



## Graduate Student Supervision – Guidance to Chairs and GPDs on supervisory changes

### Preamble

Every graduate student must have a supervisor to make progress towards their thesis research which is necessary to remain in their program. Most graduate students do not change supervisors during their program. Rarely, a student may lose the guidance of a supervisor and thus be unable to continue with their initial thesis research project.

The [Charter of Students' Rights](#) states that:

*Article 27. Students have a right to quality supervision of graduate work.*

AND

*Article 28. In the event that a change in supervisor is required, the University has an obligation to make reasonable efforts to identify a supervisor, with due regard to the preference of the student.*

The policy on [Graduate Student Supervision](#) states that:

*2.6. The academic unit must ensure continuity of appropriate supervision when a student is separated from a supervisor, for example, when the supervisor is on sabbatical, leaves McGill, or retires.*

AND

*2.9. The Chair of the academic unit (or delegate) must address serious disagreements that may arise, for example, between a student and a supervisor or between a supervisor and committee members. If the issue cannot be resolved at the unit level, or in the case of confidentiality concerns, then an Associate Dean from Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies must be contacted to facilitate a resolution. The Chair must correspond with all parties concerning the decision, proposed actions, and resulting implications 10 working days prior to any action being taken. Appeals of the Chair's decision must be addressed to the Associate Dean (Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies).*

### Situations and resolution strategies

1. The supervisor is incapable of continued supervision
2. The supervisor cannot continue as the primary supervisor
3. The supervisor declines to continue supervising the student
4. The student no longer wishes to be supervised by their supervisor

### **Situation 1: Supervisor is incapable of continued supervision**

- The Chair of the Department must arrange for a new permanent supervisor or co-supervisor as the occasion requires (e.g. in case of illness or death of a supervisor, or their departure from the university).
- The replacement supervisor must be agreeable to the student, have sufficient time, and when applicable, space and funds to support the student.
- Ideally, the student need not change the fundamental aspects of their thesis research.

### **Situation 2: Supervisor cannot continue as the primary supervisor**

- The supervisor and Chair of the Department must add a co-supervisor to the student's supervisory committee when the primary supervisor retires, moves to emeritus status, or goes on leave (including sabbatical).
- The co-supervisor must be agreeable to the student, have sufficient expertise in the thesis research to guide the student, time, and when applicable, space and funds to support the student.
- The home faculty is responsible for assuring funding.
- Ideally, the student maintains the fundamental aspects of their thesis research.

### **Situation 3: Supervisor declines to continue supervising the student**

The supervisor may decide that they can no longer supervise the student. This situation may be adversarial with little or no communication between the supervisor and the student.

The department must actively aid the student in finding a new supervisor. Steps include:

1. The supervisor must declare their intention to withdraw supervision in an email to the student, Chair of the Department, GPD, co-supervisor (if any) and supervisory committee members. If the student is funded by the outgoing supervisor, that supervisor must agree to continue the stipend of the student for the next 3 months.
  - A detailed Letter of Understanding (LOU) must be in place regarding deadlines, milestones and progress tracking meetings. If applicable, a detailed LOU must also be in place regarding use of offices and research areas, data and research materials, role in authorship, publications, intellectual property, etc.
2. Once notified, the GPD must meet with the student. The student must be explicitly informed orally and in a written document that a new supervisor must be engaged within two (2) months.
3. The student must provide the GPD with the names of potential new supervisors within the department, a cover letter, and a brief description of their research interests and skills.
4. The GPD is tasked with circulating the student-created information to the named supervisors requesting that any interested potential supervisor contact the student directly for interviews and further conversation.

5. The student must inform the GPD of the name of the replacement supervisor before the 2-month period ends.
6. Should the student be unable to engage a new supervisor, the GPD must send a *notice of withdrawal for lack of supervision letter* to the student at the end of the 2-month period.
  - The template letter to use in such instances can be obtained from GPS by emailing [associatedeans.gps@mcgill.ca](mailto:associatedeans.gps@mcgill.ca).
7. The GPD will complete the webform to withdraw the student from the program 30 days after the date of the *notice of withdrawal for lack of supervision letter*. This allows for a 30-day appeal period from the date of the *notice* before the withdrawal becomes effective.

#### **Situation 4: Student no longer wishes to be supervised by their supervisor**

The student may decide that they no longer wish to be supervised by their current supervisor. This situation may be adversarial with little or no communication between the supervisor and the student.

The department must actively aid the student in finding a new supervisor. Steps include:

1. The **student** must declare their intention to withdraw from their current supervisor in an email to the supervisor, Chair of the Department, GPD, co-supervisors (if any) and supervisory committee members.
  - A detailed Letter of Understanding (LOU) must be in place regarding deadlines, milestones and progress tracking meetings. If applicable, a detailed LOU must also be in place regarding use of offices and research areas, data and research materials, role in authorship, publications, intellectual property, etc.
2. Once notified, the GPD must meet with the student. The student must be explicitly informed orally and in a written document that a new supervisor must be engaged within 2 months. If the student was funded by the outgoing supervisor, the department must arrange to continue the stipend of the student for the next 3 months.
3. The student must provide the GPD with the names of potential new supervisors within the department, a cover letter, and a brief description of their skills or other documentation as they feel appropriate.
4. The GPD is tasked with circulating the student-created information to the named supervisors requesting that any interested potential supervisor contact the student directly for interviews and further conversation.
5. The student must inform the GPD of the name of the replacement supervisor before the 2-month period ends.
6. Should the student be unable to engage a new supervisor, the GPD must send a *notice of withdrawal for lack of supervision letter* to the student at the end of the 2-month period.
  - The template letter to use in such instances can be obtained from GPS by emailing [associatedeans.gps@mcgill.ca](mailto:associatedeans.gps@mcgill.ca).
7. The GPD will complete the webform to withdraw the student from the program 30 days after the date of the *notice of withdrawal for lack of supervision letter*. This allows for a 30-day appeal period from the date of the *notice* before the withdrawal becomes effective.