



**LETTER OF UNDERSTANDING FOR GRADUATE EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF PHYSIOLOGY, MCGILL UNIVERSITY**

This agreement ¹ is designed to promote dialogue between the supervisor(s) and the student to define their expectations and to increase awareness of the rights and responsibilities governing the training program and the student-supervisor relationship. The aim is to avoid problems and to achieve a positive and mutually beneficial experience.

Signing of this Agreement attests to:

- 1) **Compliance with University Regulations and Guidelines Governing Graduate Students and Supervisors**
Rights and responsibilities established under <http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/personalrights>
 - **General Information, Regulations and Research Guidelines Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies** including University policies on research ethics, intellectual property, conflict of Interest, leaves of absence, vacation time and holidays. <http://www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/registration/progress/leave-vacation>
 - **Supervisory Guidelines** established by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in the eCalendar.
 - Please read regulations on [graduate student supervision](#) as well as McGill Expectations for Graduate Supervision included below.
 - **Official University Policies, Procedures and Guidelines** (including harassment policy) documented in [https:// www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/policies-and-regulations](https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/policies-and-regulations)
 - **Unit policies and procedures:** It is the responsibility of the academic unit to inform students and supervisors.
- 2) **Compliance with policies and regulations on ethical conduct of research**
If the Student is working with human subjects/animals or tissues, radioactive or biohazardous material, lasers or other hazards, the Supervisor will ensure that all ethics certifications and training will be obtained and appropriate safety protocols are followed. For detailed ethics and safety policies, please visit the [Ethics and Compliance](#) webpage. Additional information on research and lab safety can be found at the [Environmental Health and Safety Office](#).
- 3) **Commitment to regular performance review and completion of progress reports** in compliance with the policies of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and the Graduate Program www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/research-tracking [[see Graduate Research Progress Tracking](#)].
- 4) **Compliance with the policies of the Graduate Program**, including funding, academic requirements and milestones. www.mcgill.ca/physiology

The Physiology Graduate program has a guaranteed funding policy. Any faculty or associate member who agrees to supervise a graduate student who does not have their own funding (i.e. a fellowship) must guarantee that each student under his/her supervision receives at least the specified minimum stipend, through a combination of internal/external awards and payment from research funds. All students in the Physiology Department will be guaranteed a minimum yearly stipend of \$20,000 for living allowance plus tuition and fees. For tuition and fees, please refer to: <http://www.mcgill.ca/student-accounts/> Payment of the minimum stipend cannot be terminated without the permission of the Graduate Program Committee upon demonstration of just cause and with reasonable notice.

***A minimal annual stipend is guaranteed under the understanding that undertaking a graduate degree is a full-time activity. As such, any other employment, including any plans to undertake TAships, should be discussed with the supervisor.**

INITIAL STIPEND to be paid to _____ I.D# _____
Amount (on an annual base): \$ _____

Source (Specify):

- a) External award (Provincial, Federal or other) \$ _____
- b) Internal award (Physiology Department or McGill University) \$ _____
- c) Supervisor's research grant \$ _____

OTHER SUPPORT: The supervisor is responsible for providing access to sufficient resources for the graduate student research project. The researcher should specify his/her policy on funding of other activities such as attending conferences to present research, subject to availability of funds.

¹ adapted from a template provided by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies



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Academic Preparation: Specify any deficiencies in the student's background preparation (academic knowledge, technical or language skills, etc.) that must be addressed to avoid negative impact on research performance or course work.

Expectations: Supervisor's *Research Environment*

Specify in each category :

- Operational expectation, including working hours, frequency of student -supervisor meetings, groups/lab meeting, reports, record keeping, contribution to general duties, assistance from and to other personnel/students:

- Expected attendance at journal clubs, seminars, etc., aside from official requirements of the Graduate Program:

- Policies on review of written work (extent of supervisor's involvement with student's presentations, thesis preparations, time-frame for return of comments, etc.):

- Conference attendance:

- Lab authorship policies:

- Intellectual Property, data storage:

- Vacation Time: Graduate students should normally be entitled to vacation leave equivalent to university holidays and an additional fifteen working days. Funded students with fellowships and research grant stipends taking additional vacation leave may have their funding reduced accordingly. More info can be found here: <https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/registration/progress/leave-vacation>

Other expectations: please specify

Specific role (s) of the Co-Supervisor (*if student has a co-supervisor*)



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RESPONSIBILITIES OF STUDENTS AND SUPERVISORS,

General Responsibilities of the Student

Be Aware of and Follow Administrative Requirements

- o Maintain awareness of all policies, procedures and deadlines that affect you.
- o Monitor and use your official McGill email address for official correspondence related to your program of study and registration as a student at McGill.
- o Maintain your registration throughout the duration of the program, including ensuring that visas and employment authorization documents, where required, are kept up to date.
- o Adhere to all deadlines and policies regarding registration, meeting your program's milestones, thesis submission, and if necessary, withdrawal.
- o Completion of Research Progress Tracking forms for every student/supervisory committee meeting.

Maintain Accessibility and Communication

- o Provide your supervisor and program administrators with your permanent and current contact information and inform your supervisor of any absences. The student is responsible for explaining any absences to the supervisor.
- o Engage in open communication and feedback with your supervisor on all issues, including research design and results, technical difficulties, other demands of the Program (courses, etc.), personal concerns affecting research progress and meeting milestones (such as medical issues), expectations, and supervisory practices.
- o Meet regularly with your supervisor and thesis advisory committee to report on progress; comply with the Research Progress Tracking policy of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/research-tracking
- o Identify and address problems early. Be aware of guidelines for conflict resolution between student and supervisor. If necessary inform the appropriate program personnel (i.e. Graduate Program Director.) <http://www.mcgill.ca/studentervices/>

Perform Academically

- o Collaborate with your supervisor to select the members of your thesis advisory committee.
- o Prepare a research plan and timetable in consultation with your supervisor as a basis for your program of study.
- o Work diligently towards your program milestones and meet them. Be aware that continuing in the program requires satisfactory performance in course work and research. The failure policy of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies requires that a student withdraw from the University upon a second failing grade, i.e. less than B-) including supplemental exams, in any course(s) required for the Program; a second unsatisfactory research progress report is also grounds for dismissal.
- o Give serious consideration and timely response to comments and advice from your supervisor and/or members of your thesis advisory committee.
- o Apply to all appropriate sources of funding <http://www.mcgill.ca/gps/funding/students-postdocs/students>

Conduct Research in a Responsible Manner

- o Uphold the academic integrity of the University. Understand what constitutes plagiarism, misconduct and cheating.
- o Be aware of emergency procedures in your workplace (in case of fire, etc.). Obtain specific training and certification related to occupational health and safety, as required for your workplace and to undertake the proposed research. Maintain a workplace that is safe, tidy and healthy.
- o Comply with all policies on research ethics and procedures governing use of human or animal subjects.
- o Students are expected to work full time for the completion of their degree. Any extracurricular activities should not interfere with work.
- o Follow good laboratory practices and research etiquette. Respect the work and equipment of others, and Show tolerance and respect for others sharing the same facilities. Discuss potential large costs or expenses when planning the research and prior to purchase. Be aware of laboratory operational rules and requirements. Maintain good



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records of each stage of the research; ensure that records and associated experimental samples are appropriately stored and that they remain properly archived with the laboratory. Understand that experimental records and materials are the property of the laboratory, although you have a right to retain copies of records.

- Discuss with your supervisor, very early on, any expectations and policies concerning authorship of publications, and issues surrounding copyright and ownership of intellectual property. Note your thesis research must be publishable in the public domain, although you may request withholding of your thesis for a period of up to one year.

Take Advantage of Opportunities for Professional Development

- Develop your professional skills (including presentation skills, teaching, writing reports and grant applications, preparation of your curriculum vitae, interviewing techniques, and management skills including time management) by attending workshops offered through Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, Teaching and Learning Services, your Faculty and your Graduate Program. <http://www.mcgill.ca/skillsets/>
- Attend relevant seminars and colloquia.

General Responsibilities of the Supervisor(s)

Supervising graduate students is an important and integral part of a professor's workload and academic duty. Within the context of the role as supervisor, a professor's primary task is to guide and inspire his or her students to reach their scholarly/scientific potential. Supervisors are expected to guide and support. www.mcgill.ca/gradsupervision

Follow Rules and Regulations

- Be aware of and conform to University's and the Program's requirements and procedures.
- Monitor the student's progress in achieving the milestones of his/her degree program. Participate in the University's mandatory progress tracking procedures to ensure that supervision and research objectives as well as a realistic timetable for meeting objectives are clear, in writing and commonly understood by both student and supervisor. Any deficiencies should be documented early and remedial action identified in consultation with the student and the Advisory Committee. Understand that dismissal of a student from the Program for lack of performance in research will occur after two unsatisfactory research progress reports to the Advisory Committee.

Maintain Accessibility and Communication

- Maintain open communication with the student on all issues, including supervisory practices. Be available for regular consultation with the student and the student's thesis advisory committee.
- Be sensitive to other program requirements, including course work, in your expectation of the student's time management.
- Examine thoroughly all written material relevant to the thesis/research project submitted by the student and provide constructive suggestions, orally and/or in writing, for improving the work, when necessary.
- Together with the student, outline an appropriate timetable for the provision of work for review and for feedback, depending on deadlines and the nature and length of the document.
- Inform the program administrators (i.e. Graduate Program Director), in a timely fashion, of any serious difficulties which may arise in supervision. These might include mismatch of interests, major professional academic disagreements, interpersonal conflicts, or potential conflict of interest situations. If a change of supervisor is warranted, the unit is responsible for assisting the student in finding a new supervisor.
- Inform the student of any prolonged absences, including sabbatical leaves, and make satisfactory alternative supervisory arrangements as required.
- Be alert of any changes in the student's performance and have him/her seek help to the appropriate University Student Services. www.mcgill.ca/studentervices

Provide and Convey Research Information

- Provide guidance, instruction, and encouragement regarding the student's research activities and professional development. Guide the student in the selection and planning of an appropriate research project.
- Discuss with the student, very early on, the University's policies governing copyright and intellectual property. Discuss *a priori* any specific expectations concerning authorship of publications, and issues surrounding



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ownership of intellectual property and disclosure (this may include patents/licenses).

Contribute to the Student's Overall Professional Development

- Encourage the student to disseminate his/her research results through publications and conference presentations; to participate in departmental/University seminars and colloquia, and to attend workshops on professional skill development.
- Provide guidance to the student with applications for funding as well general advice on career development.
- Inform the student clearly and in a timely manner if their performance is not meeting expectations. Work with the student to identify problems and find solutions; bring problems forward for discussion with the advisory committee, if necessary.

Provide an Appropriate Research Environment

- Ensure that the student is informed of the best practices for the responsible conduct research with respect to academic integrity.
- Ensure the student is informed of general emergency and safety measures in the workplace, and obtains training and certification in laboratory safety, research with human subjects, animal handling, and safety in handling radioactive and hazardous materials, as relevant.
- Maintain a professional relationship with the student. Avoid supervising any individual with whom you have a personal relationship that may constitute a conflict of interest, including a family member. Any professor engaged in a personal relationship with a student must resign as supervisor. The unit is responsible in such instances for assisting the student in finding another supervisor.
- Avoid conflicts of interest in proprietary research and follow McGill's conflict of interest policy. Declare to the Graduate Program Director any financial or business relationship with the student or with a company in which the student is conducting research. Have appropriate agreements for research leading to intellectual property or research being conducted for /in collaboration with an industrial partner. Research conducted by the student for his/her thesis must be publishable in the public domain.
- Ensure to the best of your ability appropriate funding to cover the operating costs incurred by the student to carry out his/her thesis research and to provide a stipend according to the Program's policies.

McGill University Expectations for Graduate Supervision

Supervising graduate students and postdocs at McGill University is a critical part of academic duties for faculty, as indicated in section 4.1 of the [Regulations Relating to the Employment of Tenure Track and Tenured Academic Staff](#), henceforth referred to as “the Regulations”.

In order to supervise graduate students and postdocs, faculty must complete an [orientation](#).

Supervisors are accountable to the Chair or leader of their academic unit, who is responsible for the allocation of academic duties (section 4.3 of the Regulations). To ensure all graduate students have the opportunity to succeed in obtaining their degree, the University expects all supervisors to meet the university-wide standards delineated below.

Creating a respectful, inclusive, and professional research environment while also being present, providing regular feedback, recognizing limits, and knowing relevant policies helps faculty better support supervisees and prevent potential misunderstandings down the road.

Supervisors have a responsibility to:

1) Build and maintain a respectful, inclusive, professional research environment for their supervisees.

- a) McGill University expects supervisors to maintain a **research environment free from sexual violence, harassment, and discrimination.**



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Policy Resources:

- [Policy on Harassment and Discrimination](#)
 - [Policy against Sexual Violence](#)
- b) If a supervisor observes behaviour that might constitute sexual violence, harassment, or discrimination, **they must consult the [Office for Mediation and Reporting](#) or the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) to determine how to proceed.**
- Faculty should not assume that problems between supervisees in a lab setting will resolve on their own. Faculty and staff have a shared responsibility to ensure supervisees can learn in environments where they are respected and free from pejorative or offensive acts and comments. Trained professionals in the OMR and Office of the Dean of Students are available to support faculty and staff as well as students.
- c) Supervisors, as representatives of McGill University acting in an official capacity, **have a responsibility to uphold students' rights**, as explained in [Charter of Students' Rights, Article 3](#):
- “Every student has a right to the safeguard of [their] dignity and a right to be protected by the University against vexatious conduct displayed by a representative of the University acting in an official capacity”.
 - Supervisors have a duty to accommodate on the grounds of disability and religious belief. In some cases, there might also be a duty to accommodate on the basis of dependent care responsibilities. If you have any uncertainty about what constitutes a reasonable accommodation in a given situation you may contact the Office of the Dean of Students (in all cases) or Student Accessibility & Achievement (in situations involving students with disabilities)

Policy Resources:

- [Policy Concerning the Rights of Students with Disabilities](#)
 - [Policy on Holy Days](#)
- d) Supervisors' words carry weight for supervisees. Offhand comments spoken in moments of frustration can leave supervisees doubting whether they can trust a supervisor to assess work fairly and equitably support supervisees' research and wellbeing. It is important for supervisors to keep the power differential in mind when speaking with supervisees and refrain from mocking, insulting, or undermining language.
- e) **Supervisors, as members of the University, have the right to work in a respectful and professional research environment.** [The Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#) holds that no student shall in a university context:
- “Knowingly create a condition that unnecessarily endangers or threatens or undermines the health, safety, well-being, or dignity of another person or persons, threatens to cause humiliation, or threatens the damage or destruction of property”

Resources:

- **Office of the Dean of Students:** Supervisors are encouraged to talk to the Dean of Students' office when a student or supervisee [exhibits worrisome behaviour](#), including dangerous, threatening, disruptive, or uncharacteristic behaviour. See the [Red File](#) for guidance.
- f) **Supervisors and supervisees must avoid conflicts of interest**, and if one should arise, speak to a department chair or director to implement measures to properly address the conflict of interest. For supervisors, this means ensuring that supervisees are equitably treated (i.e., avoid steps or measures that might be perceived as partiality, favoritism, or bias) and that relationships with supervisees are professional and centred on academic wellness.
- g) Following major conflicts, the best resolution may be to dissolve the supervisory relationship and have the graduate student continue under the supervision of another faculty member. It is critical for faculty to speak to both the Graduate Program Director and the Department Chair when considering whether this presents the best solution for all parties. When



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approached with a request for a transfer, faculty are expected to collaborate to ensure as smooth a transition as possible, clarifying what will happen to ongoing research, lab access, etc.

2) Be present for and accountable to supervisees by maintaining clear communication channels.

- a) Supervisors should meet regularly with supervisees, honouring the schedules agreed to in Letters of Understanding.
- b) Supervisors and supervisees should keep shared written records when it comes to important decisions about research projects, funding, authorship, graduation timelines, etc.
 - Annual Progress reports provide a framework to give feedback on a student's progress in writing and objectives for the following year in writing and represent a critical opportunity to indicate to students if their work is unsatisfactory.
- c) Supervisors must plan to ensure that graduate supervisees have appropriate supervision during prolonged absences (e.g., sabbatical leaves).
 - Supervisors who are not planning to maintain regular communication with supervised students during a sabbatical or other leave should ensure supervisees have an appropriate interim supervisor (e.g., a committee member) who will stay in regular communication with the supervisee and ensure they progress.

3) Provide supervisees with regular, timely feedback that clearly indicates how to meet their program requirements for graduation.

- a) Uphold the commitments made in Letters of Understanding regarding how long it will take to return student work with feedback. Providing regular updates for students on when to expect feedback is also helpful for ensuring accountability and on-time degree completion.
- b) Clarify expectations ahead of major milestones (e.g., proposals, qualifying examinations, thesis submission, oral defences). **Supervisees should understand how they will be assessed, what is required to pass major milestones**, and the departmental standards for thesis research and other evaluated graduate work.
 - Feedback on submitted work should be clear, substantial, and provide specific, actionable recommendations for improvement. Evaluations of student work must be made principally on the basis of the demonstrated quality of the student's research, and not comparisons with other students or supervisor opinions of the student's readiness to graduate or ability to succeed in a specific subsequent profession.
 - Supervisors must not prevent students from seeking to graduate if they have completed all the degree requirements and their work meets departmental standards.

4) Respect their limits in supporting supervisee wellbeing.

- a) Supervisors are often among the first to notice when a graduate student or postdoc is unwell. **Supervisors should offer a supportive ear while respecting their limits when it comes to addressing student mental health.** The [Student Wellness Hub](#) connects students with help from trained clinicians.

Resource:

- [Tips for talking to a student in difficulty](#)
- b) **Supervisors and supervisees alike benefit from flexibility and understanding** when it comes to balancing work responsibilities and personal wellbeing.
 - Supervisors should encourage supervisees to maintain reasonable working hours and clarify expectations that supervisees will take time to rest, recharge, and connect with friends and family.



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- Supervisors and supervisees should communicate their availability limits in Letters of Understanding (e.g., unavailable to meet after 3pm, will respond to emails within 48 hours, etc.). Supervisees should respect these limits and make use of available supports to maintain their wellbeing (e.g., Local Wellness Advisors, the Student Wellness Hub, etc.).
- c) **Supervisors must respect their supervisee’s autonomy when it comes decisions that impact the supervisee’s future.** Supervisees should be able to freely choose to pursue a particular career path, take advantage of professional development opportunities, start a family, take a leave of absence, etc., without fear that their supervisor will withdraw support.

Policy Resources:

- Parental Leave: <https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/policies-and-guidelines/parental-leave>
- Leave of Absence and Vacation Policy: <https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/registration/progress/leave-vacation>

5) Know policies relevant to graduate studies well enough to advise supervisees. If unsure, ask for clarification.

Resources:

- [Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies](#)
- [Secretariat](#)
- A Graduate Program Director or Department Chair

Signatures*(mandatory)

**I aware of and understand the content of this document including the appended program milestones and general Responsibilities of graduate students. Supervisors, the Graduate Program and the University defined by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. www.mcgill.ca/gps*

Student: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____
Print name

Supervisor: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____
Print name

Co-Supervisor (if any): _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____
Print name

Unit Head (Graduate Program Director):

_____ Signature: _____ Date: _____
Print name

*****This letter of understanding will be kept in the Department student file and an electronic version will need to be uploaded by the student to their myProgress file.***