



TO: Senate
FROM: Jonathan Mooney
SUBJECT: Question Regarding Postgraduate Supervision
MEETING DATE: October 17, 2012

PREAMBLE: The student-supervisor relationship has been described in the literature as, “a personal and professional relationship that rivals marriage and parenthood in its complexity, variety and ramifications for the rest of one’s life” (Zhao, Golde, & McCormick, 2007, p. 263; Baum, 2010). The Conseil supérieur de l’éducation (2010) has noted,

“In a context where the growth rate of the graduate student population has surpassed that of the faculty, issues related to the availability of supervisors to mentor graduate students have been observed. Moreover, challenges can also arise from the dual relationships between professor/employer and student/employee: In a case where the latter receives payment for his or her participation in a research project of the former, the objectives of training and the production of outcomes may come into conflict. For this reason, many universities have established policies and procedures that clearly outline the rights and responsibilities of each (graduate student/fellow, professor, university).”

In the Twenty-Fifth Report (2012), McGill’s Ombudsperson for Students noted that the following issues have been raised by graduate students:

- lack of regular access to the graduate supervisor;
- lack of constructive feedback on progress and/or advising;
- lack of assistance from the graduate program director;
- access to stipend payment;
- intellectual property/authorship issues;
- supervisors’ research priorities vs. students’ progress;
- interpersonal conflicts;
- inappropriate behavior

The Ombudsperson recommended, among other things, “That all new academic hires without prior experience of graduate supervision be required, as part of their academic duty, to attend a supervision workshop organized by the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies office in their first academic year at McGill before being assigned the supervision of graduate students” (2012)

QUESTION:

The PGSS has been working closely and collaboratively with the Dean of Graduate Studies, Teaching and Learning Services, and other stakeholders to try to develop proposals to improve student-supervisor relationships at McGill, and several important initiatives are underway. To provide Senate with the opportunity be informed about these plans and open up a discussion on the issues, we pose the following questions:

- What efforts are underway to ensure that newly-hired faculty receive proper training in supervision?
 - What efforts are underway to assess graduate students' and postdoctoral fellows' experience with regard to supervision?
 - In the *Regulations Relating to the Employment of Tenure Track and Tenured Academic Staff*, postgraduate supervision is considered a sub-category of teaching rather than an independent academic duty in the evaluation. How do tenure committees evaluate quality of supervision? Why is quality of supervision not considered an independent academic duty in the evaluation, and what can be done to ensure its importance is properly recognized in the tenure process?
 - The academic literature has shown unambiguously that many observables related to quality of supervision, such as frequency of meetings between students and supervisors, degree of collaboration on research articles, and extent of supervisor mentoring, are directly correlated with key performance indicators such as time to completion, attrition rate, and productivity of students with regard to scholarly publications (Heath, 2002; Paglis, Greene, & Bauer, 2006; Seagram, Gould, & Pike, 1998). What efforts are being made to actively monitor and improve quality of supervision in these respects and to ensure proper compliance with McGill's *Guidelines and Regulations for Academic Units on Graduate Student Advising and Supervision*?
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References

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