

Letter of Understanding

Graduate Programs in Rehabilitation Science School of Physical and Occupational Therapy

Preamble: This letter of understanding is designed to promote a shared understanding of both the supervisor and supervisee's expectations and to promote awareness of university regulations, graduate studies guidelines and policies, as well as rights and responsibilities governing the training program and supervisor-supervisee relationships. The ultimate goal is to prevent problems and to achieve a mutually beneficial and positive experience.

Sections included in this letter of understanding were adapted from the Supervisory Guidelines of McGill Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS), resources provided by the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies and letters of understanding of other McGill graduate programs.

The letter must be dated and signed by all parties (e.g., supervisor, co-supervisor and supervisee). It should be revisited every 12 months or as needed, as it is expected that the supervisory relationship changes as the student progress towards the degree.

The student, supervisor and the department will keep copies of the letter.

Submitting this letter of understanding attest to:

A. UNDERSTANDING AND COMPLYING TO RULES, REGULATIONS AND POLICIES OF UNIVERSITY, GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES AND REHABILITATION SCIENCE PROGRAM

1. University Regulations and Guidelines Governing Graduate Students and Supervisors

[University Policies and Regulations](#), (including harassment policy), as documented on the website of the University Secretariat;

Rights and responsibilities outlined at <https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/>;

University [Regulations and Resources for Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies](#), including, but not limited to registration, course regulations, academic integrity, failure policy, language policy, thesis, graduation;

[Graduate Studies Guidelines and Policies](#), including, but not limited to, McGill Expectations for Graduate Supervision (included below), regulations on graduate student supervision, guidelines for academic accommodation (e.g. parental leave), full-time status.

2. 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.

3. Commitment to Regular Performance Review and Completion of Progress Reports in compliance with the policies of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies ([Regulations on Graduate Student Research Progress Tracking](#)) and the Rehabilitation Science Program ([SPOT'S Graduate Student Research Progress Tracking Policy](#))

4. Compliance with the Policies of the Rehabilitation Science Program, including academic requirements, comprehensive examination (PhD students) and other milestones.

Letter of Understanding

B. SPECIFICS OF SUPERVISOR-SUPERVISEE EXPECTATIONS

1. Financial support towards graduate studies: The Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Science does not have a funding policy that guarantees a minimal stipend for graduate students. Depending on the availability of funds, graduate students may or may not receive an entrance Scholarship from the Rehabilitation Science Program, to be awarded in the first year only. Supervisor(s) and the supervisee should agree on whether a stipend will be awarded, ideally prior to the beginning of the first semester. This stipend, if applicable, can be provided through a combination of internal/external awards and payment from research funds.

Stipend awarded to: _____ (specify name of student)

Amount (year 1): \$ _____ (including sources a, b and c below)

Source (Initial stipend)	a) External award	\$ _____
	b) Internal award	\$ _____
	c) Paid from research grant	\$ _____
	Start and end dates of operating grant:	Start: _____
		End: _____

Amount (subsequent years, per annum): \$ _____ (If amount depends on fund availability, please specify as well).

Total duration: _____ (If total duration depends on fund availability, please specify as well).

Application for studentships: Unless otherwise specified, the student is expected to apply to all internal and external graduate studentships to which she/he is eligible.

If applicable, reasons for not applying: _____

Specify conditions of research stipends, as needed. Examples include expectations in terms of the student attending laboratory activities, number of hours working from the laboratory, tasks to be completed if paid as research assistant, etc. Expectations should be reasonable given the nature and amount of the stipend:

2. Financial support towards the research project: The supervisor is responsible for providing access to sufficient resources for the graduate student's 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:

3. Student Assistantship: The student has discussed their interest/intent to TA during their graduate program and presented a plan to their supervisor outlining a schedule that would ensure timely progression of their thesis work:

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

5. Expectations regarding the Supervisor's and Supervisee's research environment:

Specify operational expectations, including frequency of student-supervisor meetings, group meetings, reports, record keeping, contribution to general duties, assistance from and to other personnel/students:

Specify expected attendance at journal clubs, seminars, lab meetings etc., aside from official requirements of the Graduate Program:

6. Publications, intellectual property and authorship policies:

7. Feedback expectations (e.g. how often, turnaround times):

8. Other expectations, as applicable:

Examples:

- Laboratory etiquette, e.g. expectations towards use of common lab space/office, keeping space tidy, periodic cleanup, use of shared space and equipment, borrowing material/books from the lab or others (and sign out procedure if any), relationships with members of the laboratory, location of primary data (i.e. within the lab), etc.
- Computer use (for research purposes vs. personal use), etc.

9. General Other:

Signatures*

**I am aware of and understand the content of this document including the general responsibilities of graduate students, supervisors, and the University defined by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.*

Student: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Supervisor: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

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

Unit Head :

Graduate Program Director

Signature: _____ Date: _____

C. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

General Responsibilities of the Student (Supervisee)

Be Aware of and Follow Administrative Requirements

- Maintain awareness of all policies, procedures and deadlines that affect you.
- Monitor and use your official McGill email address for official correspondence related to your program of study and registration as a student at McGill.
- Maintain your registration throughout the duration of the program, including ensuring that visas and employment authorization documents, where required, are kept up to date.
- Adhere to all deadlines and policies regarding registration, thesis submission, and if necessary, withdrawal.

Maintain Accessibility and Communication

- Keep in touch with your supervisor and program administrators. Provide your supervisor and program administrators with your permanent and current contact information and advise the supervisor of any absences. 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 and family-related issues), expectations, and supervisory practices.
- 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.
- Identify and address problems early. Inform the Graduate Program Director, in a timely fashion, of any serious difficulties including illness, trouble with course work or other program milestones, and problems with supervision. Supervisory issues could include mismatch of interests, major professional academic disagreements, interpersonal conflicts, or potential conflict of interest situations. If a change of supervisor is warranted, the Graduate Program Director will work with the student to find a new supervisor.

Perform Academically

- Collaborate with your supervisor to select the members of your thesis advisory committee.
- Prepare a research plan and timetable in consultation with your supervisor as a basis for the program of study, including any proposed fieldwork.
- 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, including supplemental exams, in any course(s) required for the program; a second unsatisfactory research progress report is also grounds for dismissal.
- Give serious consideration and timely response to comments and advice from your supervisor and/or members of your thesis advisory committee.
- Apply to all appropriate sources of funding.

Conduct Research in a Responsible Manner

- Uphold the academic integrity of the University. Understand what constitutes plagiarism, misconduct and cheating.
- 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.
- Comply with all policies on research ethics and procedures governing use of human or animal subjects.
- 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/office operational rules and requirements. Maintain good 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 these records related to your thesis research.
- 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.
- Attend 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. Each professor is expected to participate in activities to improve teaching, supervisory and research skills throughout his/her career. 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. In order to maintain the quality learning environment outlined below, it is advised that supervisors not take on more than four new students per academic year.

Supervisors are expected to:

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, including documented Advisory Committee meetings at least once per year, 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 can be requested (to the Graduate Program Director) only after two unsatisfactory research progress reports to the Advisory Committee.
- Understand that Professors must meet qualifications and standards of performance in carrying out supervisory responsibilities.

Maintain Accessibility and Communication

- Maintain open communication with the student on all issues, including expectations and supervisory practices. Be available for regular consultation with the student and the student's thesis advisory committee, where applicable.
- Be sensitive to other program requirements, including course work, in your expectation of the student's time management. Keep in mind that passing grades (B- or better) are required for students to maintain their good standing in the program. Reasonable time must be available for students to attend classes, study and prepare assignments.
- 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. In general, it would be appropriate to provide written or oral comments to the student within two to four weeks of receipt of the submitted material according to the nature of the document, but it is recognized that on occasion, a longer response time may be needed because of other commitments of the supervisor. The student and supervisor should bear in mind that relying exclusively on oral comments or summaries of discussions can be problematic in the event of a conflict.
- Inform the program administrators (i.e. Graduate Program Director and Coordinator), 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 Graduate Program Director will assist 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 on the alert for and acknowledge any personal difficulties of the student and refer him/her to the appropriate University student services for support.

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 topic.
- Ensure that the student has information on relevant theories and the methodological and

technical skills necessary for the research. Ensure that the student has access to intellectual resources and research opportunities.

- 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 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 School/University seminars and colloquia, and to attend workshops on professional skill development.
- Assist the student with applications for funding and with his/her next career step. Provide letters of reference and general advice on career development.
- Inform the student clearly and in a timely manner when academic performance is not meeting expectations. Work with the student to identify problems and find solutions, including bringing problems forward for discussion with the advisory committee.

Provide an Appropriate Research Environment

- Advise the student on the standards for quality and style to which theses and papers for publication must conform and the rules and disciplinary convention of authorship.
- Ensure that the student is informed of the best practices for the responsible conduct of research, including respect for academic integrity. Ensure the student is informed of general emergency and safety measures in the workplace and at the University (e.g. emergency procedures and numbers), 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. The University does not permit a professor to supervise any individual with whom he or she has a personal relationship that may constitute a conflict of interest. Should such an occasion arise, the professor must resign as supervisor. The program, in such instances, will assist the student in finding another supervisor.
- Avoid conflicts of interest in proprietary research. Declare any business relationship with the student or research being conducted by the student. A professor must not supervise a student who is employed in a company in which the professor has an interest. 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.

General Responsibilities of the Academic Unit

- Advocate for and work with other departments at the university to ensure adequate resources such as Library, writing resources and space, are available to support the student in fulfilling their program requirements.
- Make available through appropriate media clear and understandable information about program requirements, regulations and procedures, the faculty and staff responsible for the graduate program and graduate faculty members and their areas of research expertise.
- Ensure that approved supervisory committees are established by the appropriate deadlines.
- Ensure that the student's supervisory committee meets at least once a year with the student, that this meeting is substantive, and that a written report (e.g. graduate student tracking

forms) of this meeting containing sufficiently useful detail is given to the student and filed in the official student file with the graduate unit.

- 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.
- Ensure that procedures are in place to address serious disagreements that may arise, for example, between a student and a supervisor or between a supervisor and committee members. Such procedures should involve a neutral mediator, such as the Graduate Program Director, who will ensure that all sides of a dispute are heard before any decision is made. If the issue cannot be resolved at the unit level, then an Associate Dean from Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies should be contacted (<https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/contact/gps>).
- Provide and/or inform the student of workshops or presentations that will support their professional skills development.

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.**

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 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.
 - 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