

Progress Tracking PhD students

Guidelines for the Research Advisory Committee (RAC)

Every student at the Department of Surgical and Interventional Sciences has a Research Advisory Committee (RAC). The main function of the RAC is to provide guidance and advice to the students throughout their graduate program.

More specifically, the RAC will:

1. Ensure that the chosen research project is adequate and well planned
2. Ensure that students receive adequate supervision and resources for their work and study
3. Review the progress made and make recommendations on the project direction
4. Make recommendations for thesis writing and defence

Number of RAC members - Each committee consists of the Chairperson, the Research Supervisor and a few members. The minimum number of members are two (2).

The Chairperson is selected by the Graduate Program Director to serve as a departmental representative and to ensure that the RAC fulfills its purpose of advising the student. The Chairperson is obliged to ensure that all policies and regulations are implemented and to alert the department to any problems in the student's progress towards graduation (e.g. inadequate supervision).

The RAC members are selected by the Supervisor and the student with the aim of providing the best advice and expertise in the student's research project. All RAC members are required to have faculty appointments. If desired by the student and the Supervisor, non-faculty members may be added to the RAC to provide additional expertise and insight. However, these members do not have voting and signatory rights on any decisions made at the RAC meetings.

For the Transfer and Comprehensive exams, the Exam Committee is formed. It consists of the RAC and one (1) or two (2) additional faculty members.

Annual RAC Meeting

Most of the interactions and feedback between the students and their RACs occur at the annual meeting. ***It is the primary responsibility of the student*** to ensure regularity of the RAC meetings and to schedule these meetings in a timely manner. Throughout the student's program, RAC meetings have different purposes and formats.

First meeting is held early in the program (within 3 months) and is usually limited to the Chairperson, the Supervisor and the student. This format seems to be sufficient because, at this point, the student has not made much progress to warrant a review of the data. The main purpose of this meeting is to discuss the project outline and to set objectives/timeline for the first year of the student's program.

A few points to be discussed:

1. The project is supposed to be established by that time. The student should demonstrate good understanding of the background/objectives/hypotheses, methods, and the short-term and long-term goals.
2. Working conditions in the lab (sufficient space, supplies, training, technical help, etc.) and sufficient funding for the project.
3. Frequency of meetings with the Supervisor/Co-supervisor and lab meetings; interactions with colleagues and collaborators; opportunity to present at the Research Day and at conferences.
4. The course work needed to complete the program.
5. Future plans, e.g., fast-tracking to PhD and the related information (e.g., transfer exam).
6. For residents, it is important to discuss their return to clinical work and to plan accordingly.
7. Selection of RAC members and scheduling the second meeting (at about 12 months).
8. Students are encouraged to communicate with the committee at the meeting and, if needed, between meetings if there are any issues on which they need guidance.

At the end of the first meeting, the Graduate Student Progress Tracking Form needs to be signed: **Objectives** section only, page 1 of the [Progress Tracking Form \(pdf\)](#).

Second Meeting is usually held at about 12 months into the program and requires the full Committee present. The purpose of this meeting is to review the student's progress and to provide recommendations for successful continuation of research. Students are expected to fill out the **Progress** section of the form (page 1 of the Progress Tracking Form) and to prepare a 20-30 minute presentation on their project. It is expected that students have made substantial progress in their work, have a good understanding of the literature in the field, and have completed most of the course work. The Committee reviews the objectives set at the first meeting (reviews the previous form) and evaluates the student's performance. Recommendations of the RAC members are recorded on the form (pages 2 and 3) and revisited at future meetings. Objectives for the next segment of the program should be discussed and recorded on the form (page 1).

Special Situations: For residents, this most likely would be their last RAC meeting as they return to their clinical duties after one year of research. Accordingly, all the lab work should be completed and the Committee has to conclude whether the student is ready to write and submit their thesis. For the MSc students fast-tracking to PhD, this meeting may be held in the format of the Transfer Exam. In this case, the Transfer Exam Form should be completed in addition to the regular form.

Third and subsequent meetings are held in the same format as above and are aimed at reviewing the student's progress since the previous meeting. A follow-up on the recommendation(s) given previously should be discussed and new recommendation(s) made as necessary. At each meeting, the Progress Tracking Form should be completed and submitted to the Graduate Program Coordinator.

When a PhD is ready to begin writing their thesis, they are required to pass a Comprehensive Evaluation Exam. At this exam the RAC will evaluate the student with the [PhD Comprehensive Exam Evaluation](#) form.

Please **ensure that all signed forms are uploaded in MyProgress and forwarded to the Surgical and Interventional Sciences Office in hard copy or PDF format by email.** (what email is behind this?)

[GUIDELINES AND REGULATIONS](#) FOR ACADEMIC UNITS ON GRADUATE STUDENT ADVISING AND SUPERVISION ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE.