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SECTION 1
Introduction

How can this handbook help you?

With its main campus located on Treaty 6 territory and the homeland of the Métis, the University of Saskatchewan prides itself on being one of the top research-intensive universities in Canada, “the University the World Needs.”

Our reputation lies in our strong commitment to provide world-class research opportunities characterized by learning environments that foster innovation, creativity and collaboration. Fundamental to our mission of supporting excellence in graduate education is the recognition that a respectful and productive relationship between the student and supervisor is critical to the student's academic success.

This handbook is intended to help supervisors better understand their roles and to ensure that the supervision of graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan is of the highest quality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This handbook is modelled (with permission) on the University of Toronto's Graduate Supervision Guidelines: Faculty Edition (2017) and informed by the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies Guiding Principles for Graduate Student Supervision (2008). The College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS) created this handbook in collaboration with the Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching and Learning (GMCTL) and the Graduate Students' Association (GSA).
SECTION 2  
Guiding Principles of Supervision and Mentoring

A Combined Approach

Research across North America consistently has shown that effective supervision and mentorship are the most important features of a student’s graduate school experience.

Broadly defined, the role of a “supervisor” is to oversee an individual engaged in particular tasks with the express goal of ensuring that they perform them correctly. In the context of graduate studies, a supervisor’s role is to successfully guide a student through the requirements of their academic program to completion in a timely fashion.

Mentorship also can play an important role in the student-supervisor relationship. Generally speaking, a “mentor” is someone who is experienced in a relevant field and agrees to advise or counsel a less experienced mentee. In most cases, this relationship tends to be focused on the broader scholarly and career development of the student.

The difference between supervision and mentorship is not always clearly defined and effective supervisors often adopt both roles, although the focus may differ depending on the stage of the student’s program.\(^1\)

In this handbook, we opted to use the term “supervisor” primarily because it is widely used across the University of Saskatchewan and is embedded in many of our policy and procedural documents. However, it should be understood that effectively combining the role of supervisor and mentor can have a positive impact on the overall graduate student experience.\(^2\)
General Characteristics of Effective Supervisory Practice

Effective graduate supervision can be identified by a number of characteristics. Essentially, an effective supervisor should:

- Guide the student through the various requirements of their academic program.
- Aim to inspire and support the student to reach their full scholarly potential.
- Help the student navigate the relevant policies and procedures established by the academic unit, the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, and the University.
- Seek to establish a work environment that is supportive and stimulating, enabling the student to learn the essential methodologies, concepts, and professional culture of their discipline.
- Be accessible, hold regular meetings, and provide the student with clear, fair, timely and honest feedback on their progress throughout the program.
- Provide the student with the opportunity to conduct original research of high quality and significance and ensure that they receive appropriate recognition in conference presentations, publications, and other scholarly activities.
- Foster a sense of academic integrity and excellence.
- Avoid any conflict of interest situations with the student.
- Handle any emerging or unanticipated problems in a timely fashion with both compassion and clarity.

Graduate Supervision as a Shared Responsibility

Effective supervision depends on communicating well, being considerate and understanding, and each (supervisor and student) holding the other to high academic and professional standards. The academic units (departments, colleges, and schools) also play important roles by providing clarity and consistency of expectations, upholding academic standards, administering programs fairly and effectively, and intervening where necessary to help resolve problems.

The Need for Mutual Respect

Regardless of their respective roles or positions, all parties (student, supervisor, members of the Advisory Committee) should treat each other with dignity and respect and make every possible effort to manage conflicts in a respectful manner. The University’s Guidelines for Academic Conduct describe the ethical principles and expectations that should inform those roles.
The Supervisor’s Role

As the supervisor of a graduate student, a faculty member’s role is to guide the student through the requirements of their academic program, set out expectations, provide evaluations and assessments of their work, and generally assist the student in meeting and completing in a timely manner the various milestones and tasks that are part of the degree program. The student-supervisor relationship is critical to the student’s success in graduate school and should be established early in the student’s program and, barring any unanticipated circumstances, remain intact until the student has successfully defended their thesis and completed the program.

As a supervisor, the faculty member should try to provide support to the graduate student at every stage of the academic program. Such support includes the following:

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

A supervisor should assist the student with the selection and design of a meaningful and appropriate research project that can be successfully completed within the normal time limit for the degree program. The supervisor also should help the student to prepare for examinations (qualifying and comprehensive, if applicable) and to develop effective presentation and grant-writing skills. Relatedly, it is important for the supervisor to help develop a realistic timeline for completion of the student’s program, preferably including a number of milestones to measure the student’s progress along the way. The CGPS Student-Supervisor Agreement, which is mandatory for all first-year students in thesis-based programs, is an excellent instrument for this purpose.

OFFERING GUIDANCE AND BEING ACCESSIBLE

A supervisor ought to provide the student with support and resources throughout the program and help them understand relevant theories, knowledge, and background literature, as well as the methodological and technical skills necessary for the research area. A supervisor should also provide adequate opportunity and a positive environment for discussion and constructive criticism of ideas, research plans, and research results. Throughout the research, writing, and exam preparation processes, a supervisor must be accessible to the student for regular consultations. More specifically, a supervisor should establish regular meeting times for discussion and review of progress with the student; be reasonably accessible for unscheduled meetings; and make arrangements to ensure continuity of supervision during leaves or other extended periods of absence.
PROVIDING FEEDBACK

A supervisor is responsible for providing sufficient and appropriate guidance and commentary on the student’s academic progress to support successful completion of the program. The supervisor should keep track of this progress and investigate any concerns, as well as be open, honest, and fair with the student about their academic performance. Effective support includes: providing a timely review of written drafts and exams, supplying feedback on successful achievements and contributions; fairly recognizing a student’s contributions in written materials, teaching, presentations, and publications, when appropriate; being candid with a student if they are not making sufficient progress; and indicating clearly and specifically what is required for successful program completion.

ESTABLISHING THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Supervisors must be aware of all relevant departmental, CGPS and University-wide policies and requirements for the student’s academic program and research. In cooperation with the student, the supervisor should ensure that there is an annual meeting held with all members of the Advisory Committee and that the progress report is completed. The report and the minutes of that meeting should be submitted to the graduate administrator in the academic unit in a timely manner.

The Role of Mentor

As a mentor, a supervisor ought to be focused on the student’s long-term development and on providing support, not just with regards to the academic requirements of the program, but also in terms of the student’s professional development as a researcher and scholar. The supervisor should endeavour to provide support in areas that are relevant to this process, including but not limited to time management, conflict resolution, gaining familiarity with the scholarly or research culture in the particular discipline, networking, attending conferences and workshops, exploring professional development and career opportunities and providing advice on how to prepare for a future career.⁴

There are many different kinds of mentors and it is important to recognize that each faculty member may have different areas of expertise, interpersonal styles, and pedagogical approaches. Although all thesis-based graduate students must have at least one primary supervisor, it may be beneficial for some students to have multiple mentors. Mentors can offer different kinds of expertise and support as a student progresses through the various stages of the graduate degree. While all supervisors should be familiar with the academic world, some mentors may have additional expertise in other employment areas such as industry, government, and non-profit organizations. In some cases, mentors may be found among the members of the student’s Advisory Committee, but mentors also may consist of alumni, or others not associated with the student’s program.⁵
Effective Supervision and Mentorship Strategies

To be an effective supervisor and/or mentor, faculty members should strive to achieve the following in their relationships with their graduate students:

COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Be sure to communicate and discuss expectations with your student in advance. Use the CGPS Student-Supervisor Agreement to make expectations clear at the outset to help ensure that there is little room for misunderstandings later. This agreement can be revised and updated at any stage of the student’s graduate program.

BE ACCESSIBLE

Prioritize time with your student. Take the time to build a strong professional relationship with them that is conducive to research productivity and intellectual growth. Meeting regularly (e.g. weekly, biweekly or monthly) helps to ensure that the student is making sufficient progress in their academic program.

INSPIRE CONFIDENCE

Convey genuine enthusiasm and excitement for your student’s research project and other scholarly efforts. Provide timely constructive feedback to your student and help them prepare to defend their research outcomes in a professional manner.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Aim to set a good example for your student in all activities related to your field of expertise, including research, writing, teaching, administration, collaborating, and presenting.

PROVIDE LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Give your student a chance to take on a leadership role (e.g. journal publications, conference panels) as this can provide valuable experience and contribute to their future success.

PROMOTE TEAMWORK

Encourage a healthy and supportive community among the students in your lab or discussion group.

BE PROFESSIONAL

Given the power differential between supervisor and student, you should avoid any conflict of interest situations and keep your relationship academic and professional at all times. Do not become involved in any romantic or sexual relationship with a student under your supervision. If such a relationship occurs, you must disclose this conflict of interest situation to your Department Head, Dean, or other authority as soon as possible.

RESPECT DIVERSITY

Be aware of differences in ability, gender, culture, or life circumstances that may require special accommodations for your student. Acquaint yourself with campus and local support groups that can help your student in varying situations, but also be aware of your own limits in dealing with such issues.

PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Introduce your student to the wider context of the discipline and the relevant communities of scholars and professionals. Mentor your student to explore career options, and to help position them for successful careers within or outside of academia (or both).
NOTES


2. Studies have shown that good supervision practices have a significant impact on graduate student retention and completion. See, for example, Baird, L.L, “Helping graduate students: A graduate adviser’s view.” In Student services for the changing graduate student population, eds. A.S Pruitt-Logan & P.D. Isaac (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995), 25-32; Barnes, B. “The nature of exemplary doctoral advisor’s expectations and the way they may influence doctoral persistence,” Journal of College Student Retention, 11.3 (2010), 297-315; Council of Graduate Schools, Ph.D. Completion and Attrition: Findings from exit surveys of Ph.D. completers (Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools, 2009). Retrieved from: http://cgsnet.org/phd-completion-and-attrition-findings-exit-surveys-phd-completers-0. In other studies, a lack of strong supervisory relationship has been demonstrated to correlate with attrition. See, for example, Golde, C.M., “The role of the department and discipline in doctoral student attrition: Lessons from four departments,” Journal of Higher Education, 76.6 (2005), 669-700; Lovitts, B., Leaving the Ivory Tower: The Causes and Consequences of Departure from Doctoral Study (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).


SECTION 3
Supervisory Styles

Gatfield’s Model

While some aspects of effective supervision can be considered universal and should be adopted by everyone, supervision styles may vary across academic units and disciplines. In addition, as a supervisor you may have your own unique style of supervising graduate students. As long as this style respects general best practices, this is perfectly fine. It is important, though, for faculty members to be cognizant of their own strengths and weaknesses as supervisors in order to find the best way to support their graduate students. Indeed, the process of evaluating one’s own style can help make you a more effective supervisor.

Of course, there is no one-size-fits-all model for supervision. Hence the model proposed by Terry Gatfield (2005) provides an overview of supervisory styles ranging from laissez-faire and pastoral (which necessitate greater student independence), to contractual and directorial (which provide greater supervisor direction to students).

In the figure at right, the “structure” axis reflects the management components in the supervisory relationship that are provided primarily by the supervisor in negotiation with the student such as research topic selection, meeting schedules, setting of milestones, feedback turn-around time, and writing support.

The “support” axis includes the components supplied by the institution and the supervisor that are more non-directive such as sensitivity to student’s needs, confidence building, exposure to the academic discipline, office and lab space, policy manuals, and funding.

**FIGURE 1.** This figure is adapted from Figure 3 in Gatfield (2005). It may be helpful as a starting point for reflecting on your own supervision style.
An important feature of Gatfield’s model is that it places supervisors and students on a spectrum, using descriptors to identify what he refers to as “preferred operating styles.” This concept means that although a supervisor might have a propensity toward one particular style over another, it allows for movement between styles as necessary. Individuals may find themselves on different parts of the spectrum at different times during the supervision process. For instance, a supervisor may allow the student considerable flexibility early in the graduate program as the student tries to identify a suitable research topic (more pastoral) but become more directive and contractual as the student is actively pursuing the project. Later in the program, the supervisor again may become less directive or prescriptive as the student is focused on writing the thesis.

Gatfield stresses that none of the four styles should be considered inherently undesirable or wrong. Supervision strategies are ineffective only if they do not match the needs and expectations of the supervisor and student, many of which can be discussed at the beginning of the relationship with the use of the CGPS Student-Supervisor Agreement.
Supervision across Different Disciplines and Programs

The University of Saskatchewan offers many graduate degree programs, spanning various fields and disciplines within the humanities, fine arts, social sciences, physical sciences, life sciences, health sciences, agriculture, engineering, business, law, and education.

Given the variety of programs and disciplines, it is not surprising that there is considerable variation in supervisory styles and practices at the University. For instance, in many programs, faculty members may agree to supervise a student prior to admission (and indeed, this may be an admission requirement of the program). In other programs, a student may be admitted and asked to identify a supervisor within the first year of the program. The nature of the student-supervisor relationship regarding the research program also varies across campus. For example, in some thesis-based programs the graduate student is expected to develop a research project that is independent from the supervisor’s, while in others the student is expected to develop a project that fits within an ongoing research project in the supervisor’s laboratory or research team.

What Do Students Value in a Supervisor?

Research across North America has demonstrated that effective supervision and mentorship are the most important features of a student’s graduate school experience and are major factors in driving graduate program completion. Across every discipline, research has shown that students value supervisors who are:

- **Accessible**: the supervisor meets with the student frequently in both individual and group settings.
- **Approachable**: the supervisor creates a comfortable environment where the student can discuss concerns.
- **Encouraging**: the supervisor provides research support, guidance, motivation, and constructive feedback.
- **Interested**: the supervisor shows interest in the student and wants to know them as individuals.
- **Open and flexible**: the supervisor discusses expectations and conflicts openly and honestly and adjusts to the student’s needs (within reason) over time.
- **Professional**: the supervisor facilitates the student’s socialization into the program and discipline, encourages participation in conferences, and introduces students to experts in the field.
- **Supportive**: the supervisor provides professional and career development support.
NOTES


Completing a graduate degree program requires a combination of skills, knowledge, professionalism, collegiality, flexibility, and effective decision-making on the part of both the student and the supervisor. Problems sometimes arise when the expectations of both parties differ, which can have a significant impact if discovered later on in the program. Difficulties also may occur when shortcuts are taken and/or the proper University or CGPS policies and procedures are not followed. This section offers strategies for helping supervisors and students get off to a good start.

**Agreeing to Supervise a Student**

Establishing a positive student-supervisor relationship needs to start on day one. While there are many factors that can affect the success of a graduate supervision relationship, it is important to make sure that the student and supervisor are a good fit.

Here are some suggestions for what you can do when deciding to supervise a student:

- Have a conversation (through electronic means or in-person if possible) with the student to ensure that your expectations of a graduate student meet those of the candidate.
- Ask yourself: Does the candidate’s research interests fit with your interests and areas of expertise? Are you willing and able to supervise the candidate on a mutually agreed-upon research topic that may fall somewhat outside your immediate area of expertise?
- Does the candidate have the communication and academic skills that you are looking for in a student?
- Is it possible to invite the candidate to visit the University campus and your research facilities prior to admission? If not, can you give the candidate a virtual “tour” of the available facilities?
- Given your commitments, will you have the appropriate time available to supervise this new student?
- How will the student be funded? If you are expected to provide funding, do you have the funding available now? For how long will you have access to funding? What are the other available funding mechanisms to support the student?
- Will the student report only to you or is there another member of the academic unit who also will work closely with the student?
- To what extent will the student work as a teaching or research assistant?

Of course, you may not find complete answers for all of your questions during a first conversation but asking them may help you and your potential student anticipate and minimize problems down the road. Setting up a meeting with the candidate (either virtually or in-person) should give you a good sense of whether this is someone who fits with your supervisory style and, more importantly, if it is someone who you can see yourself working with. Once you have agreed to supervise the student, keep in mind the following responsibilities that are associated with the role of supervisor.
Key Responsibilities of Supervisors

**KNOWING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**
All supervisors should be aware of, and adhere to, the regulations, policies, and procedures in place in the academic unit, CGPS, and the University. This awareness includes being familiar with the timelines and deadlines associated with the various requirements of the program, such as registration, advisory committee meetings, examinations, and thesis submission.

**COMPLETING THE STUDENT-SUPERVISOR AGREEMENT**
At the beginning of the program, the supervisor should meet with the student to establish the guidelines that will govern their relationship. The CGPS Student-Supervisor Agreement, which is mandatory for all first-year students enrolled in thesis-based programs, is an excellent instrument for this purpose as it encourages discussion of: the roles and responsibilities of the supervisor and student, establishing a research topic and thesis proposal, meeting schedules and completion timelines, publications and authorship, intellectual property and academic integrity, funding sources, support services, safety issues, professional development possibilities and vacation time.

**BEING AWARE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES**
Funding is often a critical factor in a graduate student’s academic progress and success. Before agreeing to supervise a student, the supervisor should be aware of their academic unit’s policy on funding graduate students. If possible, the supervisor should seek research grants or other funds so that the student’s research can be fully supported. While funding arrangements vary across disciplines and programs, the supervisor, in collaboration with departmental administrators, ought to discuss with the student the level and duration of funding that will be provided, including support for conferences and travel for research. The supervisor also should be knowledgeable about funding resources that are available to eligible students such as SSHRC, CIHR and NSERC Tri-council research awards. It is a good idea for the supervisor to encourage their students to apply for these awards and be prepared to review their applications and provide feedback in a timely manner. Additionally, the supervisor ought to be cognizant of the scholarship and financial aid services available to graduate students through CGPS Awards and Scholarships. In the event of an emergency, the supervisor should be familiar with the University’s Crisis Financial Aid, which is administered by Student Central.
EXAM PREPARATION
The supervisor should help the student to prepare for oral and written examinations (e.g. qualifying, comprehensive, and thesis defense exams). At a minimum, the supervisor should ensure that the student is aware of the format, expectations, standards, and means of assessment of the exam.

PROVIDING TIMELY FEEDBACK
Timely and constructive feedback on written work is an important responsibility of the supervisor. At the outset of the relationship, the supervisor should clearly communicate to the student their expectations regarding the submission of written material for review. For instance, do you expect students to submit only completed sections of a thesis or other written work, or can the student submit outlines or drafts of parts of the material for review? Should the material be submitted in electronic or hard copy?

Generally speaking, a reasonable turnaround time for drafts needs to be determined by both parties in advance. Expecting a thorough reading and commentary for a lengthy chapter in less than a week would probably be unreasonable. Equally unreasonable would be for a student not to hear back for more than a month, unless the supervisor has provided notice to the student that the review may take longer. In these days of electronic communication, the supervisor being away on sabbatical leave should not preclude timely reading of drafts or signing off on the final version.

MAINTAINING ONGOING SUPERVISION
When planning a leave or absence, the supervisor must ensure that adequate provision is made for continued supervision and student support. All such arrangements must be communicated well in advance to the CGPS Dean, academic unit Head, and the student. Interim examining and supervisory arrangements to cover a period of absence do not release the supervisor from final responsibility for the adequate supervision of the graduate student.

WRITING REFERENCE LETTERS
It is very common for students (current or past) to ask supervisors for reference letters in support of funding, research, academic, and employment opportunities. If a student asks for a reference letter, the supervisor should be honest about their willingness to write a strong letter. Effective letters usually include concrete examples that highlight the student’s standout traits, strengths, and accomplishments but also, if applicable, areas in need of growth or improvement.

TROUBLESHOOTING
It is always best if the supervisor attempts to address any concerns with the student’s academic progress and any other related issues as early as possible. If a supervisor is unable to resolve an issue with a student, they should consult with the relevant members of the academic unit, including the other Advisory Committee members, the Graduate Chair, and the department Head. The supervisor also can seek assistance from the staff at the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, including the Associate Dean, to get information about policies and procedures, as well as advice on informal intervention and formal appeal processes.

SUBMITTING THE THESIS FOR THE ORAL DEFENCE
The supervisor must carefully read the final draft of the thesis and determine if it is ready for defence. Once the supervisor and other Advisory Committee members agree that the thesis is ready for examination, the supervisor should identify potential external examiners and discuss their suitability for the role with the Advisory Committee.
Establishing the Advisory Committee

All graduate students in thesis-based programs must have an Advisory Committee. Whereas the Master’s Advisory Committee consists of at least three members, the PhD Advisory Committee consists of at least five members. These committees, which include the supervisor, should be established as soon as possible following the student’s registration in the program. Responsibility for naming the members of a student’s Advisory Committee lies with the academic unit Head, Graduate Chair, or designate, in a formal meeting with the academic unit’s Graduate Affairs Committee. While the supervisor is intended to be the first point of contact for students, the other Advisory Committee members can add additional value to the student’s academic program. These members can help ensure academic standards in the discipline and also provide expertise that complements and expands on that of the supervisor.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Advisory Committee

It is the responsibility of the Advisory Committee to assist students in course selection and definition of research area, to provide support and advice on thesis work and examinations, to regularly evaluate the student’s progress by meeting at least once yearly, to take appropriate and timely action in view of this progress, and to keep and approve records of this evaluation and actions taken.

- As soon as possible (preferably early in the first year of registration in a graduate degree program), the Advisory Committee shall develop an individualized Program of Studies for the student. The Program of Studies should then be approved by the Graduate Chair of the unit and sent to CGPS for final approval.
- The Advisory Committee must meet with the student, as a committee, at least once per year, to assess the student’s progress in the program. Some academic units require more frequent meetings, a practice that should be considered good practice for most students. During these meetings, it is important to highlight the student’s successes but also supply feedback on the areas that need improvement. Meetings should be more frequent if there are significant questions concerning progress and performance.
- At its annual meeting, the Advisory Committee will complete a formal report of its assessment, detailing its observations of the student’s progress and its recommendations. Copies of the report and minutes of the meeting should be distributed to the student and all members of the committee. The approved (and signed) report and minutes should then be submitted to the graduate administrator in the academic unit to be uploaded to PAWS as soon as possible.
- The Advisory Committee is responsible for advising the academic unit that a thesis is ready to proceed to defence. This means that the Committee should be actively involved in reading and giving constructive feedback on drafts of the thesis, advising when and if the research and writing are complete and acceptable, and approving the final draft as ready for examination. The Advisory Committee also should discuss potential external examiners with the supervisor. Once the Committee has agreed on the proposed external examiner, the academic unit will provide the name to CGPS along with notification that the student is ready for defence. The examining committee will consist of the supervisor, all other members of the Advisory Committee, and the external.
SECTION 5
Supporting Students to Completion and Beyond

In addition to completing all of the course, research, and other requirements related to the program, students must complete the thesis. Completing the first draft of a thesis is challenging for many students. Some students may experience “writer’s block” while others may be affected by anxiety about failure, a reluctance to share work with others, a lack of experience in writing, and excessive and sometimes contradictory demands of Advisory Committee members, or a host of other factors. For some students (and supervisors) this can be a stressful time, particularly if expectations have not been clarified earlier on.

Guiding Principles

While this is by no means a comprehensive list, the following are a few guiding principles that may help your student complete the writing stages of the thesis:

- The supervisor ought to encourage the student to start writing early and often. Writing a thesis is much easier when writing is already a regular part of the student’s academic work. Including expectations about the writing schedule in the CGPS Student-Supervisor Agreement is advisable. The supervisor also should be aware of and encourage their students to make use of the numerous resources available on campus to help with writing, including one-to-one appointments. Writing workshops and other supports offered through the University Library can be particularly useful for graduate writers. The library also offers writing retreats for graduate students.

- Constructive feedback by the supervisor on chapters and complete thesis drafts plays an important role in promoting timely completion of the degree. It is best if the supervisor and student have a discussion early on in the program about what the student can expect in terms of turn-around time so that everyone’s expectations are met. Advisory Committee members also are expected to read and comment on drafts of the thesis in a timely manner.

- The supervisor may encourage the student to submit portions of the thesis as articles to be published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals. Since these articles are frequently multi-authored, they may provide valuable learning experiences, as well as professional development opportunities, for the
student. Increasingly in some disciplines, theses are becoming compilations of material already published during the student’s program; these are known as manuscript-style theses. (For further information on the preparation of both manuscript-style and traditional-style theses, please see the thesis preparation guidelines on the CGPS website).

- In some cases, the supervisor might need to help the student understand that the completion of the thesis is a very significant, but not necessarily final, stage in scholarly development. While the thesis is an important milestone required for the degree, it is not always the culmination of an academic career. Optimally, the thesis should be of a quality and quantity sufficient for clear acceptance at the oral defence so that the student can earn the degree and move on to the next career stage.

- The supervisor and other Advisory Committee members have a responsibility to provide feedback to the student within a reasonable amount of time. What is a “reasonable amount of time” is difficult to define, but normally should be measured in weeks and not in months. It might depend on the faculty member’s other commitments, the time of year, vacation plans, the length of the draft, and how much the draft has changed from previous versions. If drafts have been read and comments acted upon, reading the final version of the thesis usually should be possible within one month of submission.

- Being away on sabbatical leave should not prevent a supervisor or Advisory Committee member from reading drafts or signing off on the final version of the thesis since these documents can be sent electronically.

- Once the thesis has been submitted, the supervisor should help the student prepare for the oral defence. Many students have never been tested in an oral exam. Therefore, it is good practice to familiarize your student with the format, expectations, and standards associated with the defence process, as well as providing them with some strategies for success.

**TEACHING DEVELOPMENT**

The University’s Learning Charter is a good resource for supervisors and their graduate students since it highlights institutional goals related to the pursuit of learning and teaching.

The Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching and Learning provides support specifically designed for graduate students who are working as teaching assistants, lab instructors and class instructors. At no cost, graduate students can participate in a variety of workshops, events, sessions and non-credit courses about teaching and learning offered by the centre.

Supported by the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in partnership with the Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching and Learning, the Teacher Scholar Doctoral Fellowship program supplies PhD students with mentored graduate teaching support through a University-wide competition.

**LIBRARY RESOURCES**

The University Library helps graduate students become more effective researchers by offering a range of programming, consisting of workshops, online resources, and one-to-one consultations with subject librarians. Also, the University Library helps provide support for transition and peer support. In this regard, they offer a series of peer-led workshops to help students manage the transition into graduate school and curate an online resource that provides further insight into the graduate school experience.
GRADUATE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER PREPARATION
As a supervisor, you will have many opportunities to support your students in their professional and career development. Beyond assisting graduate students with networking opportunities, funding applications, conference presentations and preparing research for publication, the supervisor can play an important role in helping to shape the future career paths of their students. Although expectations will vary across disciplines, supervisors should encourage students to explore the professional development options available to them on campus and advise them to obtain the relevant skills and knowledge that will help optimize their career opportunities.

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
The Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching and Learning provides students with the opportunity to complete the non-credit Graduate Professional Skills Certificate Program. At no cost to students, this program gives them the opportunity to develop a professional skills portfolio and receive one-on-one professional skills coaching.

The Student Employment and Career Centre provides students with tools, resources and support to help them make the transition from graduate school to future careers. Mitacs, a non-profit organization, also offers professional skills development workshops, at no cost to students.
Graduate students and faculty at the University of Saskatchewan come from diverse backgrounds, abilities, and life experiences, and these differences can impact the graduate student-supervisor relationship. Effective supervision requires faculty to learn to work across differences and help students to understand the social and academic cultures of their departments and programs. In doing so, faculty supervisors must consider issues of both equality and equity when supervising their graduate students and find the right balance between the two.

Equality means providing each student with the same or similar opportunities and ensuring fairness in processes and outcomes so that each student has an equal opportunity to make the most of their abilities. At the same time, supervisors must recognize that each student is unique and thus must also work to treat their students equitably. Equity means that a student’s personal or social circumstances, as well as gender, ability, cultural, or socio-economic background, should not stand as roadblocks to the student achieving their educational potential. For instance, while the supervisor should give all students equal opportunities to meet, early morning meetings may be difficult or impossible for students who also have childcare obligations. Similarly, a student with disabilities may require unique accommodations with meeting deadlines or completion of certain writing or research tasks. Maintaining equity requires taking the range of human attributes and qualities into account and providing each student with what they need to be successful in their program of choice. For more information on these concepts, supervisors should familiarize themselves with the University’s Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy.¹

While every student will have their own specific needs, the key to building an effective relationship with the student is to be compassionate and to establish a relationship of trust and respect through patience, time, careful listening, and honesty.² Creating a space where open conversations are possible will allow students to feel comfortable with expressing any successes and/or challenges they might encounter during their studies. However, supervisors should also recognize their limits in understanding the experiences of graduate students with different life experiences, which is why encouraging multiple mentors, as well as opportunities to participate in peer communities (on or off-campus), is important.³

Different Experiences in Graduate School

A supervisor ought to be aware that a student’s experience will likely be different from their own experience and from the experience of their peers. A student’s experience in graduate school can be shaped by a number of factors. For example, studies examining graduate-level programs across North America have demonstrated that older students tend to feel more connected to faculty members than to their peers.⁴ Since this experience can lead to these students feeling isolated from their peers, productive approaches should be taken by the supervisor to help the student integrate into departmental and peer groups.⁵
Student-supervisor relationships can also be defined along gendered lines. Research has shown that women are more likely to choose other women as mentors. Women students also report that they are more likely to receive psychosocial support (acceptance, confirmation, role modelling, and counselling) from their mentors, while men report that their mentors are more likely to provide support for work-related tasks like networking.

It is important for supervisors to recognize that all students are different and that this handbook cannot possibly provide a comprehensive list of those differences. For example, supervisors may encounter students with different cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, gender identities, sexual orientations, ability statuses, and ideological perspectives. Being aware of the ways in which such differences can shape a graduate student's relationship to their studies, their department, and their overall experience within academia is integral to creating a solid framework for a successful supervisor-student relationship.

Relatedly, supervisors should try to be aware of any implicit or hidden biases that they may hold. These biases can originate from past experiences and, in many cases, the supervisor may not be aware of their presence. For example, you may think that you do not maintain a bias regarding age and ability; however, you may discover that you have innate preferences with regard to your students. One way to measure and begin considering these implicit or hidden biases is to participate in an online test offered as part of Project Implicit by Harvard University. Being open and willing to examine your own possible biases is important to being able to provide appropriate support to your graduate students.

The following sections address some specific challenges or issues that your graduate students might encounter during the course of their studies.

**LIFE STAGES**

Graduate students enter their programs at different life stages and, as a result, it is necessary for the supervisor to try to accommodate a reasonable academic plan for the student’s program that meets the needs of the program but also suits the student’s individual schedules and time constraints. For instance, some graduate students may begin graduate school directly after their undergraduate degrees and may be able to work long hours in a lab or travel extensively for archival research to finish their degrees more quickly. Others may be returning to their studies later in life and/or they may have family and/or community responsibilities that require additional consideration when mapping out their programs. In either case, clarifying expectations from the outset of the student-supervisor relationship will be useful for all parties involved.

**ENROLMENT STATUS**

Situations also may arise as a result of a change in a student’s personal circumstances. For example, an illness or loss in a student’s family may require a student to take some time away from their studies. The supervisor should create an environment where a student feels comfortable about bringing these issues to the attention of the supervisor so that they can be discussed, and options explored as soon as possible. In order to be able to do so, the supervisor should know the appropriate contacts within the department as well as the appropriate CGPS leave policies. Relatedly, the supervisor should be prepared to assist the student in resuming their program when they return from a leave.
STUDENTS WITH FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES
Family structures and responsibilities can impact the way a student engages in graduate studies. For example, students who have young children may require more flexibility with regard to their work deadlines and meeting schedules. Childcare issues cannot always be anticipated or planned for in advance. Some students also may encounter illnesses or emergencies among elderly or extended family members that require their attention.

Because such circumstances may affect their academic progress, students may not feel comfortable about bringing them up in discussion with the supervisor. Nevertheless, “life happens” and it is important for the supervisor to create an environment where students feel comfortable discussing family situations that might affect their academic progress. Ideally, students should feel that the supervisor is there to help them explore various options for dealing with these situations, and, if necessary, locate resources at the University that can provide additional advice and support.

FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS
In some cases, graduate students will experience unique pressures because they are the first in their families to enrol in graduate school. Studies have shown that doctoral students who are the first in their families to enrol in graduate studies often carry significant levels of financial stress while pursuing higher education. As well, they often do not have the support in their immediate families to help them navigate the complex system of higher education. Faculty should take this into consideration in their approach to supervision. Students in this category might require more explicit support regarding expectations and more information on CGPS and University processes and policies.

INDIGENOUS STUDENTS
Since some Indigenous students may be the first in their family or community to attend graduate school, they may be unfamiliar with the academic environment of graduate-level university programs. They also may have cultural backgrounds that are different from that of their supervisors and this may affect their approach to scholarly work. It is important for supervisors to support and value what Indigenous students bring to their academic work, including cultural contexts, traditional knowledges, family histories, and community obligations. The model of individual scholarly competition with peers may run counter to values of shared achievement through the contributions of families and communities. Many Indigenous students attend university so that they can provide positive contributions to their communities and see the experience as an opportunity to share what they learn for the benefit of others.

Supervisors should be prepared to help their Indigenous students navigate the academic culture of their departments and become familiar with the policies of the CGPS and the University. In addition to academic and administrative support, Indigenous students may benefit from spiritual support from elders available on campus. Supervisors also should be aware of the resources and support available at the Aboriginal Students’ Centre. Located in the Gordon Oakes Red Bear building, the Centre is committed to supporting the academic and personal success of Métis, First Nation, and Inuit students. Dedicated to promoting inclusivity and diversity, the Centre provides social, cultural, and academic programs and services for the entire campus community throughout the year.
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Students come from around the world to attend the University of Saskatchewan, bringing with them a wealth of expertise and experiences that enrich the overall academic contributions of the University. At the same time, students who come from abroad may experience high levels of stress in dealing with the cultural differences they encounter during their time at the University. One of the main challenges they might face is their ability to deal with cultural differences in the academic environment at the University, such as how to interact with faculty members, when and how to ask for support, and how to communicate with the CGPS and the University administration.

Students arriving in graduate studies from different cultures may face challenges that include deciphering the expectations of the program and/or discipline while at the same time getting used to both a new university and a new living environment. If possible, supervisors should try to mentor their students during this transition.

Funding can be an added stress for these students, placing pressure on them to do well in their programs in order to meet visa requirements to stay in the country or completion pressures imposed by their scholarships. In addition, English may not be a student's first language, so accessing the resources that they need and engaging in the academic community in their departments, and at the University at large, may be more challenging.

Cross-cultural communication can also be a challenge for international students. For example, cultures can vary in expected behaviour associated with power differences. Based on their cultural backgrounds, some students may be reluctant to question their supervisors or other faculty while others may be more willing to openly challenge them. As well, it is important to note that communication styles may differ: some cultures value indirectness, others directness. In these situations, it is important to work toward avoiding potential misunderstandings. For example, at the outset of the relationship, the supervisor might make it clear that they know some students may be uncomfortable asking questions, but that questions are expected and welcome.

There are many ways that supervisors can provide support to international students to help them succeed in their graduate education. In particular, supervisors should try to help alleviate feelings of isolation that may be experienced by their international students. As soon as possible, supervisors should introduce their international students to the other students in their cohort. Supervisors should also try to connect their international students with the financial, social, language, and cultural support resources on campus that can be helpful to their studies. Dedicated to fostering a welcoming and supportive campus community, the International Student and Study Abroad Centre is a valuable resource for international students at the University.

GENDER DIVERSITY

Supervisors also should expect to work with students of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations and be aware of resources on campus that support gender and sexual diversity. The Women's Centre, which serves as a resource and information centre, provides a safe environment to promote equality while recognizing and celebrating differences. Also embracing diversity, the Pride Centre is an inclusive space for people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and relationships. Both centres offer peer supports, unique programming, events, and workshops for students at the University.
MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Although some students thrive within the context of graduate studies, others may experience mental health challenges. While supervisors should not take on the role of therapist or counsellor, it is important that they support the mental health and well-being of their students during the course of their studies. In particular, supervisors should be aware of campus programs and resources—including the Wellness Strategy, the Student Wellness Centre, and Student Affairs and Outreach—so that they can refer students to them when necessary and appropriate. In addition, supervisors might find consider completing the Mental Health First Aid certificate training course offered by the Student Wellness Centre.

As another means to promote the well-being of their graduate students, supervisors ought to be knowledgeable about the recreation facilities on campus. For example, the Physical Activities Complex is an activity hub for students that includes a swimming pool, running track, fit centre, climbing wall, gymnasiums, squash and racquetball courts, and a dance studio. Outdoor facilities are also available such as soccer fields, baseball diamonds, tennis courts, and walking paths.
NOTES


10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.


The University of Saskatchewan's Access and Equity Services (AES) is guided by Saskatchewan's Human Rights legislation and the duty to accommodate individuals requiring accommodations based on disability, religion, family status and gender identity.

Graduate supervisors must make every reasonable effort to provide accommodations to students with disabilities to provide them the opportunity to demonstrate and develop their academic, research, and scholarly potentials to the fullest.

**What are Accommodations?**

Accommodations are supports or services that allow a student with a disability, or other accommodation needs, a fair opportunity to engage in academic activities and fulfill essential course and program requirements. Accommodations are meant to level the playing field for students; they are never meant to provide an advantage to students. Accommodations are not the same as modifications; students must still meet the learning outcomes of their programs.

**ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS POLICY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Graduate supervisors should familiarize themselves with the CGPS policy Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities. The goal of this policy and its procedures is to ensure that graduate students with disabilities pursue their programs of study in an academic environment where, once appropriate accommodations are in place, and without undue hardship to the University, all students have an equitable opportunity to succeed.

This policy is based on the premise that a student with a disability is the most capable person to determine whether future success in their graduate program will be assisted by registering with AES. Students are responsible for organizing their own assessment of disability and accommodation requirements in consultation with AES. Once it is deemed necessary that the student's stage of program requires an individualized accommodation plan (e.g. to support preparation of the research proposal, qualifying or comprehensive exams, thesis writing, oral defence, etc.) the Graduate Chair schedules an Accommodation Planning Committee meeting. At this meeting, the committee will determine a plan appropriate to the student’s necessary accommodations.

**DISCLOSURE AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information related to a student’s disability (or disabilities) is to remain confidential. Information about a student’s disability will not be disclosed to anyone by AES staff without the express written consent of the student. Students are never required to disclose their disability to the supervisor and under no circumstances should the supervisor or other Advisory Committee members ask a student to disclose this information. Instead, if you suspect that a student has a disability, you should provide them with information on the resources available through AES.
Despite the faculty member’s best intentions and preparations, the path from start to finish of a successful graduate supervisory relationship can at times be difficult. Some of the most challenging issues to resolve on university campuses are student-supervisor disputes. As the research indicates, these problems are often caused by one or more of the following factors:

**PERSONALITY FACTORS**
- Personality clashes
- Communication barriers
- Differing interests and working styles

**PROFESSIONAL FACTORS**
- Insufficiently qualified supervisor or student
- Lack of contact between supervisor and student
- Student ignoring or struggling to integrate their supervisor’s guidance

**ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS**
- Supervisor with too many students and other responsibilities
- Inadequate supports for the student (including funding)
- Student feels isolated or experiences problems in a team-based environment

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**Strategies for Preventing and Navigating Conflict**

Supervisors are encouraged to seek out support and advice and to try to resolve issues as early as possible by communicating directly with their students, other Advisory Committee members, and the Graduate Chair and/or department Head. In recognition of the fact that problems are rarely completely one-sided and implementing workable solutions will often require compromise and flexibility, the following strategies may help supervisors prevent or navigate conflict in their relationships with students:

- **Establish a relationship of mutual respect.** From the first day, mutual respect must be the foundation of the relationship between the supervisor and student.

- **Inspire communication at the outset.** Use the Student-Supervisor Agreement to discuss expectations about respective roles, responsibilities, milestones, and goals as early as possible to prevent future possible misunderstandings.

- **Start earlier rather than later.** Solutions are often simpler and easier to implement before a problem escalates and positions harden. Be attentive to emerging issues and handle them in a timely manner. Start with the goal of managing a conflict with your student with respect and understanding.
- **Be open-minded and remain calm.** Challenging situations can be emotionally charged, and it is important to acknowledge feelings and emotions (your own and the student’s) when tackling a problem respectfully and with an open mind. Try to remain calm, rational, and professional when communicating with the student.

- **Listen carefully.** Different problems require different solutions and different people have different perspectives. Differences push us to think creatively and demand that we avoid assumptions, generalizations, and personal attacks. The root cause of the issue may not be the same as the stated issue, so it is important to ask questions and listen to the student to try to understand the “why” behind a position or problem.

- **If needed, seek assistance to resolve issues.** First, try to resolve problems through open and respectful discussion with the student. If this approach does not work, members of the Advisory Committee may be able to help resolve the issue between you and your student. Guidance also can be sought from the Graduate Chair or Head of your department. If necessary, staff at the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (including the Associate Dean) are available for assistance as well.

- **Acknowledge the power imbalance.** Since there is a real power imbalance in the supervisory relationship, students may be reluctant to speak freely and worry about recriminations. Advisory Committee members, other faculty members, and/or the Graduate Chair may be able to help but may also be perceived as part of the “power group.” A discussion early in the supervisory relationship about appropriate ways and processes for bringing concerns or issues forward can give clarity and structure in anticipation of having to manage a difficult situation.

- **Avoid conflict of interest situations.** At all times, maintain a professional relationship with your student. Given the power imbalance that exists between the supervisor and the student, do not engage in any romantic or sexual relationship with a student under your supervision. If such a relationship occurs, for the protection of all parties, there is an obligation for the supervisor to disclose the relationship to their Department Head, Dean, or other senior administrator as soon as possible.

- **Familiarize yourself with relevant CGPS and University policies and review them with your student.** In particular, take a look at the CGPS Policies and Procedures Manual, as well as the University Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, Regulations on Student Academic Misconduct, the Responsible Conduct of Research Policy, the Guidelines for Academic Conduct, the Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy, the Sexual Assault Prevention Policy and the Procedures for Student Appeals in Academic Matters.

- **Get support and access resources on campus.** In certain circumstances, it might be necessary to ask for advice from support services. Depending on the situation, there are many resources on campus that may be helpful such as the Student Wellness Centre, Student Affairs and Outreach, Access and Equity Services, the Graduate Students’ Association, the Women’s Centre, the Pride Centre, the Aboriginal Students’ Centre, Student Central and the International Student and Study Abroad Centre.
NOTES


SECTION 9
Celebrating Achievements

The main goal of this handbook is to help ensure the success of our students in their graduate programs and in their future endeavours. By following these best practices, we hope that supervisors will be able to establish relationships with their students that are respectful, professional, productive, and rewarding. Along the way, supervisors also should take the time to promote and celebrate the achievements that result from successful student-supervisor relationships.

The following are some of the ways that supervisors (and other Advisory Committee members) can do this:

- Organize a celebration when your student’s work is accepted for presentation or publication.
- Attend poster competitions, research days, book launches, and other functions that showcase your student’s achievements.
- Arrange an event to celebrate your student’s successful comprehensive examination or thesis defence.
- Nominate students for thesis and dissertation awards at the university and national levels.
- Announce your student’s achievements in campus communications and/or through academic and professional networks to support and advance your student’s research and career opportunities.
- Submit nominations for the Distinguished Graduate Mentorship Award and attend the ceremony when the award is presented.
- Attend events such as the Indigenous Student Achievement Awards Ceremony.
- Be present at Convocation and the Graduation Powwow ceremonies and congratulate your students after they receive their diplomas.
SECTION 10
Appendices

- CGPS Student-Supervisor Agreement
- University Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy
- University Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy
- University Guidelines for Academic Conduct
- University Learning Charter
- University Procedures for Student Appeals in Academic Matters
- University Regulations on Student Academic Misconduct
- University Responsible Conduct of Research Policy
- University Sexual Assault Prevention Policy
- University Students with Disabilities: Academic Accommodation and Access Policy