

THESIS SUPERVISOR/STUDENT AGREEMENT

One of the most difficult aspects of graduate work include 1) defining a well-defined thesis with objectives that are attainable within an acceptable time frame, 2) establishing an appropriate working arrangement between the supervisor and the student that is both professional and personal, 3) establishing proper communications between the student, supervisor, and the supervisory committee and, most importantly, 4) clearly understanding the expectations of the program, the student, and the supervisor.

It may help you to know some of my expectations of students that I accept for degree programs:

1. My general attitude toward all graduate students is that they are colleagues and future peers, and I try to interact accordingly. I also expect the quality of your work to be high – a reflection of your status as a colleague and eventual peer. I try to interact accordingly and also expect high quality work.
2. **Honesty and candour in communications.** These are essential for establishing and maintaining a successful working relationship.
3. **Independence.** This is graduate school and I expect students to be able to work independently. At the same time, I encourage students to work in groups so as to benefit from the interaction with other students. I am here as a resource person and a mentor. I will help with those things that you have trouble with, in terms of administration, finances, thesis development, methodology, and the drafting of the thesis. However, I expect students to attempt to solve their own problems before coming to me, especially when it concerns course work and the thesis.
4. **Commitment.** Your thesis and related research will need to be top priorities for you to succeed. Be prepared to put in 50-hour and more work weeks on a regular basis. I also expect you to consult with me on the courses you take and I expect you to obtain high grades.
5. **Scholarship.** I expect only the best from my students and this means producing a high quality, flawless thesis that has scientific integrity. You may find theses on the shelves of the department that have been successful but may not meet my personal standards. I do not waiver on quality. In addition, much of my work is used in setting regulations, and quite often my data are subject to audits from external agencies. I insist that all theses that have a significant public health component may be subject to audits by myself or by my statistical analysts before they can be submitted for review or for publication. This should not be construed as meaning lack of confidence in your work; it is very easy for errors to crop up in database management or in the statistical analyses, and having a third party check the data will make your results stand up to scrutiny. Often I provide statistical and programming support, and you should make use of that service to the fullest to ensure accuracy. (This does not mean that my programmers will do the work for you.)

6. **Responsibility.** I entrust my students with keys to restricted areas, computers, software, and classified data. I expect you to use these in a trustworthy and responsible manner. This includes safeguarding materials (i.e., not losing keys or leaving account codes out where others can see them) and informing me immediately if anything is lost or security is compromised in any way. I also expect you to use computers, data, software, and office space in a professional and ethical manner.
7. **Morale management.** Graduate school is a roller coaster for almost everyone that goes through it. I was no exception, and I try to use my own experiences in helping students get through this tough but interesting and productive period. I expect you to have ups and downs, but I encourage you to manage your attitude and perspective to make them as positive as possible. In the case of major personal problems that affect your ability to do your work as a student, please alert me to this fact rather than silently letting your work suffer. In the long run you will need to learn to balance personal issues with professional ones and not let them have an ongoing negative effect on your work. If you are having problems with me, and vice versa, then we should try and work this out together. I do not want to hear any negative comments about me from third parties.
8. **Sharing.** I expect you to reciprocate and help support your fellow students. And, as the graduate student/supervisor role is a reciprocal one, there may be times when I request your assistance as well.
9. **Collegiality and professionalism.** I go on a first name basis with my graduate students, so "Mark" is fine, but I expect you to act in a professional and respectful way.
10. **Theses and publications.** I usually ask students to produce a thesis that consists of one or more papers that are publication-quality. This style is consistent with McGill regulations and makes it more likely that you will have at least one paper completed and submitted by the time you finish your thesis. I will recognize all publications, manuscripts, abstracts and works produced by you. My rule of thumb is: "if you write the paper, you are first author". However, I will insist that I am corresponding author, as I am ultimately responsible for the work you produce for publication.

It is very difficult for students to write papers after the thesis is finished, usually because they "never want to see it again" and/or have gone on to other activities. For the sake of your career, which depends completely on publishing as many papers as possible and obtaining grants, I ask students to ensure that the paper(s) are completed before completing the degree. I usually do not have the time to complete the paper for you but, as corresponding author, I will make time to shepherd the paper through the review process.
11. **McGill regulations.** You should become familiar with all relevant McGill regulations that affect your thesis and course work, as well as relationships with students, staff, and faculty.

At the same time, I will do everything in my power to assist you in getting through the program, including:

1. With your assistance, I will develop a supervisory committee that contains the requisite expertise to provide you with the guidance you need . Remember, it is the supervisor and committee who are responsible for allowing a thesis to be submitted for review; a failed thesis means the supervisor and committee have failed in their scientific duties. In addition, I will try to define a committee that will protect you from vested interests.
2. I will assist you in selecting a project that is suitable in scope, difficulty and extent of work required. For masters students, this may consist of a secondary analysis that can be completed by the end of the second year of the program. In some instances, this may take a few more months to complete. For doctoral students, this consists of an original research project; the amount of time required to complete the project depends on many factors, and so no definite time limit can be given. Despite what you may hear from other persons, it is customary and usual to take about five years to complete a doctorate.
3. I will ensure that you have appropriate access to a study population or a database to answer your question.
4. I will advise and support you throughout the entire course of the project including the design, development, implementation, monitoring, analysis and reporting, in addition to helping with all difficulties as they arise.
5. I will assist you in obtaining personal funding and project funding as required; external assistance depends on your marks (GPA>3.5), the competition, and other vagaries associated with granting committees.
6. If you are a doctoral student I will attend your Ph.D. research protocol presentation (part of the comprehensive examinations).
7. I will attempt to assure adequate progress in your work, timely submission for ethical approval and timely completion of the project. However, this also depends on you.
8. I will read your drafts and thesis and provide comments as soon as possible. Please recognize that this may entail a considerable amount of time on my part, and my time is severely constrained by other activities; if your drafts are not up to par, then it will take me longer to read and edit and this will extend the wait. As well, there are periods of time, usually near grant deadlines, when I may not be able to read and correct your work in a timely manner.
9. I will facilitate, if funds permit, your attendance at conferences and professional meetings and fulfill other mentoring responsibilities (e.g. notification of important meetings, assisting with poster/slide costs, reviewing papers and protocols, etc...). I also expect that you will make presentations at these meetings.
10. I will arrange for replacement supervision if/when I am on leave for any reason (sabbatical, medical, parental, etc.).
11. Depending on the situation I may also provide:
 - i. Office space (i.e. desk, shelves etc.)

- ii. Computers
- iii. Access to subjects/clients and databases
- iv. Consultations with statistical analysts and programmers
- v. Assistance with applications for funding

To get to know you better and to understand your expectations and preparation, I would appreciate a sentence or two from you (in your own words) on each of the following:

1. What are your strengths and weaknesses in your academic work thus far?
2. How are your writing skills?
3. How are your methodological skills (i.e., epidemiological/statistical)?
4. How are your grades?
5. Have you published, or do you have plans to publish, any of your thesis or previous work?
6. Who is your current advisor (and where) and how is your working relationship?
7. If you were to pursue a graduate degree with me, what is your anticipated graduation date? How long from start to finish?
8. Please provide a self-assessment of your degree of independence in designing and carrying out graduate research.
9. What is your funding record and your intentions/options for extending your funds?
10. What level of financial support will you need to live, enrol, conduct research? (being aware that the Department and I may not be able to meet those needs entirely).
11. What are your preferences for solo or team research projects?
12. How do you express (or fail to express) dissatisfaction, anger or frustration?
13. How tolerant are you of other people's opinions, attitudes, or beliefs?
14. Can you take and give constructive criticism?
15. When asked to do something (particularly if it's different from the way you are doing it now), how do you respond?
16. How do you ensure that you correct your mistakes and do not repeat them in the future?
17. What are your long-term career goals for a permanent job?