



TEMPLATE
Creating a Letter of Understanding
for Advisors/Supervisors and Graduate Students

Statement of Purpose

The combined effort of graduate students and their advisors/supervisors is essential if we are to achieve excellence in graduate education. Because conflict and /or tension can arise in situations where expectations are unclear or mismatched, a thorough understanding of each person's role is critical to productive learning and successful outcomes. The following is a suggested template for a *Letter of Understanding* that can serve as the basis for discussion between graduate students and their supervisor(s) to clarify expectations.

This document has been prepared jointly by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Society of Graduate Students and is geared to helping initiate discussion at the initial stages of graduate training, with awareness that the relationship and expectations will evolve with time. As a result, the *Letter of Understanding* may need to be revisited with progression through the program.

Below you will find ideas to consider during your discussions. In an attempt to create a generic template that is applicable to many disciplines, some suggestions may be more appropriate than others for discussions between supervisor and student in certain areas. Please use these ideas and others that may be appropriate to your discipline to develop suitable letters of understanding.

OVERALL ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES:

Supervisor/Advisor(s):

It is my responsibility to:

- ☐ make every effort to ensure that student's learning and research environment is adequately supported with guidance in choosing appropriate course work, providing suitable resources and work space
- ☐ ensure that student's project has an appropriate hypothesis/question and achievable goals, using the Thesis Guidelines as a framework
- ☐ establish a professional working relationship to guide student in approach to research
- ☐ guide student in learning to work independently and as a member of a team
- ☐ give credit in an appropriate manner to graduate student contributions to scholarly activity, whether presented at professional meetings, publications, or in applications for grants
- ☐ meet regularly/weekly/monthly with student to provide guidance, assess progress and assist student in the goal of completing the program on time

Candidates:

It is my responsibility to:

- ☐ learn skills and approaches to thinking about problems that are suitable for an advanced degree
- ☐ exhibit independent judgment, academic rigor, and intellectual honesty
- ☐ devote full time to scholarly studies and make timely progress towards completion of degree (There is/is not a policy on a specific number of hours to spend carrying out research, but regular involvement in research activities is required.)
- ☐ meet regularly/weekly/monthly with advisor/supervisor and advisory committee to assess progress
- ☐ participate in departmental meetings, seminars and training regularly as determined with supervisor/advisor
- ☐ interact with fellow students, both graduate and undergraduate, staff and faculty in a professional and mature manner
- ☐ negotiate amount of time and timing of holidays

MEETINGS:

Meetings can be called by the student or the supervisor, and usually by common agreement, with the frequency varying according to the stage of the program and the tasks at hand.

Supervisor/Advisor:

It is my responsibility to:

- ☐ monitor the accuracy, validity, and integrity of student's progress
- ☐ respond in timely manner with comments/revisions to drafts of applications, reports or research presentations
- ☐ ensure that student is aware of relevant policies and procedures for the conduct of research
- ☐ be available to meet on a regular basis and as needed for progress and completion of the program

Candidates:

It is my responsibility to:

- ☐ set up weekly meetings with supervisor(s) to discuss progress in research and to meet deadlines
- ☐ balance duties and allocate professional time to be academically effective
- ☐ hold face-to-face meetings with supervisory committee at least once per year and preferably every 6 months
- ☐ distribute progress report and future plans to advisory committee at least a week in advance of meetings
- ☐ plan appropriately to allow time for your supervisor(s) to review and comment on reports before meeting

TIMELINES:

- ☐ every effort should be made to complete research, course work and/or thesis within the (1-year, 2-year/4-year) period that is typical for specific degree program
- ☐ be aware that financial support beyond normal length of program is difficult, if not impossible to obtain. Continued support beyond that time will only be considered if research progress has been substantial, and that the likelihood of completion of the work within a further (four/eight) month period is very high.

FUNDING:

- ☐ an agreed upon level of support is provided for the period from X to Y
- ☐ our program has a policy of following a standard stipend schedule
- ☐ understand that graduate student support may come from a variety of sources that may include Graduate Teaching Assistantships, Scholarship funding from the Faculty of Graduate Studies, internal and external scholarships and bursaries, and research funds acquired by your supervisor (designated as Research Assistantships)
- ☐ students may seek Graduate Teaching Assistantships to gain teaching experience
- ☐ students are expected to apply for scholarships appropriate to program of study
- ☐ supervisors/advisors are expected to provide consultation about scholarship and bursary applications in advance in order to look at ways of optimizing chances of success

SAFETY:

- ☐ safety courses requirements (e.g., Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) and the New Employee Health and Safety Orientation.) and Laboratory and Environmental Waste Management Safety training
- ☐ pass the appropriate courses on the use of animals in research
- ☐ departmental safety officers will assist students in determining if further training is required

PERSONAL CONDUCT: Research and/or Lab space:

Supervisor/Advisor:

It is my responsibility to:

- ☐ maintain good professional and personal relationships with trainees in the research group
- ☐ treat all members of the laboratory (and their work) with verbal and intellectual respect

Candidates:

It is my responsibility to:

- ☐ keep space tidy, respect the space of others, clean glassware, etc.
- ☐ understanding space and equipment is shared and that care must be exercised, with problems reported as they arise
- ☐ not borrow others' supplies without asking, or remove anything from the laboratory without asking permission
- ☐ participate in periodic laboratory cleanup
- ☐ maintain good professional and personal relationships within the research group
- ☐ treat all members of the laboratory (and their work) with verbal and intellectual respect

LABORATORY & COMPUTER USE:

Candidates:

It is my responsibility to:

- ☐ maintain daily records of laboratory notes, including printed records of primary data
- ☐ use this data as the basis for the weekly meetings
- ☐ leave laboratory books and primary data within the department; if signing out a process must be pre-determined
- ☐ use laboratory computers for research purposes only (*e.g.*, email, data analysis, literature searches and other forms of scientific communication)

PUBLICATIONS:

Candidates & Supervisors

It is our joint responsibility to

- ☐ present research results that are publishable in reputable, externally refereed journals, thereby achieving the goals of creating new knowledge and reporting it to the appropriate community
- ☐ determine authorship – process for shared and non-shared authorship; the importance of first authorship for the student
- ☐ recommend timely completion and publication of manuscripts before completion of the program to facilitate preparation of thesis
- ☐ publish the findings from the research. The laboratory retains the use of research if the student does not publish results (*e.g.*, If you are unable to present acceptable manuscripts within twenty-four months following the completion of your graduate studies, you waive the right to first authorship)

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY:

- ☐ original research is carried out by students; the intellectual property component may wholly or in part belong to student
- ☐ maintenance of appropriate confidentiality concerning the research activities, in accordance with existing practices and policies of the discipline
- ☐ circumstances of the research and student's contributions will influence the extent of your intellectual property (see <http://www.cags.ca/> for discussion of the factors that come into play)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

- ☐ work together to find opportunities for students to attend suitable conferences and present research findings
- ☐ investigate sources of funding for travel
- ☐ encourage participation in non-academic programs for professional development, such as effective writing courses, teaching training programs, and workshops on research grants and conflict resolution

Supervisor

Date

Graduate Candidate

Date