

## Letter of Understanding – Biological Research Stream

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**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Supervisor Name(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

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### ***Statement of Purpose***

The combined effort of graduate students and their advisors/supervisors is essential if we are to continue achieving 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. This Letter of Understanding is therefore intended to serve as the basis for discussion between graduate students and their supervisor(s) to clarify expectations.

This document is a customized version of a template document prepared jointly by Western's School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS) and the Society of Graduate Students (SOGS) and is geared towards helping initiate discussion at the early stages of graduate training, with awareness that the relationship and expectations will likely evolve over time. As a result, the Letter of Understanding may need to be revisited with progression through the Program.

***This document should be completed and signed at the start of the student's graduate studies.***

### **OVERALL ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES:**

#### **Supervisor/Advisor(s):**

#### **It is my responsibility to:**

- ☐ Make every effort to ensure that the student's learning and research environment is adequately supported with guidance in choosing appropriate course work and providing suitable resources and work space.
- ☐ Ensure that the 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 the student in his/her approach to research.
- ☐ Guide the 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.
- ☐ Ensure that the student and all parties involved are aware of relevant policies and procedures for the conduct of research.

**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 my full time to scholarly studies and making timely progress towards completion of my degree.
- ☐ Balance duties and allocate professional time to be academically effective.
- ☐ Participate in departmental meetings, seminars and training regularly as agreed upon with my supervisor/ advisor.
- ☐ Negotiate 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:**

- ☐ Be available to meet weekly/bi-weekly/monthly (*please circle one*) with the student to provide guidance and constructive feedback, assess progress, and assist the student in the goal of completing the program on time.
- ☐ Monitor the accuracy, validity, and integrity of the student's progress.
- ☐ Respond in timely manner with comments/revisions to drafts of applications, reports or research presentations.

**Candidates:****It is my responsibility to:**

- ☐ Set up weekly/bi-weekly/monthly (*please circle one*) meetings with my supervisor(s) to discuss progress in research, discuss strengths and areas of improvement, and to meet deadlines.
- ☐ Hold face-to-face meetings with my supervisory committee every 6 months.
- ☐ Distribute progress reports and future plans to my advisory committee at least a week in advance of meetings.
- ☐ Plan appropriately to allow time for my supervisor(s) and committee members to review and comment on reports before meetings.
- ☐ Fill out and bring the appropriate Supervisory Meeting form to the committee meetings.

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**TIMELINES:**

- ☐ Every effort should be made to complete research, course work and thesis preparation within the 2 year (MSc), 4 year (PhD) or 5 year (MSc to PhD transfer) period that is typical for the 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 month period is very high.

**FUNDING:**

- ☐ The ACB Graduate Program has a policy of following a standard stipend schedule (see [http://www.schulich.uwo.ca/anatomy/graduate/financial\\_support.html](http://www.schulich.uwo.ca/anatomy/graduate/financial_support.html) for details).
- ☐ 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 must apply for external 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:**

- ☐ Fulfill the 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 (if applicable).
- ☐ 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.
- ☐ Interact with all students (both graduate and undergraduate), staff and faculty in a professional manner.

**Candidates:****It is my responsibility to:**

- ☐ Keep space tidy, respect the space of others, clean glassware, etc.
- ☐ Understanding space and equipment is often 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, and treat all members of the laboratory (and their work) with verbal and intellectual respect.
- ☐ Interact with all fellow students (both graduate and undergraduate), staff and faculty in a professional manner.

**LABORATORY & COMPUTER USE:****Candidates:****It is my responsibility to:**

- ☐ Maintain daily records of laboratory notes, including records of primary data.
- ☐ Use this data as the basis for the weekly meetings and keep it backed up electronically as per the supervisor's guidelines.
- ☐ 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 high-quality 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, the order of authorship of those involved, and the process for shared and non-shared authorship; as well as understanding the importance of first authorship for the student.
- ☐ As much as possible, facilitate timely completion and publication of manuscripts before completion of the program to facilitate preparation of thesis.

**INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY:**

- ☐ Maintain 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 each contributor's intellectual property (see <http://www.worlddiscoveries.ca/bdo/resources/ip-guide>) 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.

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Graduate Student

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Date

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Supervisor

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Date

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Graduate Chair

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Date

*Supervisory Committees:* All ACB Research students must have a supervisory committee. Members of the supervisory committee have the expertise to help students successfully navigate their degrees. Members of the supervisory committee should be viewed as a valuable resource and consulted often both informally and during supervisory committee meetings. The supervisory committee will be composed of the supervisor(s), a representative from the GAC (appointed by the GAC) and at least one additional mentor with expertise in aspects of the proposed research project. Mentors can be selected from ACB or other programs/departments as long as the potential mentor is accredited and in good standing with SGPS. Mentor(s) must be selected in consultation with the student and are subject to approval by the GAC. (from the ACB Graduate Student Handbook)

**Please complete the *Proposed Advisory Committee* form sent to you via separate e-mail.**