

## Letter of Understanding for 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 *Letter of Understanding* will serve as the basis for discussion between graduate students and their supervisor(s) to clarify expectations.

This document is based on a template prepared jointly by the School of Postdoctoral and Graduate Studies (SGPS) and the Society of Graduate Students (SOGS) and tailored to the needs of faculty and students in Medical Biophysics.

Below, you will find items that new students and supervisors should have a meeting to discuss within the first month after a student starts their program. All discussion points are taken from SGPS regulations, as cited.

In addition to reviewing the items in this Letter of Understanding, students and supervisors are expected to read and adhere to all requirements and expectations of students and supervisors as described in the SGPS regulations at the following location:

<https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/11.html>

### **Supervisor and candidate – It is our joint responsibility to:**

- Not engage in personal harassment, which means conduct and/or behaviour which creates an intimidating, demeaning or hostile working or academic environment whether or not it is based on the prohibited grounds defined in the Human Rights Code. <sup>1</sup>
- Include as authors or creators, with their consent, all those and only those who have materially or conceptually contributed to, and share responsibility for, the contents of the publication, academic presentation, document or creation, in a manner consistent with their respective contributions, and relevant authorship policies or intellectual property rights. <sup>2</sup>
- Reference and, where applicable, obtain permission for the use of all published and unpublished work, including data, source material, methodologies, findings, graphs and images, in accordance with copyright and other intellectual property laws. <sup>2</sup>

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

- Very early on, discuss and formulate with the student a plan of study for completion of degree requirements and thesis work, with clear milestones denoting progress. <sup>3</sup>
- Commit the time, energy, and focus reasonably necessary to enable students to achieve the progress expected in their program. <sup>4</sup>
- Be available for regular consultation with the student. The supervisor and student should discuss and agree on an appropriate schedule for supervision meetings, and the supervisor should provide constructive and timely feedback to the student. <sup>3</sup>
- Provide guidance, instruction, and encouragement regarding the research activities of the student. <sup>3</sup>
- Recognize the supervisor-student power differential and demonstrate respect for the student's rights and goals. <sup>4</sup>
- As far as allowed by the logistics of the research setting, allow and respect the student's right to set their own daily schedule. <sup>4</sup>
- Respect the student's personal circumstances (e.g. the student's need to fulfill personal obligations such as childcare). <sup>4</sup>
- Respect appropriate times and means for communication with the student. <sup>4</sup>
- Provide timely feedback on documents/reports/materials/scholarship applications – normally 2 weeks is reasonable for a thesis chapter or equivalent. <sup>4</sup>
- Provide timely response (whether acknowledgment or a substantial reply) when contacted by students, for example responding to emails within 72 hours. <sup>4</sup>
- Ensure regular meetings of the student with the full thesis supervisory committee as per the program's and SGPS's regulations. <sup>4</sup>
- Explicitly discuss with the student expectations regarding authorship on publications and ownership of intellectual property. <sup>4</sup>
- Allow and not undermine the student's engagement in professional development. <sup>4</sup>
- Help ensure that the research environment is safe, healthy, free from harassment, discrimination, and conflict. <sup>3</sup>

**Candidate - It is my responsibility to:**

- Become aware of, very early on, all program requirements and deadlines, information about various sources of funding, and university policies covering the proper conduct of research, race relations, sexual harassment, appeals, and any other relevant safety and/or workplace policies and regulations. <sup>3</sup>
- Make and maintain a strong commitment to devote the required time and energy needed to engage successfully in graduate work and research, write a thesis, and contribute fully to the scholarly and intellectual life of the University. <sup>3</sup>
- Communicate regularly with the supervisor and the thesis supervisory committee with respect to progress in the thesis. <sup>4</sup>
- Give serious consideration and response to comments and advice from the supervisor and committee members. <sup>3</sup>
- Adhere to the program's progression requirements. <sup>4</sup>
- Provide timely response (whether acknowledgment or a substantial reply) when contacted by supervisor or department, *e.g.* responding to emails within 72 hours. <sup>4</sup>
- Set my own daily schedule within the logistics of the research setting, which includes working reasonable hours and informing supervisors of any change in schedule that could affect the work of others. <sup>4</sup>
- Respect the work, environment, and equipment/materials of others, and show tolerance and respect for others sharing the same environment, equipment and materials. <sup>4</sup>
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality concerning research activities. <sup>2,4</sup>
- Keep complete and accurate records of data, methodologies and findings. <sup>2,4</sup>
- Not engage in misappropriation or denial of access to research records: the use of data or research records in a way that results in misappropriation of the materials, or a loss of access or right of another person (e.g. the supervisor) with a claim of access or ownership. <sup>2</sup>
- Engage in self-directed learning. <sup>4</sup>
- Know who else to go to for advice and guidance, in addition to the supervisor, when needed. <sup>4</sup>
- Explore and articulate academic and career objectives and goals. <sup>2</sup>

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Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Graduate Candidate

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**References**

1. [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies\\_procedures/section1/mapp135.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section1/mapp135.pdf)
2. [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies\\_procedures/section7/mapp70.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section7/mapp70.pdf)
3. <https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/supervision.html>
4. <https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/11.html>