

Dear graduate student:

Welcome to the research-based graduate program of the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry at Western University. Two important goals for your time in our program are to: (1) further your academic and professional career in a stimulating and rewarding work environment, and (2) produce a body of scientific research that enhances our knowledge on human health and disease.

To assist you in achieving these goals, we are providing you and your supervisor(s) with the attached *Letter of Understanding* which outlines your individual roles and responsibilities. It is important that you meet and discuss the expectations of our graduate program, and to review the obligations that you have to each other and to the other members of your laboratory.

If you have any questions regarding the content of this document or if other issues arise as you proceed through your graduate studies, please do not hesitate to discuss these with your supervisor(s), members of your thesis advisory committee or myself as the Chair of the Graduate Education Committee for research-based programs.

Again, welcome to our department. We are confident that you will find your graduate training a positive experience and that you will share the enthusiasm that we have for research and our disciplines.

Sincerely,

Art Poon, PhD

Professor; Chair, Research-based Graduate Programs  
Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine  
Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry  
Western University

## **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 *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 by the Graduate Education Committee of the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine and is geared towards helping initiate a discussion in 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.

## **LETTER OF UNDERSTANDING**

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

#### **Supervisor(s):**

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

- to familiarize myself with the regulations of the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS) and the department.
- 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 workspace.
- ensure that student's project has an appropriate hypothesis/question and achievable goals, using the Western University *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.
- to read, in a timely fashion, portions or whole of the graduate thesis submitted by the student and offer constructive criticism.
- meet regularly with student to provide guidance, assess progress and assist student in the goal of completing the program on time.

#### **Candidate:**

##### **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.

- meet regularly with supervisor(s) and advisory committee to assess progress.
- participate in departmental meetings, seminars and training regularly as determined with supervisor(s).
- interact with fellow students, both graduate and undergraduate, staff and faculty in a professional and respectful manner.
- negotiate amount of time and timing of holidays.

### **MEETINGS:**

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

### **Supervisor(s):**

#### **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.

### **Candidate:**

#### **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 6-8 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 duration period that is typical for specific degree program.
- be aware of the maximum registration period in graduate programs, as specified by the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS) and the department.
- be aware that financial support for full-time students 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 to full-time graduate students in their *Funding Eligibility* period.
- 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, Western Graduate Research Scholarship, internal and external scholarships and bursaries, and research funds acquired by your supervisor (designated as *Graduate Research Fellowship*).
- students are expected to apply for scholarships appropriate to program of study.
- Supervisor(s) are expected to provide consultation about scholarship and bursary applications in advance in order to look at ways of optimizing chances of success.

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

- complete, in consultation with supervisor(s), Western University's Position Hazard Communications form.
- complete required safety courses and workshops, including Health and Safety Awareness, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS), Safe Campus Community.
- complete additional safety training courses and workshops as recommended by the supervisor(s).

**PERSONAL CONDUCT: Research and/or Lab space:****Supervisor(s):****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.

**Candidate:****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:**

### **Candidate:**

#### **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:**

### **Candidate & Supervisor(s):**

#### **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 the student is unable to present acceptable manuscripts within twenty-four months following the completion of their graduate studies, they 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.

**STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING**

I have read the letter of understanding and I have had the letter contents discussed with the student/supervisor. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor's name:                      Supervisor's signature:                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Co-supervisor's name:                      Co-supervisor's signature:                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student's name:                      Student's signature:                      Date

Return the signed letter of understanding within 4 weeks of starting the graduate program to:  
Graduate Program Administrator, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine: [pathgrad@uwo.ca](mailto:pathgrad@uwo.ca)