Neuroscience Graduate Program
Student – Supervisor Guidelines

Overview and Instructions

This guide provides a framework for developing and defining the student-supervisor relationship; it is divided into two parts:

Part I: Framework for Establishing a Successful Student-Supervisor Partnership
Part II: Framework for Financial Support

Purpose: This student-supervisor guide is designed to provide a framework for discussing and developing clear expectations in areas such as communication, work habits and financial support for graduate students. Clear expectations between the supervisor and student will help to facilitate the student's successful completion of the program requirements.

Process: Both parts of this document should be reviewed and discussed during a meeting with the student and supervisor at the start of graduate school after which it is to be reviewed **annually** or as required due to changing circumstances – in particular finances. Depending on the stage of graduate career, not all portions will be relevant at a given time. Please be as specific as possible in your discussion so that expectations are clear for both the student and supervisor.

After both parts of this document have been signed by the student and supervisor they must be submitted to the **Graduate Adviser** or the **designated alternate**. Once the Grad Adviser or the designated alternate has signed the agreement it must be sent to the **Graduate Secretary** to keep it in the student's file; additional copies should be kept by the student and supervisor for their records.

If consensus cannot be reached between the student and supervisor, written documentation describing the issue should be submitted to the Graduate Adviser or designated alternate, who will then follow up with both parties.

Note: It is mandatory for students and supervisors to read the following:

- ☐ NGP Code of Conduct;
- ☐ NGP Handbook; and
- ☐ Graduate Supervision Policy (GSP).

The student should discuss with their supervisor any information in these documents that is unclear (GSP 1.9).

Part I: Framework for Establishing a Successful Student-Supervisor Partnership

Graduate school is both challenging and very rewarding. It is important to acknowledge that there is a major transition from undergraduate work - which is highly structured and prescriptive - to graduate work. Graduate work is highly flexible; requires initiative, self-motivation, self-organization; as well as the gradual development of independent direction and thought, in consultation with a supervisor. There is no manual for success; however, the challenges of graduate school are best managed when students and supervisors are open and honest with one another and communicate clearly and on a regular basis.

To facilitate communication and clarify expectations, the supervisor and the student will discuss the following points as applicable to the student's stage in the program:

- ☐ **Project development -** Projects must be developed in consultation with the supervisor. As graduate thesis/dissertation work is supported by operating grants to the supervisor, the focus of the thesis work stems directly from the focus of the lab. Project development discussions can include: background information, relevant literature, preliminary data, working models and hypotheses, potential aims, as well as short and long term experimental goals.
- ☐ **Student-supervisor meetings -** This can include: the type (group lab meeting, one-on-one etc.), frequency (once a week, once a month etc.) and meeting expectations (data updates, level of preparedness, etc.).
- ☐ **Supervisory committee make-up -** The supervisor and student will collaborate to form a supervisory committee which considers the project and the relevant expertise of potential committee members. There should be an element of arm's length relationship among the committee's membership and the primary supervisor. The first supervisory meeting should take place ***within the first semester*** of entry into the program***.***
- ☐ **Course work -** When choosing courses, the student should consider both the program's course requirements as well as how a course's content aligns with the project and experimental goals. Course choices must be discussed with the supervisor and ***approved by the supervisory committee***.
- ☐ **Expectations for work hours -** The student and supervisor should come to an initial agreement on the student's typical working hours/schedule; typically this would constitute a full-time level of commitment. This information is important as the supervisor might want to ensure that the student is in the lab during their typical working hours so that they can be available to help the student. It is important to understand the expectations of the experiments and the field of research they are undertaking. Students should be aware that on occasion their experiments may require them, within reason, to work outside of their pre-determined working hours.

- ☐ **Goal setting, productivity, time-management -** It is important to differentiate between “busy” vs “productive”. Recognize that being in the lab for long hours does not necessarily equate to adequate progress; this is an especially important distinction to understand when a student is enrolled in courses and managing experiments in parallel.
- ☐ **Communication and honesty** - Students should keep their supervisor informed if they don’t feel they are progressing well or if their goals/workload feels unmanageable. In a respectful manner, the supervisor should provide the student with constructive and descriptive feedback on their progress.
- ☐ **Providing feedback** – Review the expectations regarding the maximum amount of time allocated for the supervisor to return comments on a thesis, dissertation or research proposal. The maximum time allotted cannot exceed **20 business days** without extenuating circumstances (GSP 5.9).
- ☐ **Scientific integrity -** It is of the utmost importance that students understand scientific integrity as documented in the Neuroscience Graduate Handbook and Code of Conduct. Student review of the preceding documents is mandatory.
- ☐ **Time off -** Graduate students are entitled to a **minimum of 10 working days** of vacation per year, not including weekends, statutory holidays, or university closure days (FGS Calendar pg. 39). The student should provide advance notice pertaining to their intention to take vacation days or leaves of absence, as set out in the FGS Calendar (*GSP 9.18*). If a student requires additional time off they must speak to their supervisor.
- ☐ **Writing/study for special degree requirements -** Define the expectations for the amount of time that a student can be away from the lab/research to write their thesis/dissertation/candidacy exam.

Signatures:

_____	_____
Student (please print)	Student Signature
_____	_____
Supervisor (please print)	Supervisor Signature
_____	_____
Grad Advisor/designated alternate (please print)	Grad Advisor/designated alternate

_____

(y/m/d)

Note: This form must be reviewed and updated at a minimum of once per year or more frequently as required by changing circumstances.

Part II: Framework for Financial Support

Graduate Student Stipend

As per the GSP (*5.10*), the supervisor(s) must identify the student's annual stipend amount, its duration, general source(s), and whether/how it is renewable.

- ☐ **Minimum amount -** A stipend of $24,000 per year is guaranteed to graduate students. Students can expect that the precise sources of funding will often change due to changes in resources (e.g. grants from different funding bodies starting and ending, award announcements, etc.), however, the overall general funding sources should be identified (i.e. grant, scholarship, TA).

  As per FGS policy, a month's written notice is required to restructure, reduce or withdraw financial support from a student (e.g. requirement of TA ship to meet the minimum amount) (GSP 7.13); these changes should be discussed openly and be agreed upon. All funding information will be provided to the student from the **student's home department**.

- ☐ **Duration -** The minimum stipend is guaranteed for 2 years for a Master's program and 4 years for a PhD program. Financial support beyond the timeframes noted above depends on the ability of a supervisor to support a student or on pre-existing scholarships and awards. If a student is graduating or approaching the end of the 2 or 4 year timeframes described above, they should initiate a discussion with their supervisor, well in advance, regarding a possible extension of funding.

Presentations at Scientific Conferences – Guidelines

A student should discuss/review with their supervisor the following prior to submitting an abstract or registering for a conference:

- ☐ the details of the conference in order to determine if attendance/abstract submission is appropriate;
- ☐ that all co-authors are informed and provide written approval for abstract submission. If the co-author is a student who has graduated, please speak to your supervisor regarding the process for obtaining approval; and
- ☐ if financial support is being provided, the amount of the agreed-upon financial support is documented in writing (email).

Students are expected to apply for travel awards/grants from their home department, from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and other available sources to offset the costs incurred during travel to conferences.

Signatures:

Student (please print)	Student Signature
Supervisor (please print)	Supervisor Signature
Grad Advisor/designated alternate (please print)	Grad Advisor/designated alternate

_____

(y/m/d)

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