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Adapting to COVID-19: Establishing and Building a Stronger Relationship with Your Supervisor

Facilitators: Karen Flood and Rehana Bacchus

Moderator: Duane Seibel

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Territorial Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge that although we are online and not physically on our campus, we are employees of UBC Vancouver, and that it is situated on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people.

We would also like to acknowledge that you are joining us today from many places, near and far, and acknowledge the traditional owners and caretakers of those lands.



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Session Plan

- Overview of principles of effective supervision
- Building a strong relationship with your supervisor
- Taking responsibility for your graduate program
- Strategies for addressing and managing conflict

Over 82% of graduate students report overall satisfaction with their supervisor but we recognize many also seek more consistent, meaningful interactions.





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Supervision:

- Is a process of interactive, reciprocal, intellectual, and ethical dialogue;
- Involves engagement with a community or communities of scholars;
- Supports the development of professional judgement and learning to create, transform, and share knowledge;
- Changes within and across units and disciplines, which are constantly evolving and shifting; and
- Ideally inspires lifelong learning and commitment to the public good.



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UBC's Seven Principles of Excellent Graduate Supervision

1. Students' learning benefits from individualized supervisory approaches
2. Student learning develops with both dialogue and guidance
3. Students' multifaceted growth as scholars is supported by supervisors
4. Students learn from role models
5. Communication is key to teaching and learning and relationship-building
6. Scholarly and other communities are central to students' development
7. Reflection makes one a better supervisor (and student!)



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Tell us what you think...

What is one thing reflected in these principles you would most like to see in your relationship with your supervisor?



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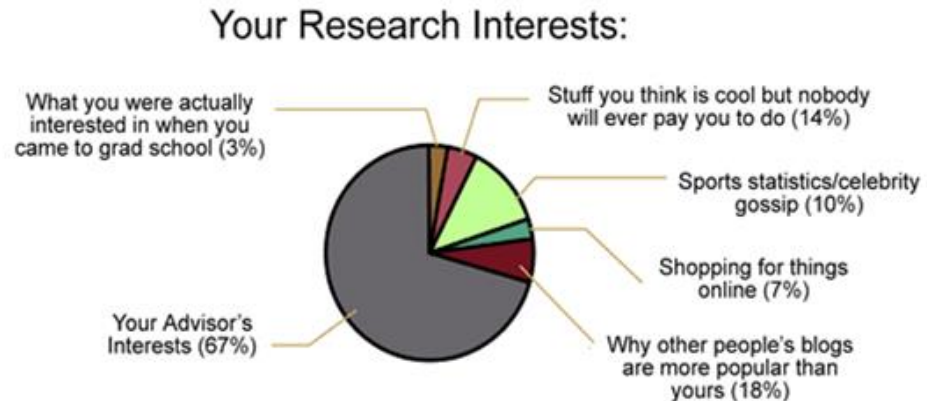
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Practices for effective supervisory relationships:

- Thoughtful decision-making in deciding to work together
- Communicating expectations
- Mutual fostering of academic progress
- Access to others/larger scholarly community
- Maintaining appropriate boundaries
- Proactively addressing issues/conflicts

In an ideal world, you and your supervisor:

- Are mutually committed to the success of your program;
- Are a good fit in terms of research interests;
- Are a good match of working style/willingness to adapt;
- Create a timeline of productive meetings, goals, outcomes;
- Establish clarity related to funding issues; and
- Agree on available and suitable committee members.



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**footnote: Usually, my research interests add up to more than what I have time for, and some interests take up more time than what they are supposed to.

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Building a strong relationship with your supervisor:

- Prioritize strong communication
- Be your own project manager
- Clarify existing and future financial support
- Initiate or participate in discussions about intellectual property, publishing, and authorship
- Seek advice, support, and conversation on academic matters
- Contribute to a safe and stimulating environment
- Negotiate conflicts, tensions, and issues that arise
- Clarify expectations

Expectations

- Discussion of expectations can foster open communication between you and your supervisors
- This can help to prevent misunderstandings that might otherwise arise, and be critical to the success of your program
- Having different expectations is a frequent cause of misunderstandings, therefore it is important to communicate expectations to clarify and modify together, meet expectations (on both sides), and maintain ongoing communication in regards to any changes.

Examples:

UBC: <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/current-students/supervision-advising>

McGill: <https://www.mcgill.ca/gradsupervision/supervisors/roles-and-responsibilities/expectations>

Take five...

Reflecting on your expectations for your supervisor/supervision at the beginning of your program, how (and if) did you communicate your expectations to your supervisor?

Take five...

Reflecting on your understanding of your supervisor's expectations of you, how (and if) did they communicate them to you?

Addressing conflict:

The #1 reason the graduate supervision experience gets derailed:

lack of communication  **mismatched expectations**

Differing expectations regarding responsibilities was identified by both students and supervisors as a major cause for conflict between graduate students and their supervisors

Examples of potential conflict:

Supervisor Expectations	Student Expectations
Critical approach to literature review and already well-developed and analytical writing skills	Inappropriate to criticize experts, reliance on inference and paraphrasing what 'experts' say without citations
Solid research skills	Training to improve research skills
High level of autonomy	Guidance initiated by supervisor
Confidence with data collection and presentations	Supervisor will provide feedback and confidence ahead of presentation



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Tips for effective problem resolution:

Problem solving

- Define the problem
- Gather information
- Define the goal
- Generate solutions
- Evaluate ideas and choose one
- Implement and evaluation



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Tips for effective problem resolution (continued):

Communication!

- Have confident conversations
- Set boundaries
- Know how to make requests

The Sandwich Technique



Validation

Message

Action



Tips for effective problem resolution (continued):

If the conflict continues to escalate, here are some practical tips to pursue problem resolution:

- Consult early, involve a neutral party
- Document all interactions, timelines, and requests (especially decisions!)
- Keep core principles in mind: fairness, academic progress and success, academic integrity
- Know the policies in your program, graduate school and University

Things to avoid:

- Fatigue
- Isolation
- Avoidance
 - Ignoring or waiting too long to address “danger signals” of supervisor and of self
 - Withdrawal
- Judging and blaming others
- The Karpman Drama Triangle:
 - Being the victim (the only owner of legitimate feelings)
 - Being the rescuer (the one who always saves the day)
 - Being the persecutor

Stop the Drama!

We tend to move around the triangle until **ONE** of us changes;
until **ONE** of us communicates in a clear and healthy pattern.

1. Stop!
2. Notice what role you are in.
3. Move out of the triangle to a clear and healthy role.

ATTACKER (Bully/Blamer)

Beliefs

*This is your fault.
You're not OK but I am.
You'll be OK if you do
what I tell you.*

Behaviours/Feelings

- Critical, domineering and bossy
- Puts other person down
- Blames and finger points
- Feels anger or resentment
- Fears being out of control
- Rigid in thinking

RESCUER (Enabler)

Beliefs

*You need my help.
You're not OK but I am.*

Behaviours/Feelings

- Supports other at expense of self
- Feels guilty and anxious if doesn't rescue
- Feels connected and capable when *victim* is dependent



VICTIM (Underdog)

Beliefs:

*I'm helpless and powerless.
I'm not OK and everybody else is.*

Behaviours/Feelings

- Feels oppressed, hopeless, incapable and misunderstood
- Seeks a rescuer to validate feelings
- Does not stand up to attacker
- Refuses to make decisions, solve problems, get professional help, do self-care or change behaviour

Patricia Morgan www.SolutionsForResilience.com



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Resources

- Graduate school contacts
- Graduate student society (e.g., peer support)
- Ombuds Office or Student Advocate
- Equity Office
- Institutional health and wellbeing resources
- Here2Talk
- Here to Help, Kelty's Key
- Crisis Centre (<https://crisiscentre.bc.ca/>)



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Thank you!

<https://covid19.bccampus.ca/category/webinars/>

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