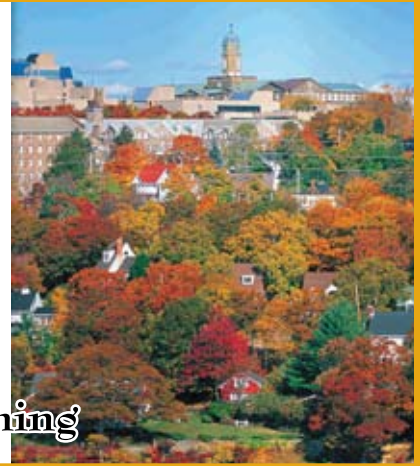




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From the Director

Although many professors (and graduate students) hold the view that the graduate supervision process is idiosyncratic and the unique product of each advising relationship, research on graduate supervision demonstrates that there are beneficial practices that cross personalities and disciplines. In this issue of *Focus*, colleagues from Dalhousie and beyond share their insights about effective graduate learning experiences.



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DALHOUSIE
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Inspiring Minds

Guiding Principles for Graduate Student Supervision

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A. Introduction

Post-baccalaureate graduate studies are extremely important to the economic and social well being of Canadians and have an ever increasing role in higher education in Canada. Over the 10 year period between 1995 and 2004, graduate student enrollment increased from approximately 113,000 to 149,000 in Canada¹. Graduate studies are not only a life and career enhancing activity for students, but also a vital component of research and scholarship in Canada, important drivers of the nation's productivity and essential for global competitiveness. The role of supervisors and supervisory committees, as well as the relationship between students and their supervisors, are key components affecting the success

of research-stream students in their programs.

Superimposed upon the student-supervisor relationship are the roles of supervisory committees, graduate program committees, departmental bodies, and offices of faculties/schools of graduate studies. Further complicating the issue of graduate student supervision is the diversity in supervision culture across the University, where the relationship may range from a very structured "master to apprentice" scenario to a very unstructured, "subtle guide of an independent scholar."

Despite the complexity and diversity surrounding supervision of graduate students, the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies felt it important that guiding principles for graduate student supervision be identified and endorsed at a national level. While

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many excellent guides on graduate student supervision exist within various graduate handbooks, senate or faculty by-laws, and websites within graduate schools across Canada, these are often highly specific to individual departments or graduate programs. This

“At the core of successful supervisor-graduate student relationships are mutual respect and professionalism.”

document is meant to identify, at a high level, guiding principles which can apply to all graduate supervisors and students. These principles can be a stand-alone resource or a precursor for graduate schools and programs to customize to their particular academic environment. It is also intended that the document be applicable to defining roles and responsibilities of graduate students in the student-supervisor relationship as well as for graduate supervisors and administrators of graduate programs across Canada.

Various documents have been utilized and are cited in the preparation of these guiding principles, but in particular, a document from the University of Western Ontario² has been used as a “template” for many of the principles identified here. The principles are intended mainly for research masters and doctoral programs, though they may have relevance to “professional” graduate programs where the student works with a supervisor.

B. Guiding Principles

1. A Supervisor should be identified in a timely fashion.
2. Supervisory committees or equivalents should be established early.
3. Expectations, roles and responsibilities of graduate students and supervisors should be made clear.
4. Supervisors should be readily accessible to their students, and regular monitoring and feedback should be ensured.
5. Student-supervisor relationships should be professional.
6. Intellectual debate and challenge should be encouraged and supported.
7. Supervisors should be mentors.
8. Issues of intellectual property and authorship should be made clear.
9. Conflicts should be resolved at the lowest level possible.
10. Continuity is important in graduate supervision.
11. Alternative supervision should be available.
12. Students have substantial responsibilities for managing their own graduate education.

C. Conclusion

As noted in these principles, successful supervision of graduate students depends on a healthy and productive relationship between the supervisor and graduate student, within a milieu that involves several other parties and conditions. At the core of successful supervisor-graduate student relationships are mutual respect and professionalism.

When combined with clarity on the respective roles of students, supervisors, and others involved in the students education, and information on the policy and procedures relevant to a student’s graduate program, these features will serve students, supervisors and the rest of the University community well. Our goal is to ensure the success of graduate students in their programs and in their future endeavours.

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