



Graduate Program in Biology
York University



Annual Milestones and Expectations for Biology Graduate Students and Supervisors

Student _____ Year in Program (e.g., MSc1, PhD1) _____

Supervisor _____ Date _____

Purpose. The aim of this exercise is to provide a flexible structure for each student and supervisor to have a conversation to discuss and agree upon important goals and expectations. There are important reasons to have such a conversation: it is meant to contribute to an effective working relationship and thus better facilitate the student's progress through the program.

Supervisory Relationship. Positive, respectful, professional, and productive working relationships are paramount to the success of graduate students and supervisors. This guideline is intended to help promote proactive dialogue about major and minor expectations, responsibilities, accountability, and communication. Having a clear and mutual understanding of these things will pave the way for a smooth and productive relationship and help prevent future misunderstandings.

Milestones toward Degree Completion. There are certain required milestones in the Grad program regarding expected dates for research proposal, committee meeting, Research Progress Evaluations, Departmental Seminar participation, thesis completion, etc. (see Research Progress Evaluation forms). It is important for students and supervisors to be aware of these milestones when setting realistic goals while also taking into account TA duties and individual circumstances.

Graduate Policies and Guidelines. The FGS Policy on Graduate Supervision outlines the roles and responsibilities of graduate students, supervisors, the Grad Program Office, and FGS. That policy recommends the use of a program-specific checklist like this one. In brief: students hold the primary responsibility for their degree completion; supervisors provide mentoring and guidance; and the Graduate Office administers the program and provides structure and support to students and faculty, in conjunction with the Chair of Department.

How to use this Form. Completing this form is voluntary. The form may be adapted and customized to make it more specific to your situation and lab. The form is simply a vehicle for starting the conversation. Feel free to add to it/change it. After the September meeting with your supervisor, the form should be signed by both people and a copy submitted to the Graduate Program Assistant, as a record of the conversation having taken place.

Milestones and Goal Setting

1. For second year and above students, follow-up from Last Year's Goals (based on previous plans and referencing your last Research Progress Evaluation form).

What were the student's positive accomplishments in the past year? (Celebrate first!)

Were there goals from last year that were not met? If so, we have discussed reasons related to student, supervisor, other circumstances, unrealistic goals, etc) and the implications for goal setting for this year (any problems to be resolved? other resources needed? other people to help? technical skills to be learned?)

2. Milestones and Goals for this Academic Year

This could include: courses, technical skills, literature background, thesis (committee, proposal, doing the research, writing thesis), and so on, along with timelines for completion.

There may also be goals that are not official graduate program milestones, such as submitting thesis for publication prior to defense, extra research projects, additional publications, conference presentations, etc. (list below as many as needed).

a)

b)

c)

d)

e)

Supervisor-Student Relationship and Expectations

For the sections below, check the box to indicate you have discussed the point and write in any specifics that were discussed and agreed upon. These discussion points are particularly important in the earlier stages of a student-supervisor relationship but may need to be revisited periodically (at the initiative of either student or supervisor) if issues arise.

Meetings and Communication

[] how often will we need to meet face-to-face this year (given the student's stage in program and both people's expectations, availability, etc.)? _____

[] how do meetings get scheduled? _____

[] what other meetings are important or mandatory (e.g., lab meetings, conferences)? _____

[] what is the preferred method(s) of communication in between meetings (email? or other?); what is a reasonable expectation for response time to email? _____

[] is it ok to also communicate by text? work phone? home phone? cell phone? other? _____

[] are there any known absences or particularly busy times for either person this year that may affect goal completion?

[] we agree that we both have a right to expect our communications with each other to be timely, courteous and respectful

Turnaround Time and Feedback on Research Products

[] what is the usual time frame for the supervisor to give feedback to the student on thesis proposals, publications, conference posters, etc.? (FGS policy suggests 2-3 weeks) _____

[] what is the usual time frame for the student to incorporate feedback and submit a revised draft? _____

[] what kind of feedback will be most helpful on written work (email document with track changes? face-to-face meeting? written document with positive and constructive comments?). This will depend on the student's stage in the program, the specific product being reviewed, personal style, etc. _____

Workload Expectations

[] what is the general expectation for student workload (including TA) 40 hours/week? more? less? how flexible? _____

[] when (if ever) might there be a need for working weekends, evenings, holidays? _____

[] what is the general expectation regarding holidays and time off? _____

[] how will the student and supervisor promote work-life balance? _____

Financial Resources for Grad Students

we acknowledge financial concerns are an important consideration for graduate students, including achieving time to completion as a full-time and funded student

we agree that students are responsible for applying for scholarships and investigating other funding options

we devote our joint efforts to obtaining funding for the student via scholarships, bursaries, and other funding options (learning about funding opportunities/deadlines, deciding which competitions to apply for, providing feedback on research statements, submitting applications, writing reference letters, etc.)

we have discussed timelines for reviewing funding application materials and providing reference letters for funding applications _____

what will faculty contribute to students financially in addition to the minimum salary stipend (e.g., conference funding, field travel, "top up" salary etc.) _____

Non-academic Professional Development (development of general skills apart from the specific research area)

we acknowledge the importance of "soft skills", or general professional skills, as a valid part of a grad student's activities and support the value of the student attending non-academic conferences and workshops that address such skills when relevant (e.g., FGS Professional Skills series of workshops)

we agree that we have a shared responsibility to identify and acknowledge any areas of weakness the student may have (writing, stats, lab techniques, diagnostic procedures, etc.), and to provide or seek other support for remediation of these difficulties

we have discussed the practice of assisting in the mentorship/supervision of more junior students (such as undergraduate volunteers or honours thesis students), and have clarified expectations regarding this role for the grad student, and what level of oversight and supervision the supervisor will provide

Authorship & Intellectual Property

we have discussed our general philosophy about authorship (what does and doesn't constitute entitlement to authorship? how is order of authors determined, etc)

when planning a specific project (abstract, poster, presentation, or publication), we agree to discuss authorship issues early on in the process – and to revisit the conversation later if circumstances change

we are sufficiently familiar with University guidelines around Intellectual Property and/or patents if relevant

Supervisory Relationship and Mentoring

in the student-supervisor relationship, we acknowledge the importance of taking into account the student's stage in the program and level of experience and adapting our supervisor-student activities accordingly

in the student-supervisor relationship, we also acknowledge the importance of taking individual differences and diversity dimensions into account as far as possible to maximize the effectiveness of the relationship and we realize we may need to discuss these periodically

[] we affirm the importance of generating high quality research in our field and also building the student's CV in terms of research accomplishments, including:

a) encouragement and support for posters and presentations at conferences. We have discussed upcoming conferences this year in our field and which might be appropriate to submit to: _____

b) encouragement and support for publications of the student's work when appropriate and have discussed any goals related to publications this coming year _____

[] we acknowledge the importance of the student making connections with other students and professionals in the field (i.e., supervisor will try to build connections, inform students of good opportunities, etc.) as these arise

Relationship Expectations and Conflict Resolution

[] we agree that graduate students have the right to be treated with respect and not be subject to any form of harassment, bullying, or exploitation (as do all members of the University community)

[] we take seriously the supervisory and mentorship role as a crucial part of the academic experience

[] we acknowledge the inherent power differential between a graduate student and his/her supervisor and agree not to allow this power to be misused

[] we agree that, if issues arise between us (from either the student's or supervisor's point of view), we will seek to speak to the other person directly as early as possible and try to resolve the issue informally

[] if issues cannot be resolved satisfactorily, we understand that either person may consult with the Graduate Program Director, or other campus resources as per our Graduate Biology website "Need Help?" section and the FGS Conflict Resolution section of the FGS Policy on Graduate Student Supervision

Signatures Acknowledging this Conversation has Occurred

Student:

Name _____ Signature _____ Date _____

Supervisor:

Name _____ Signature _____ Date _____

Supplementary Section Regarding Lab/Office Space and Lab Group Functioning

This section could be discussed with individual graduate students, but may be more appropriately discussed at a Lab Meeting (and may include RAs, undergraduate students, etc.). Additional points may be added as appropriate to the particular lab.

what space do students have exclusive or shared access to?

what are the expectations regarding keeping shared space clean, tidy, etc. (e.g., who takes out the garbage?)

should lab/office space be used only for lab research? OK for coursework? other research? TA activities? personal use?? (what can computers, printers, supplies, etc. be used for?)

what can be stored in lab/office (TA material? gym clothes? personal books? hard copy data from previous studies)

what security concerns are there regarding lab/office (doors locked, filing cabinets, computer protection, hazardous materials, etc.) - what level of security is needed for data storage? Frequency and format of data backups? are there data or intellectual property that should remain confidential?

are there any other important lab rules? E.g. storage and backup of lab notebooks?

what are expectations re maintenance of equipment, ordering supplies, etc.

when there are research projects involving multiple lab members, we agree that we will take a collaborative, team work approach for the good of the whole lab and larger project. The supervisor should discuss with the group roles and responsibilities and eventual authorship order (which may change with circumstances).