

Policy and Guidelines for Faculty Members in Employment and/or Supervisory Relationships with Graduate Research Assistants, Post-Doctoral Fellows and Other Research Collaborators

Preamble

As directed in the Letters of Understanding, section A. Academic Responsibilities of Members, Clause 5 f, a sub-committee of the Joint Committee was struck to develop and recommend policy and guidelines to support faculty members in employment and/or supervisory relationships with Graduate Research Assistants, Post-Doctoral trainees and other research collaborators and ensure that such relationships are carried out in accordance with the law and good academic practice.

We include here as “research trainees” undergraduate and graduate students working in a supervisory relationship with a faculty member, post-doctoral fellows and postdoctoral associates, and other research-related personnel, such as summer research students, research associates and graduate research assistants.

Statutory Obligations

The supervisor has a responsibility to be aware of, and adhere to, all legal and statutory obligations that govern the supervision of research trainees. These include relevant Collective Agreements between the University and specific employee groups, the Ontario Human Rights Code (<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/code>), the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act (http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90o01_e.htm) and the Ontario Employment Standards Act (http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_00e41_e.htm). In particular, supervisors should be aware that there are provisions for many employee-related issues, including minimum wage, hours of work, termination procedures, and notification and severance obligations.

Guidelines for Best Supervisory Practices

Notwithstanding that student supervision involves an interaction between two parties and that both parties bear some responsibility for the success of the relationship, the following guidelines are suggested as best practices for the supervisor.

The supervisor should strive to cultivate conditions that are favorable to the trainees' research and intellectual growth, and provide appropriate guidance on the progress of research and the standards expected. Good supervisory practice includes the following:

Availability:

- Be accessible, and provide advice and constructive criticism.
- As appropriate, ensure that sufficient resources are available, including access to facilities and research materials, technical training and financial support.
- Respond in a timely manner with comments/revisions to drafts of applications, reports or research presentations/publications.
- Ensure continuity of adequate supervision of trainees during leaves or any extended period of absence

Mentoring:

- Provide appropriate guidance on the nature of research, research ethics, intellectual property rights, and academic integrity.
- Establish a professional working relationship to guide the trainees' approach to research.
- Assist the trainee with the selection and planning of a suitable and manageable research program.
- Guide the trainee in learning to work independently and/or as a member of a team, as appropriate to the discipline.
- Encourage and assist trainees to participate in programs for professional development, such as effective writing courses, teaching training programs, and workshops on research grants and conflict resolution.
- Encourage and assist trainees in obtaining financial resources to attend and present their work at local, national and international conferences.
- Encourage and assist trainees to publish or disseminate their work in appropriate venues.
- Inform trainees when progress is unsatisfactory and advise them on what can be done to improve it.

Maintaining a safe and professional workplace:

- Avoid personal or business relationships that may constitute a conflict of interest.
- Ensure that the research environment is safe, equitable and free from harassment and discrimination (see, for instance, the Articles, “Discrimination and Harassment” in the Faculty Collective Agreement).
- Give credit in an appropriate manner to trainees' contributions to scholarly activities, such as at professional meetings, in publications, in applications for grants or in performances or exhibitions.