

# IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO ASK AT THE START OF YOUR GRADUATE PROGRAM

## GRADUATE STUDIES

### GENERAL

- What is the supervisor's goal/objective for a graduate program?
- What do you hope to achieve in your graduate program?
- What are your expectations of time I should spend at work per week?
- What are your expectations regarding how long it will take me to complete the MSc/PhD? (in terms of "funding horizons" and average completion times for your graduate students)
- What is the difference between the MSc and PhD? What are the career implications?
- What responsibilities will I have that are un-related to my thesis topic?
  - Training others, teaching assistantships, group research activities etc.
- Will additional scholarships/bursaries, which I secure, be paid in addition to my stipend funding? (Any suggestions of where to apply?)
  - Department Recommendation: Annual Stipend + tuition for current year – scholarship (e.g. \$19,000 + \$8,000 - \$15,000 = \$12,000 – supervisor's commitment over 12 months; \$1,000.00 per month before taxes)
- In addition to my stipend or scholarship support, am I allowed to work as a teaching assistant or a job off-campus?
  - If so, how many hours per week are acceptable? (Dept. maximum of 10 hrs/wk)
- How do we set a clear plan of action for my research program to ensure it stays on track?
  - When?
  - How detailed?
  - How much input will the supervisor provide in establishing this plan?
- How and when do I begin to prepare for my candidacy examination? (PhD students only)

### RESEARCH

- How should my lab book be kept?
  - How should I save my data for long term storage?
  - Who owns the lab book?
- Am I expected to attend national, international or provincial conferences?
  - If so, how is this funded?
- Who in the lab should I expect to get hands on training from?
- Will I be expected to assist with other students' research projects?
  - What sort of compensation will I receive? e.g. monetary, acknowledgment, authorship, their assistance when I need it, etc.
- What alternative projects/contingency plan is there in case my main research project fails to progress as planned?
- What are the consequences if I do not progress in my research project?
- What set of goals must I achieve to have my supervisor's approval to defend? e.g. number of publications, time spent, etc. (Masters and PhD specific)

## TEACHING

- Should I partake in teaching (TAing) courses on campus?
  - Do I (the student), want TAing be a small/medium/large part of my graduate education?
  - What training should I seek to develop my skills as an educator?
- Will you expect me to instruct others in the lab? If so, how will you and I know when I am ready to do this?

## COURSE WORK

- Are there courses you recommend I take beyond the required departmental courses?
  - Student: What aspects do you perceive yourself to be lacking in that are necessary to complete your degree?
  - Advisor: What courses may be beneficial for the student to specifically prepare them for candidacy, and future endeavors of their research?

## COMMUNICATION

### STUDENT AND PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

- How often should we meet to assess my progress in research or courses?
- What is the best way for us to communicate on a daily basis? e.g. email, phone, face-to-face.
- As new facets of my research emerge, what is the best way for me to present possibilities new directions in research/future project ideas to you?
- Will there be a regular “research group” meeting? What is my role in this?

### STUDENT AND COMMITTEE

- What can I expect from the supervisory committee in terms of guidance in my research?
  - How often will we meet with them?
  - What access to committee members will I have outside of scheduled meetings?
  - What are they likely to expect from me at each meeting?
    - Presentations
    - Written work
    - Data reports
- What should I do to ensure the meetings are properly organized and productive?
- What access do I have to the supervisory committee members outside of meetings?

### RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN THE RESEARCH GROUP

- What is my role within the group?
- How are disputes/issues in the lab resolved?
- What does the organizational structure of the research group look like?
  - Who makes the decisions?
  - Who reports to who?

### STUDENT AND OTHERS

- Is it appropriate for me to contact other academics (on my committee, in the department, or even at other universities) for advice on particular areas of my research that might be outside your specific expertise as supervisor?
  - Do I need permission from you (or the supervisory committee) prior to doing this?
- How is IP (Intellectual property) handled within the research group and who “owns” the lab books or data repositories?
  - Who is appropriate to talk to about my research? To whom can I disclose the details of my research project to?

## **LIFE**

### **VACATION**

- How much vacation time do I receive each year? What determines when I may take time off? (Dept. recommends 3 wks/year; Department policy is 15 working days per year; GSA Agreement indicates “1 week of vacation leave for each 4-month GA appointment held”.)
- How much advanced notice would you like, and in what format?

### **TROUBLES**

- If there is disagreement on important aspects of my program, what is the dispute resolution mechanism?
- Should personal issues begin to hinder my progress; can I feel comfortable discussing these issues with you before they become detrimental to my program?