Supervisor-Student Conversation Starters

The relationship between the student and the research supervisor is most important to the student's successful completion of a graduate degree. This document complements the Graduate Academic Calendar’s section on roles and responsibilities of supervisors and students. The following conversation starters are suggested to help align expectations of supervisors and their graduate students (adapted from the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies):

1) Communication and Professional Conduct
   - Frequency of meetings to review research progress and relevant deadlines, in compliance with program policies.
   - Supervision process (i.e. hands-on/hands-off, mentor/manager/colleague etc.), as well as expectations regarding the student’s office/lab/on-campus attendance.
   - Arrangements to ensure the continuity of supervision during leaves or extended periods of absence.
   - Potential cultural factors that may influence the student's learning, research behaviour and experience.
   - Frequency of advisory/supervisory committee meetings (for example, every term), and timing of progress reports and other material to be submitted in advance of scheduled meetings.
   - Student’s awareness of policies, rules and regulations in effect at the university as well as any communications which may be directed to them.
   - Supervisor’s required input when student makes important decisions about their course of study and research.
   - Student's timely discussion of any foreseen prolonged absence and timing/duration of holidays.
   - Student’s participation in research seminars, training sessions and departmental/lab meetings that the supervisor deems relevant.

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1 The Graduate Academic Calendar remains the official reference on the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and graduate students.
2) Academic Development, Mentorship and Training

- Supervisor’s response to written work submitted by the student, including providing feedback and suggestions for improvement.

- Feedback on thesis drafts and writings submitted by the student in accordance with an agreed-upon schedule.

- Establishment of the supervisory committee (timelines, composition etc.).

- Student’s completion of research, coursework and/or thesis within the period that is typical for specific degree program.

- Student’s submission of written work and other material in a timely manner so as to receive an adequate assessment.

- Student’s progress towards completion of degree and the required number of hours carrying out research activities.

- Student’s responsibilities regarding ethics approval (if their research involves human, non-human animals, human tissues or records).

- Student’s participation in professional skill development training offered by the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

3) Authorship, Publication and Intellectual Property

- Acknowledgement of the contributions of the student in presentations and published material, in many cases via joint authorship.

- Clarifying the criteria determining authorship order, and responsibilities for preparing and submitting for publication the results of research completed by the student as part of their degree requirements.

- Maintaining appropriate confidentiality concerning research activities, in accordance with existing practices and policies of the discipline.

- Clarifying relevant publication restrictions on the student’s research such as a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) if applicable.

- Involvement in research governed by an Industry-Sponsored Research Agreement if applicable.

- Additional professional experience including sessional teaching opportunities, Graduate Teaching Assistantships or Research Assistantships.
4) Health and Safety

- Training and course(s) required for the student’s study program in compliance with health and safety regulations.

- Arrangements to ensure that student’s learning and research environment are safe and adequately supported.