

GSS Position Statement on Supervisory Excellence at UBC

WHEREAS the GSS advocates for, promotes, and protects the academic, social, intellectual, cultural and recreational interests of its members, and

WHEREAS UBC recognizes that, “graduate education is greatly affected by the nature of the supervision and the quality of communication between graduate students and their supervisors,” and

WHEREAS UBC ranked below the national average in graduate student satisfaction with their supervisor in the Canadian Graduate & Professional Student Survey, and

WHEREAS less than 70% of UBC graduate student respondents in the 2015 GSS Graduate Student Satisfaction Survey agreed or strongly agreed that they had appropriate academic supervision, and

WHEREAS the UBC Senate Mental Health & Wellbeing ad hoc Committee has identified the student-supervisor relationship as a key area affecting student mental health, and has suggested the creation of stronger guidelines, standards, and requirements for supervisors, including possible mandatory training and the creation of support resources, and

WHEREAS supervisory excellence is a topic of active discussion at UBC by the Supervision Leadership Group, the Ombuds Office, and the Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies, requiring graduate student input, and

WHEREAS the literature on graduate supervision pedagogy reveals that excellent graduate student supervision helps produce satisfied and productive students, which in turn has a positive effect on a university’s reputation and leads to improved enrolment of high caliber students and increased research funding, and

WHEREAS defining ‘supervisory excellence’ must involve the consideration of: academic advising, structure and support, communication and availability, respect, discipline-specific skills, and a balance of direction and self-direction that fosters student growth, and

WHEREAS supervision is most successful when treated as pedagogy which includes training, continuous learning, and a commitment to personal growth, and

WHEREAS differences are natural between different individuals, disciplines and cultures, supervisory styles need to be flexible in order to accommodate the multitude of these differences, and

WHEREAS open, two-way communication between students and supervisors is essential for both academic success and fostering supportive relationships to facilitate the navigation of challenges that arise during the degree program; this includes setting clear expectations and having regular meetings with constructive feedback, and

WHEREAS addressing the unique needs of international graduate students requires intercultural fluency, and

Position Statements

WHEREAS graduate students face new challenges and require diverse proficiencies in the modern job market, and

WHEREAS current methods of assessing graduate student satisfaction do not effectively assess the quality of student-supervisor relationships, and this miss some of the key elements of the graduate student experience, therefore

Be it resolved that the GSS recommends that UBC develop its own definition of supervisory excellence that will guide decision making in areas surrounding graduate student education, and

Be it further resolved that (BIFRT) the GSS recommends that UBC actively foster a culture of graduate student supervision as pedagogy by implementing:

- High quality and mandatory training for graduate student supervisors as well as workshops and peer mentoring programs available for the ongoing development of supervisor proficiencies in the spirit of continuous learning,
- Methods of assessment that consider feedback from both students and peers, and
- The consideration of graduate student supervision philosophies and proficiencies in the criteria for hiring and promotion decisions, and

BIFRT the GSS recommends that UBC consider the value of and need for flexibility and different styles in supervisory training, workshops, and evaluation and assessment, and

BIFRT the GSS recommends that UBC fosters a culture of open, continuous, two-way communication between graduate students and supervisors, including the setting of clear expectations, and regular meetings, and

BIFRT the GSS Council directs the GSS Executive Committee to familiarize incoming graduate students with the resources available to support positive working relationships with their supervisor at GSS Orientations, including the setting of clear expectations, regular meetings, and written student-supervisor agreements to be developed jointly by graduate students and supervisors when and where appropriate, and

BIFRT the GSS recommends that UBC provide resources and workshops that educate supervisors on the unique challenges of conducting international graduate studies, and facilitate dialogue on cultural differences, including different learning and mentoring styles and the challenges of adapting to unfamiliar cultural norms, and

BIFRT the GSS recommends that UBC fosters a culture where all graduate student supervisors are supportive of their students' reasonable pursuit of learning and teaching activities outside the bounds of the thesis, and

BIFRT the GSS recommends that UBC investigate barriers to timely program completion and identify effective measures to decrease average graduate student time to completion, and

Position Statements

BIFRT the GSS recommends that UBC creates a culture that emphasizes the role of the supervisory committee as an important resource for students and endeavours to ensure committee composition is in the best interest of the student, and

BIFRT GSS Council directs the GSS Taskforce for the GSS Graduate Student Satisfaction Survey to revise and expand the sections of the annual GSS survey to better assess the quality of graduate student-supervisor relationship and the quality of supervision, and

BIFRT GSS Council directs the VP Academic & University Affairs, the Academic & External Affairs Committee, and the Graduate Council GSS Caucus to advocate for these changes with the UBC Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies, Graduate Council, Senate, Board of Governors, and the UBC President, as appropriate.