

GRADUATE  
STUDENT SOCIETY  
UBC VANCOUVER

# Graduate Students– Supervisory Relations

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UBC Vancouver

April 2019

## Introduction

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**“My faculty supervisor barely knows me. I know she is busy and has a big case load, but I always feel rushed with her, even if I’ve made an appointment.”**

*– Graduate student, Student Satisfaction Survey, 2018*

Student-Supervisory relationship has been greatly debated and researched upon across the University of British Columbia, keeping a keen focus on graduate students and their well-being. In March 2017, Graduate Student Society (GSS), published a comprehensive report, *Supervisory Excellence: A Graduate Student Perspective* with strong recommendations for the university to adopt. The full report was shared with the Counsel, Senate and Graduate Postdoctoral Studies, as well as with key personnel and decision makers across the campus.

This paper is a follow-up from the 2017 report, which was based on statistics from *GSS Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS)* results 2014 and 2015. Drawing on and analysing qualitative data, this paper tries to investigate the changes, if any, which have been witnessed in the student-supervisor relationship in the interim. It also measures if any recommendations as suggested in the report, were implemented and if they were able to make any positive impact.

The qualitative data used for this paper has been retrieved from the GSS SSS 2017, while some figures and numbers quoted are from the latest 2018 survey.

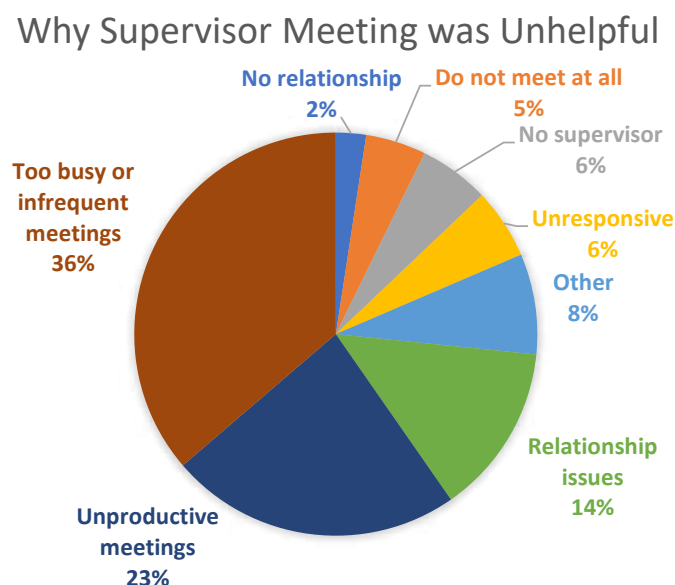
## Results & Analysis

Graduate students feel strongly when their relationship with their supervisor is unresponsive or dysfunctional, where no matter if they were meeting their supervisor, the consultations remained to be unproductive for around 25% of the surveyed students.

Around 40% students complained that their supervisor appeared to be “too busy and not having enough meetings,” while some students expressed these meetings to be “too negative” or in some cases even “counter-productive.” Additionally, some students do not meet their supervisor at all (5%) with some comments received through the Student Satisfaction Survey as follows:

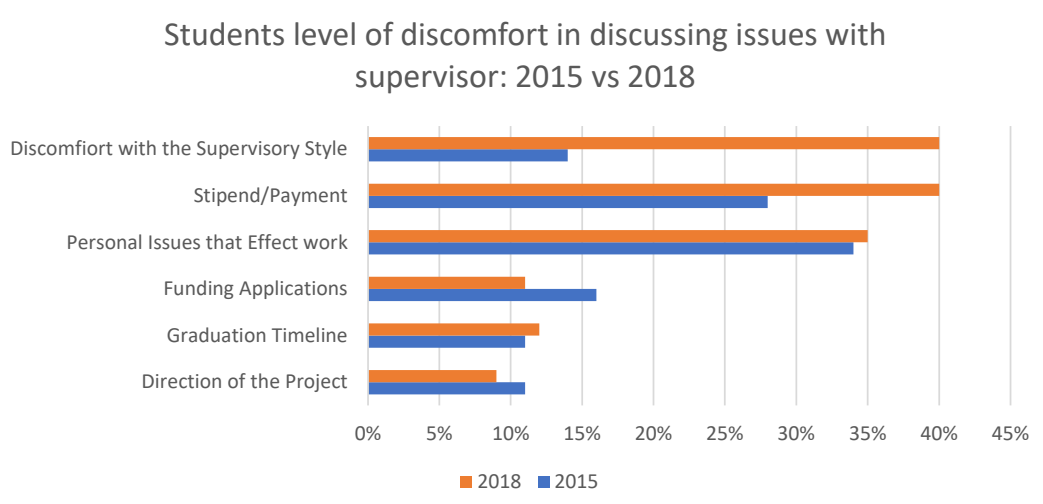
**“In theory, it would be good to meet with my supervisor on a regular basis (which is hard to do given my supervisor does not prioritize students). The reality is that my supervisor is very negative and highly inconsistent and our discussions, when they do happen, are typically counterproductive.”**

**“I think more structured and frequent meetings would be helpful to my work – I often find myself lacking feedback and guidance.”**



**Figure 1:** Tabulation to responses of why students found their meetings with their supervisor unhelpful (GSS SSS Survey 2017)

Figure 2 below, shows a comparison between the survey results obtained in 2015 and those in 2018 concerning the level of discomfort faced by students, over different topics, when discussing the same with their supervisor. While the stats have remained substantially similar for most of the student responses, however, levels of comfort in discussing Supervisory Style and Stipend/ Payments have seemingly declined over the last 3 years.

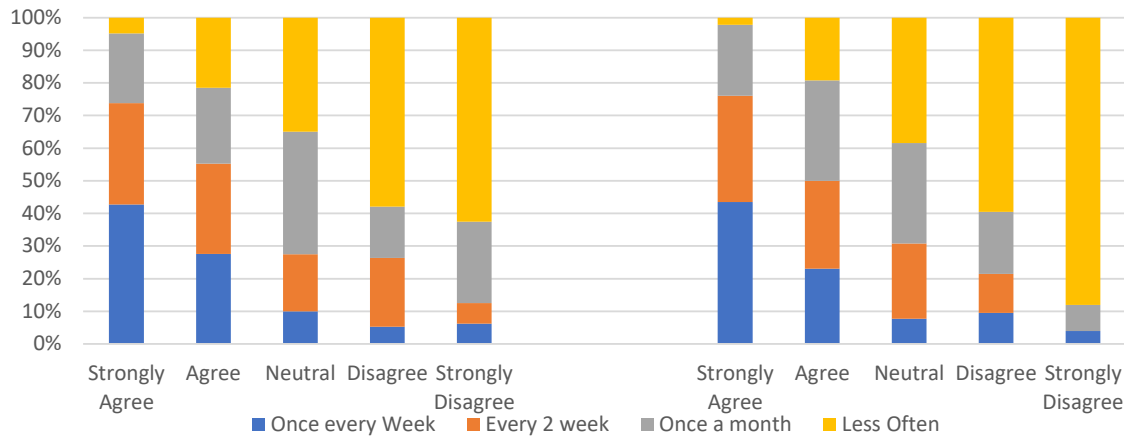


**Figure 2:** Results from GSS Student Satisfaction Survey 2015 vs. 2018 in measuring change in students discomfort level with their supervisor over 3 years (GSS SSS Survey 2015 n=1,091, and 2018 n=422)

Moreover, a comparison was done between 2015 and 2018 responses from SSS, to evaluate if the students answer to the effectiveness of supervisory meetings and their frequency had changed. Figure 3 below depicts these responses graphically. It displays little substantively significant change over the years. The most noticeable variation was a more pronounced opinion that fewer meetings with supervisors negatively impacted the academic work for studnets.

An analysis with 2018 recofirms the conclusions of Supervisory Excellence: A Graduate Student Perspective, that an increased number of meetings with the supervisor has a direct correlation with students' satisfaction with their academic work.

### Supervisor Meeting Frequency and its effect on academic work



**Figure 3:** Results from GSS Student Satisfaction Survey 2015 vs. 2018 in measuring supervisor meeting frequency and its effect on students' academic work (GSS SSS Survey 2015 n=1,091, and 2018 n=422)

## Conclusion

Effective student supervision is beneficial for not only the students, but also for the supervisors, the faculty and the university. This requires a holistically defined framework and an active implementation of the same, which needs to be prioritized by the supervisors and the managing faculty. The first step towards which would be the recognition of its importance and the role it plays in nurturing a student's work and overall university experience.

Training, assessment and continuous learning should be a part of refining this relationship, effectively monitored and modified to match supervisory excellence criteria. This could be implemented through workshops, in-house trainings, and adopting effective rectification strategies. Clearly defined expectations, including expectation around the frequency of meetings, both from student and supervisor are essential. While getting periodic feedback ensures systematic participation and learning which positively impacts student-supervisor relationship.