

Herding Hedgehogs

Tools, Techniques and Challenges of
Supervising Graduate Students at a
Distance

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Agenda

- ▣ What is the role of the Supervisor?
- ▣ What Tools and Techniques are Available?
- ▣ What Challenges Can We Expect?
- ▣ What Skills do you need?
- ▣ Discussion



WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR?

Role of Supervisor at AU

- be familiar with all policies and regulations
- provide environment conducive to research and intellectual growth
- construct and agree to academic plan (program of study)
- assist and advise on AU Research Ethics Applications
- inform student of awards/scholarships/research funding /conferences and assist in any applications/abstracts
- clarify intellectual property rights and primary authorship
- ensure that the student is adequately supervised
- determine when the student is ready

Supervision entails..

- ▣ Teaching
- ▣ Coaching
- ▣ Mentoring
- ▣ Modeling
- ▣ Managing
- ▣ Brokering
- ▣ Counselling

Effective Supervisors...

- ...ensure the partnership is right for the project
- ...get to know the student and carefully assess their needs
- ...establish reasonable, agreed expectations
- ...work with students to establish strong conceptual structure and research plan
- ...encourage students to write early and often
- ...initiate regular contact and provide high quality feedback
- ...get students involved in department a(and discipline)
- ...inspire and motivate
- ...help if (when) academic and personal crises crop up
- ...take an active interest in student's future careers
- ...carefully monitor final production and presentation of research

James & Baldwin (1999)

Supervision is...

- ...time consuming – at the most inconvenient times
- ...unpredictable – life happens
- ...a responsibility to the University and Profession
- ...a reciprocal long-term relationship
 - in which both supervisor and student has responsibilities



**WHAT CHALLENGES CAN
WE EXPECT?**

Challenges – In General

- ▣ Deciding between a project and a thesis
- ▣ Identifying appropriate learning approaches and behaviours
- ▣ Tailoring the mentoring relationship
- ▣ Maintaining clear and frequent communication
- ▣ Agreeing on mutual expectations
- ▣ Dealing with cultural differences
- ▣ Work life balance

Challenges – At a Distance

- Getting to know you
 - Lack of casual opportunities- No unscheduled “coffee breaks” or office visits
 - Out of sight out of mind
- Cultural differences
 - Lack of background cultural awareness
 - We do not control or even understand the learning context
- Communication
 - Lack of visual cues
- Conducting analysis at a distance



**WHAT TOOLS, TECHNIQUES
AND RESOURCES ARE
AVAILABLE?**

Tools

- ▣ Communication
 - ▣ email, Telephone, Skype,
- ▣ Conferencing
 - ▣ Elluminate, Adobe
- ▣ Coordination - Shared Calendars
 - ▣ Google, Lotus, Outlook, Facebook?
- ▣ Shared Readings/References
 - ▣ Mendelay, Endnote?
- ▣ Online Meetings Spaces
 - ▣ the Landing, Google, Microsoft, Lotus
- ▣ File sharing tools
 - ▣ Dropbox, Box, Sugar,

Techniques

- ▣ Get them off to a good start
- ▣ Keep in Touch
- ▣ Use Deadlines Strategically

Get them off to a good start

- Start the supervisory committee early
- Put them to work as soon as you can
- Make expectations attainable and then build up your expectations
- Get them involved in department or faculty research meetings
- Meet them regularly

Keep in Touch

- ▣ Meet them in person when you can
- ▣ Schedule regular checkpoints
- ▣ Agree on reasonable turnaround times and best ways to get in touch
- ▣ Use the phone or skype
- ▣ Plan for meaningful personal conversations
- ▣ Keep them informed of your schedule
- ▣ Plan meaningful work reasons to meet

Use Deadlines Strategically

- ▣ Plan the work
- ▣ Use conference deadlines or meetings
- ▣ “Chunk” the work and plan to “meet” regularly to review these chunks
- ▣ Provide detailed and timely feedback
- ▣ Regularly schedule “meetings”

Resources

▣ At AU

▣ Grad Studies

▣ <http://fgs.athabasca.ca/guidelines/roles.php>

▣ The Landing

▣ TEKRI, Learning Services

▣ Your Colleagues, Program Director,

▣ Online

▣ University of Western Ontario Grad Supervision resources

<http://www.uwo.ca/tsc/gradsupervision.html>

▣ 11 practises of effective post grad supervisors University of Melbourne

<http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/pdfs/11practices.pdf>

▣ Mentoring: How to Mentor Graduate Students - A Guide for Faculty (PDF) - University of Washington

<http://www.grad.washington.edu/mentoring/GradFacultyMentor.pdf>



**WHAT SKILLS DOES A
SUPERVISOR NEED?**

Skills a Supervisor needs to have

- ▣ Disciplinary expertise
- ▣ Communication
- ▣ Negotiation
- ▣ Project Management
- ▣ People skills

In Summary...

- Real work of supervising is not the “work”
- Like any relationship, supervising requires more time and effort than you expect
- Supervising is one of the most rewarding, and challenging, relationships you are likely to experience

Discussion

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