

Research Apprenticeship Model of Graduate Student Training

The Department of Psychology at the University of Alberta observes a research apprenticeship model of training for its graduate students. In this approach, there is a focus on assisting students in developing and conducting research. Each staff member and student will, of course, remain flexible in how they approach and apportion responsibilities in the projects they work on (together and individually). Nevertheless, it should be noted that a research apprenticeship model of training is designed to assure that, as they apprentice, all graduate students receive the necessary mentoring and guidance that is required to become independent researchers. Thus, the central focus is on the research interests of the students and their development as independent researchers. Mentoring will come not only from faculty members, but also, from other students in the graduate program. Ideally, students will be at different stages of their programs, which will allow for a layering of mentoring opportunities: faculty to student and student to student.

It is assumed that individual students will have different skills, needs, and research interests when they first enter the program. It is the responsibility of each supervisor to assess what those skills, needs, and interests are, and to help the student design a set of courses, laboratory experiences, and research goals that will help him or her acquire the skills needed for a successful career as a research scientist. In addition, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to assure that the student develops his or her own research interests. In general, students should not work on projects that are entirely devised by the supervisor unless they are paid to do so. Ideally, the student progresses from having a collaborative relationship with the supervisor, to being a capable, innovative, and independent researcher.

It should be noted that even though a graduate student enters the program with a supervisor already “assigned,” and although that supervisor will typically remain the student’s supervisor throughout the student’s degree program, it is not a requirement of the program. That is, we recognize the right of both student and supervisor to shift interests, or to otherwise decide that their supervisor-supervisee relationship is no longer productive. In cases like this, it is the responsibility of both parties to inform the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies, who will attempt to assist the student in finding another supervisor. However, the student is ultimately responsible for his or her own program, and for practical purposes, that includes finding a faculty member who will agree to take on supervisory responsibilities. On a more positive note, many students will find that there is more than one staff member who is doing research of interest to them. The department encourages collaborations with as many other staff and students as is feasible, in the interests of expanding a students’ breadth of interests and research capabilities.

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The following two lists are not exhaustive, but are meant as guidelines.

The faculty supervisor is responsible for:

- The supervision of the student's research activities.
- Creating an environment in which the student can acquire and develop the research techniques and skills necessary for successful dissertation-level research.
- Assuring that the student is familiar with the ethical issues involved in the conduct of the research he or she becomes involved in.
- Meeting regularly with the student.
- Periodically evaluating the student's continuing progress through the milestones of the graduate program.
- Striking a Supervisory Committee and making sure that committee meets at least once a year prior to the Annual Evaluation Meeting.
- Providing the "wherewithal" for the student to conduct independent research. This may include, but is not limited to, providing laboratory space and computing facilities, including statistical software; funds for photocopying research materials and/or readings; advice on background readings and courses; editorial advice on manuscripts; advice on which department research seminars to attend (e.g., Cognitive Seminar, Cognitive Neuroscience Seminar, Developmental Lunch); advice about which other faculty members might be of interest to collaborate with; and so on.

The graduate student is responsible for:

- Participating in research activities that are of mutual interest to the student and the supervisor.
- Meeting regularly with the supervisor.
- Developing a research program that is consistent with the goal of becoming a research psychologist.
- Becoming aware of the ethical issues involved in conducting the type of research the student is involved in.
- Being available to the supervisor for laboratory meetings, progress reports, etc.

Psychology Graduate Policy Documents

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- Making sure the graduate course requirements are fulfilled in a timely fashion.
- Assuring that the department's research requirements (e.g., the first-year research project, the second-year research project or Master's thesis, and the dissertation) are completed on time.
- Mentoring other students, as possible.

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