BBME Letter of Understanding

From: *[supervisor name]*

Dear *[trainee name],*

You have been admitted into our *[****select*** *M. Eng. or PhD]* program in Biological & Biomedical Engineering. My overall goal is to guide you through a transformation from trainee to independent researcher in your field of interest, while building relationships for a future network of colleagues. The following are points of discussion designed to make this process efficient and productive for both trainees and supervisors. They are adjusted to the nature of the research in our research laboratory and complement the directives in your official Letter of Offer from McGill. Both supervisor and trainee have rights and responsibilities. Both supervisor and trainee **must review the McGill Expectations for Graduate Supervision (included below)** and McGill University [policies](https://www.mcgill.ca/study/university_regulations_and_resources/graduate) regarding graduate studies. Please also see [www.mcgill.ca/gradsupervision](http://www.mcgill.ca/gradsupervision).

**1**: **Professional relationships** (communication/ honesty/ respect/ collaboration/ awareness)

You will be joining a working team, and expected to collaborate as needed with colleagues. Teamwork is an essential skill for a researcher. Some of your work will focus on your thesis goals, but some may also be part of a larger team goal that will allow a broader perspective on research planning. All contributions are recognized appropriately (see **#2**).

**2:** **Academic skill development** (writing/ presenting/ research/ academic rigor/ autonomy)

Together, we will strengthen your skills to search for papers, patents and other information on your research topic. You will thus stay up to date and report novelties to your supervisor(s) and lab mates. When writing, any claims in your publications or reports should be rigorously accurate and verified. You will be given opportunities to gain experience in oral presentations in open conferences, and in preparing written journal articles. Sometimes authorship will be assigned to several colleagues if they made significant contributions, with the order of the authors’ names agreed to by all. You will normally be the first author on reports of your own project. See also *[*[*http://www.mcgill.ca/gradsupervision/timelines/emergence-independent-researchers/publishing*](http://www.mcgill.ca/gradsupervision/timelines/emergence-independent-researchers/publishing)*]*

The ultimate intent is for you to develop *autonomy* and *creative thinking* by proposing and justifying novel directions to your peers. *Before submitting your thesis:*

* *You must* comply with all progress meeting deadlines and recommendations in the program. ***[***<https://mcgill.ca/bbme/students/policies-forms>***]***
* *You are expected to provide as part of your thesis [****select****: XX original contributions for M. Eng. or YY original contributions for PhD level]*. *Depending on the nature of these contributions, they may appear as conference or journal papers, as review articles or as IP disclosures.*
* Finally, I will make every effort to support you in future career applications.

**3**: **Time management** (working time/ graduation timeline/ timeliness)

*The minimum/maximum window to graduation is [****select*** *3/6 years for PhD, or 1.5/ 3 years for M.Eng.]* Work guidelines are important to optimize your progress within this timeline and minimize costly extensions:

* *[each lab, edit your requirements]- according to experimental needs, required presence in the lab for work, and duties*
* The expected frequency of one-on-one meetings with me is every ##weeks, and of general lab meetings is every ##weeks. Attendance at lab meetings is compulsory and strongly encouraged at selected public seminars.
* Be on time for any appointment or meeting as a sign of respect

**4: Feedback** (assessment/ performance/contact)

Feedback throughout training is essential to make deadlines. I will set submission dates and expect reports in a timely manner; in return, I will provide comments on the quality and progress of your submissions to allow fast corrections or changes in directions and meet external deadlines. This can occur during lab meetings, one-on-one meetings or when editing presentations/manuscript drafts etc. (see #3). To facilitate contact, I provide my *Emergency Contact information* below:

Supervisor: provide Adjust Phones-email…..

**5: Ethics & Intellectual Property** (lab confidentiality, IP rules at McGill)

First, all IP acquired during research done at McGill under federal or provincial grants belongs to McGill and the inventors. Any confidential information divulged during lab interactions must not be shared with anyone, without my explicit consent as your supervisor. Student and supervisor must be aware and comply with the guidelines for academic integrity and intellectual property at McGill **[**<http://mcgill.ca/gradsupervision/resources/policies-guidelines-and-advice>**]**. For example, all lab books and associated data/software must remain with the lab at McGill when you complete your degree.

**6: Conflict Resolution** (Plagiarism, IP issues, personal issues)

Refer to **[**<https://www.mcgill.ca/gradsupervision/supervisors/interacting-supervisees/student-supervisor>**]** for McGill contacts at all levels, concerning resolution of potential conflicts (student-student, student-staff…). If the supervisor is not directly involved, he/she should be your first point of contact for a consultation.

**7: Environment** (access to resources/ safety)

Please consult the Safety Office guidelines for safety in research laboratories

**[** <https://www.mcgill.ca/ehs/environmental-health-and-safety> **]**. It provides all McGill regulations that concern your host laboratory, and procedures for certification of safety training –

Supervisor: Provide links for Resources outside lab for special equipment in some projects: [….Link]?

**Closing comments** (for supervisor if needed, comment on other personal views…)

**McGill University Expectations for Graduate Supervision**

Supervising graduate students and postdocs at McGill University is a critical part of academic duties for faculty, as indicated in section 4.1 of the [Regulations Relating to the Employment of Tenure Track and Tenured Academic Staff](https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/employment_of_tenure_track_and_tenured_academic_staff_regs_relating_to.pdf), henceforth referred to as “the Regulations”.

In order to supervise graduate students and postdocs, faculty must complete an [orientation](https://www.mcgill.ca/gradsupervision/supervisors/training-supervisors).

Supervisors are accountable to the Chair or leader of their academic unit, who is responsible for the allocation of academic duties (section 4.3 of the Regulations). To ensure all graduate students have the opportunity to succeed in obtaining their degree, the University expects all supervisors to meet the university-wide standards delineated below.

Creating a respectful, inclusive, and professional research environment while also being present, providing regular feedback, recognizing limits, and knowing relevant policies helps faculty better support supervisees and prevent potential misunderstandings down the road.

**Supervisors have a responsibility to:**

1. **Build and maintain a respectful, inclusive, professional research environment for their supervisees.** 
   1. McGill University expects supervisors to maintain a **research environment free from sexual violence, harassment, and discrimination.**

Policy Resources:

* [Policy on Harassment and Discrimination](https://www.mcgill.ca/omr/harassment-discrimination-0)
* [Policy against Sexual Violence](https://www.mcgill.ca/omr/sexual-violence-0)   
  1. If a supervisor observes behaviour that might constitute sexual violence, harassment, or discrimination, **they must consult the** [**Office for Mediation and Reporting**](https://www.mcgill.ca/omr/) **or the** [**Office of the Dean of Students**](https://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/) **to determine how to proceed.**
* Faculty should not assume that problems between supervisees in a lab setting will resolve on their own. Faculty and staff have a shared responsibility to ensure supervisees can learn in environments where they are respected and free from pejorative or offensive acts and comments. Trained professionals in the OMR and Office of the Dean of Students are available to support faculty and staff as well as students.
  1. Supervisors, as representatives of McGill University acting in an official capacity, **have a responsibility to uphold students’ rights,** as explained in [Charter of Students’ Rights, Article 3:](https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/personalrights/dignity)
* “Every student has a right to the safeguard of [their] dignity and a right to be protected by the University against vexatious conduct displayed by a representative of the University acting in an official capacity”.
* Supervisors have a duty to accommodate on the grounds of disability and religious belief. In some cases, there might also be a duty to accommodate on the basis of dependent care responsibilities. If you have any uncertainty about what constitutes a reasonable accommodation in a given situation you may contact the Office of the Dean of Students (in all cases) or Student Accessibility & Achievement (in situations involving students with disabilities)

Policy Resources:

* [Policy](https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/rights-of-students-with-disabilities-policy-concerning-the_1.pdf) Concerning the Rights of Students with Disabilities
* [Policy on Holy Days](https://www.mcgill.ca/importantdates/holy-days-0/policy-holy-days)   
  1. Supervisors’ words carry weight for supervisees. Offhand comments spoken in moments of frustration can leave supervisees doubting whether they can trust a supervisor to assess work fairly and equitably support supervises’ research and wellbeing. It is important for supervisors to keep the power differential in mind when speaking with supervisees and refrain from mocking, insulting, or undermining language.
  2. **Supervisors, as members of the University, have the right to work in a respectful and professional research environment.** [The Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/personalrights/dignity) holds that no student shall in a university context:
* “Knowingly create a condition that unnecessarily endangers or threatens or undermines the health, safety, well-being, or dignity of another person or persons, threatens to cause humiliation, or threatens the damage or destruction of property”

Resources:

* **Office of the Dean of Students:** Supervisors are encouraged to talk to the Dean of Students’ office when a student or supervisee [exhibits worrisome behaviour](https://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/staff/worrisome-behaviour), including dangerous, threatening, disruptive, or uncharacteristic behaviour. See the [Red File](https://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/staff/helpingstudents) for guidance.
  1. **Supervisors and supervisees must avoid conflicts of interest**, and if one should arise, speak to a department chair or director to implement measures to properly address the conflict of interest. For supervisors, this means ensuring that supervisees are equitably treated (i.e., avoid steps or measures that might be perceived as partiality, favoritism, or bias) and that relationships with supervisees are professional and centred on academic wellness.
  2. Following major conflicts, the best resolution may be to dissolve the supervisory relationship and have the graduate student continue under the supervision of another faculty member. It is critical for faculty to speak to both the Graduate Program Director and the Department Chair when considering whether this presents the best solution for all parties. When approached with a request for a transfer, faculty are expected to collaborate to ensure as smooth a transition as possible, clarifying what will happen to ongoing research, lab access, etc.

1. **Be present for and accountable to supervisees by maintaining clear communication channels.**
2. Supervisors should meet regularly with supervisees, honouring the schedules agreed to in Letters of Understanding.
3. Supervisors and supervisees should keep shared written records when it comes to important decisions about research projects, funding, authorship, graduation timelines, etc.

Annual Progress reports provide a framework to give feedback on a student’s progress in writing and objectives for the following year in writing and represent a critical opportunity to indicate to students if their work is unsatisfactory.

1. Supervisors must plan to ensure that graduate supervisees have appropriate supervision during prolonged absences (e.g., sabbatical leaves).

* Supervisors who are not planning to maintain regular communication with supervised students during a sabbatical or other leave should ensure supervisees have an appropriate interim supervisor (e.g., a committee member) who will stay in regular communication with the supervisee and ensure they progress.

1. **Provide supervisees with regular, timely feedback that clearly indicates how to meet their program requirements for graduation.**
   1. Uphold the commitments made in Letters of Understanding regarding how long it will take to return student work with feedback. Providing regular updates for students on when to expect feedback is also helpful for ensuring accountability and on-time degree completion.
   2. Clarify expectations ahead of major milestones (e.g., proposals, qualifying examinations, thesis submission, oral defences). **Supervisees should understand how they will be assessed, what is required to pass major milestones**, and the departmental standards for thesis research and other evaluated graduate work.

* Feedback on submitted work should be clear, substantial, and provide specific, actionable recommendations for improvement. Evaluations of student work must be made principally on the basis of the demonstrated quality of the student’s research, and not comparisons with other students or supervisor opinions of the student’s readiness to graduate or ability to succeed in a specific subsequent profession.
* Supervisors must not prevent students from seeking to graduate if they have completed all the degree requirements and their work meets departmental standards.

1. **Respect their limits in supporting supervisee wellbeing.**
   1. Supervisors are often among the first to notice when a graduate student or postdoc is unwell. **Supervisors should offer a supportive ear while respecting their limits when it comes to addressing student mental health**. The [Student Wellness Hub](https://www.mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/hub-clinical-services/hub-clinicians/local-wellness-advisors) connects students with help from trained clinicians.

Resource:

* [Tips for talking to a student in difficulty](https://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/staff/helpingstudents)   
  1. **Supervisors and supervisees alike benefit from flexibility and understanding** when it comes to balancing work responsibilities and personal wellbeing.
     + Supervisors should encourage supervisees to maintain reasonable working hours and clarify expectations that supervisees will take time to rest, recharge, and connect with friends and family.
     + Supervisors and supervisees should communicate their availability limits in Letters of Understanding (e.g., unavailable to meet after 3pm, will respond to emails within 48 hours, etc.). Supervisees should respect these limits and make use of available supports to maintain their wellbeing (e.g., Local Wellness Advisors, the Student Wellness Hub, etc.).
  2. **Supervisors must respect their supervisee’s autonomy when it comes decisions that impact the supervisee’s future**. Supervisees should be able to freely choose to pursue a particular career path, take advantage of professional development opportunities, start a family, take a leave of absence, etc., without fear that their supervisor will withdraw support.

Policy Resources:

* Parental Leave:

<https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/policies-and-guidelines/parental-leave>

* Leave of Absence and Vacation Policy: <https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/registration/progress/leave-vacation>

1. **Know policies relevant to graduate studies well enough to advise supervisees. If unsure, ask for clarification.**

Resources:

* [Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies](https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/policies-and-guidelines)
* [Secretariat](https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/policies-and-regulations)
* A Graduate Program Director or Department Chair

Date: Click or tap to enter a date.

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| Supervisor Name: | *[type name here]* | Signature | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |
| Trainee: | *[type name here]* | Signature | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |

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