Appendix D
Sample agreements between students and supervisors

This appendix contains a general description of agreements prepared for workshops on supervision for faculty members, plus two examples. It is recommended that more examples be developed and be placed on the Graduate Studies web site.

Writing an agreement with a graduate student whom you supervise
A guide for senior supervisors at SFU
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November 2005

[this document is part of a package given out at supervision workshops for faculty members]

An agreement in writing with a student accomplishes the following:

1. It protects your interests and it protects the interests of your student.
2. It demonstrates that you and the student each have a commitment to behave professionally in a relationship that should provide benefits to both of you; it also provides a model for your student of how such relationships should work.
3. It provides the opportunity for you and the student to think seriously about what you expect from the supervisory relationship, and to anticipate how you will deal with any problems that may arise.

Some supervisors are unwilling to commit their expectations to paper because they are afraid of being in a contractual relationship. However, when a student is admitted to the University, they have entered a contractual relationship with the institution. You, as an employee of the University, are expected to know the rules, guidelines and policies that govern the supervisory relationship and the treatment of students.

A written agreement can include both general and specific items; it can include a provision for review and revision; it can provide for unexpected occurrences. There is no simple list of what topics should be included. Ultimately it is up to you and the student to have something on paper with which you both feel comfortable. The following list is designed to help you construct an agreement:

- What research will the student do, and do you have provisions for negotiating a change in research direction?
• What is a reasonable timetable for completion?
• Do you intend to fund the student? How much? When? How long? Is the funding secure or does it depend on a grant application?
• What do you expect in return for funding the student?
• Have you made it clear that you expect to meet regularly? How often will you meet?
• What provisions have you made concerning intellectual property, collaboration, patents, co-authorship etc.?
• Is there a provision for dispute resolution?
• Have you experienced problems with previous students? Could those problems have been taken care of with a written agreement? If so, make sure that those issues are included in your written agreement.
• Once you have a draft agreement: Are you being reasonable? Are you micro-managing this too much? Have you given the student the opportunity to discuss? Are you treating all students in your research group fairly? Does the agreement have provisions for change/renegotiation etc.?

**Example 1.** A generic agreement, to be used for a new student not working on the supervisor’s research project

Dear new student,

This letter sets out a preliminary agreement of my supervision of your master’s project on “a very important topic”. It is understood that the agreement may need revision, depending on the direction your research takes.

For the first two semesters you will be taking courses and completing your research design (to be presented at the end of the spring semester). I suggest that we meet once a month during the first semester. During the second semester, when you will be working on your research design, we should meet more frequently. I expect you to be in the field in the summer, and we will set up a schedule for the following year when you return from the field.

I expect you to be prepared for meetings, and I hope that you will e-mail me in advance of topics you want to discuss. I will give you advance warning if a meeting needs to be re-scheduled.

With regard to your research, I can assist you in developing a research design, and can introduce you to people working in the region. However, I expect you to be primarily responsible for developing the research questions, and assessing the data needs of the research. Provided that your research is largely your own, I do not expect to be a co-
author of any publications arising from the research. If I believe that I have significant intellectual input into an aspect of the research, I may suggest that we co-author a publication. You would have publication rights to anything in the completed thesis.

I am not in a position to fund your research from my research grant. I will assist you in applying for internal and external research funding.

A possible time line for the completion of your studies is as follows:

- **Fall 2005**: Two required courses
- **Spring 2006**: Research design course and research colloquium
- **Summer 2006**: Fieldwork
- **Fall 2007**: Final data collection and begin thesis
- **Spring 2008**: Complete thesis draft
- **Summer 2008**: Defence

This time line will be revised at regular meetings of your supervisory committee required by the department for the purposes of assessing progress.

___________________________                                           _____________________

Signatures of supervisor and student.

**Example 2.** An agreement in which a student will be working closely with a supervisor.

Dear new student,

This letter sets out our understanding of how we will handle various aspects of your PhD program. If you agree with the contents, please sign at the end. If you would like to amend some items, please let me know and we’ll discuss and re-draft the document. None of these items is written in stone – all are open to future discussion. 

I have a long term research program on “things”, undertaken in collaboration with other scholars and institutions, notably the University of Southern BC. Currently I am focusing on microscopically small things. For your research, I expect you to work on even smaller things. The precise direction your research takes will depend on the formulation of a more detailed research proposal over the first year in the program.

Another student will be working on slightly larger things and I will be compiling data on things of all sizes. The long term project has also resulted in large databases on things from other parts of the world. Some sharing of data will therefore be required by all members of the project.

**Courses and other requirements**

As a Ph.D. student you are expected to take two required courses in theory and research methods. In addition, I suggest that you take two reading courses with me. You must take
comprehensive exams in the spring semester of year two. I will give you advice on how to prepare for these.

**Funding and working conditions**

I can provide funding until August 20XX. I will pay you a stipend of $$$$ per semester from a grant. The total will be reviewed annually, and adjustments will be made if tuition increases occur. Funding after August 20XX depends on my ability to secure further grants.

When I am paying you, I expect you to work at least 40 hours per week, either on your graduate studies or on your research. Some of your research will relate directly to your thesis, but I will also expect you to work as a research assistant for me from time to time. For example, I expect you to contribute bibliographic material to a database shared by all project members, and I expect your assistance in writing some papers (see discussion of authorship below).

I expect you to apply for other sources of income, notably teaching assistantships and other scholarships. I will reduce your stipend in semesters when you are a TA, because you will be spending less time on your studies and research. I will also reduce your stipend in semesters when you have scholarship support, but in any case your semester’s income will not drop below $$$$.

I expect you to take all statutory holidays recognized by SFU (including the Christmas break) and I encourage you to take three weeks paid vacation per year (at a time we agree on).

I prefer to meet my graduate students every week, and we will establish a schedule for these meetings. Your overall progress will be reviewed twice a year, as required by the department.

I expect to be able to provide you with some travel funding to visit another laboratory once, and to attend at least one conference.

**Intellectual property**

1. The material you analyze and include in your dissertation is your IP. However, I expect to receive regular copies of your data, and a final version once the analysis is complete. This is because I have a responsibility to look after data collected under my research grant, and also because it provides a safe backup for you. I will not use these data while you are a graduate student without your permission. Furthermore, you have exclusive rights to publish the data up to two years after completing your PhD, subject to further provisions below.
2. Should a publication by you require significant data or intellectual input from me or another project member, I would expect me or them to be included as a co-author on your publication. Similarly, should I or another project member use data or ideas derived from your research, you should expect to be included as a co-author. All work done by you and me collaboratively will be co-authored.

3. We have obligations to our collaborators in USBC to provide descriptive summaries of analyses. I expect to be a co-author of such reports, and will contribute to them. These reports are likely to be published online or in conference proceedings.

4. If we disagree over any issues of intellectual property, we will ask the chair of the graduate program committee to act as mediator.

**Progression through program**

We have already outlined a timetable in a separate document.

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__________________________________
Supervisor  New student