Guidelines for supervisory committee meetings for progress assessment

For all continuing MSc or PhD students, progress must be assessed and approved by the student’s supervisory committee through regularly held supervisory committee meetings.

Reminder, the student must send the annually updated and signed Student/Supervisor agreement to the grad program assistant. *The grad program assistant will not follow-up on this. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure this is done.*

Students who are due to submit a graduate progress report (GPR) will receive a generated email from Grad Studies with instructions. Committee meetings must occur **no later than 12 months after the previous progress approval.**

**Please note:** There are additional instructions in these guidelines. You do not only complete the online GPR. Follow the instructions below.

*(Note: The PhD Graduate Research Candidacy Examination (MBB 806) also involves committee members and progress assessment, but is not identical to a Progress Meeting in format or purpose and does not replace a supervisory committee meeting or GPR.)*

The objective of progress approval is to confirm that the student’s academic development is keeping up with expectations for students at a comparable training level in the chosen research discipline. Aspects to be assessed typically include not only progress in original research (the thesis project itself), but also technical skills, theoretical knowledge, and written and oral communication skills.

- **Note:** student interaction with committee members is not intended to be restricted to committee meetings. Indeed, the department encourages students to seek guidance from committee members whenever needed, either one-on-one or assembled in informal meetings.

**The workflow will look like this:**
Report generated and student receives an email notification > Student schedules supervisory committee meeting > Student verifies pre-populated information and adds any applicable updates online (go.sfu.ca) and submits to sr. supervisor > Senior Supervisor completes evaluation online > Student acknowledges > Supervisor Committee Meeting held > Committee members complete evaluation online > Chair approves (optional: comments) > Student acknowledges entirety of report.

The moment you receive the generated email you should schedule a meeting and follow the workflow above. Update all your information as soon as possible and submit (go.sfu.ca) to sr. supervisor.

Your sr. supervisor should summarise his/her evaluation of your success in meeting previous year’s research and training expectations, while also highlighting notable strengths and/or weaknesses, and suggested goals for the coming year. **NOTE:** The sr. supervisor only provides feedback once. In other words, if the preference is to complete the online evaluation after your committee meeting, the sr. supervisor should hold off in completing their part until after the meeting.

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**Prior to the meeting**

At least ONE week prior to the meeting, circulate the following documents to your committee via email:

1. A written summary of your progress made in your thesis project. The suggested report is 5 single-spaced pages, not including figures and relevant references. The report should include:
   - a title
   - an abstract
   - background information pertaining to the research area; include useful figures as needed; state hypotheses and specific aims
   - description of the results obtained during the last year, and interpretations
   - future directions (proposed research) with estimated timelines

2. Committee comments and your response from the most recent committee meeting *(if not accessible online)*.

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**During the meeting**

During the meeting, the student will deliver an oral presentation to the committee, explaining the project background, aims, approaches, outcomes (including data collected over the past year) and significance. The presentations, together with questions/comments by the supervisory committee, vary in duration, but are typically 1.5 – 2 hrs. A suggested use of the meeting time would be: < 1 hr presentation, 0.5 hr questions from the committee, 0.5 hr discussion of progress and plans future work. It is suggested that the student’s presentation time be focused on progress made since the last meeting.

At the meeting, the student will receive oral comments from the committee on recommendations for the coming year and its significance, feasibility and suitability for that student. Notably, the discussion should explicitly include any of the following administrative milestones that are anticipated in the coming year:

- transfer from MSc to PhD program
• undertaking the MBB 806 PhD Candidacy Exam
• submission of the MSc or PhD thesis for defence
• if applicable, planned leaves of absence
• if applicable, need for significant changes in research direction (e.g. a new project)

At the end of the meeting, the student should leave the room (but remain nearby) to provide committee members the opportunity to discuss matters pertinent to the meeting.

The comments and suggestions will then be discussed with the student. The student should then explain to the other committee members that they must complete there comprehensive feedback in the online system and will receive an auto-generated email to do this.

Comprehensive feedback should cover comments on:
• progress in original research
• technical skills
• theoretical knowledge
• written communication
• oral communication
• steps that should be taken to ensure goals are reached

External committee members can complete the attached Supervisory Meeting Feedback form and the Grad Program Assistant will enter online on their behalf.

Also refer them to http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/current/gpr/committee-resources.html for more information and instructions.

Following the meeting

The student will only be able to read the feedback from the other committee members once they have all completed the online form and the Grad Chair approved and sent it back to the student to review and accept the feedback. [If the feedback is all satisfactory the student just accepts and will not be able to respond to the feedback. If the student is not completely satisfied with the feedback and wants to submit a response, they will have to ‘disagree’ with the feedback to be able to include a response.]

Another option: After the student has read the comments and suggestions online, they can compose a brief Response (~1 page) that outlines measures to be taken to meet any concerns raised during the meeting and email it to their committee and copy to the grad program assistant. The student may wish to discuss this response with their supervisor.
Finally, the student must send the annually updated and signed Student/Supervisor agreement to the grad program assistant. The grad program assistant will not follow-up on this. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure this is done.

Revised: May 15, 2019