

# Faculty Policy

## Policy on the constitution and operation of Advisory Committees for Master's and Doctoral Research Students in the Faculty of Medicine

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In order to improve supervision and support for the success of graduate students, the establishment of a Advisory Committee is mandatory in all Master's with thesis and Doctoral programs in the Faculty of Medicine.

The establishment of a Advisory Committee has many advantages for the student, including:

- enrichment of the research project (emergence of new ideas and suggestions, new directions, themes or technical approaches to explore, updating of results, etc.);
- access to advice on scientific activities that could be worth attending;
- a wider network of contacts (meetings with potential signatories of letters of recommendation, or even members of dissertation/thesis or general examination juries);
- consolidate a sense of belonging to the study program by increasing interaction with various researchers;
- a neutral space for dialogue and conflict resolution.

### **THE ROLE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The Advisory Committee is responsible for monitoring the student's progress in research and training. Its assessment is based on a periodic review of activities accomplished, as well as on the achievement of training objectives. Finally, it must contribute to the advancement of the student's project through annual planning of the next steps to be taken, including the development of cross-disciplinary skills and the elaboration of a professional project. Such monitoring should enable early detection of any difficulties linked to scientific training, the research project or internal or external conditions likely to hinder the expected progress. If necessary, the Advisory Committee can suggest possible solutions (need for additional training, redefinition of the thesis topic, supervisory arrangements, financial support, etc.).

The establishment of an Advisory Committee is not intended to restrict the role of the research supervisor, who has the ultimate responsibility for training and supervising the students under his or her direction. Nonetheless, Committee members can support the student in the event of short-term absence of the supervisor, act as mediators in the event of disagreements, or report conflict situations to the supervisor's graduate program director, who will follow up with the relevant departmental management if necessary.

### **COMPOSITION OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

At the Master's level, the Advisory Committee is made up of two people: the research supervisor, the co-supervisor, if applicable, and one advisor.

At the doctoral level, the Advisory Committee is made up of three people: the research supervisor, the co-supervisor, if applicable, and two advisors.

The Advisory Committee must also comply with the following rules:

- In accordance with the declaration of interest policies in force at the Université de Montréal (<https://interets.umontreal.ca/accueil/>), at the time of composition of the Advisory Committee (see Advisory Committee Composition form), any conflict of interest or appearance of conflict of interest must be avoided. If unavoidable due to certain collaborations in the publication of articles or shared grants, the conflict must be duly declared, together with the measures taken to mitigate its potential effects.

- The advisors are professors pursuing research in a field related to that of the student, but who are not involved in the student's research project. Advisors may belong to the same department or research center as the research supervisor. Regardless of their research environment or administrative unit (department or center), advisors must be faculty members duly authorised to supervise graduate students at the Université de Montréal.
- In the special case of co-supervision, the co-supervisor is also an ex-officio member of the Advisory Committee, in the same capacity as the research supervisor, without the number of other members being reduced.
- For students enrolled in the Medicine-Research program (M.D.-M.Sc. or M.D.-Ph.D.), at least one of the advisors should be well informed of the rules specific to this type of program.
- At least one of the advisors must come from outside the supervisor's research group.
- In view of their expertise in the research subject, the Committee's advisors may take part in the student's dissertation, thesis and comprehensive examination juries (maximum one event per member and one member per event). However, in the event that a member of the Advisory Committee is also approached to serve on the thesis jury, it should be remembered that members of such a jury must not, over the last five years, have held any research funds, maintained any active collaboration, or been the author of articles in common with the research supervisor or co-supervisor of the person being assessed. At least one member of the thesis jury should not come from the same university department.

Advisors' areas of research should be diversified to broaden the range of skills available to the student.

## **SETTING UP THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The student, in consultation with his or her research supervisor, is responsible for forming his or her Advisory Committee before the end of the first trimester of enrolment in the graduate program.

The composition of the Advisory Committee must be approved by the person in charge of the program of study when he or she accepts the completed Advisory Committee Composition form.

It is the student's responsibility to recruit the members of his or her Advisory Committee and to ensure that they are willing to serve. If necessary, the research supervisor or graduate program director can provide a list of department/unit members to consider, depending on the research topic.

The Advisory Committee must be chaired by one of the advisors. Under no circumstances may the Committee be chaired by the research supervisor.

## **MEETINGS**

The Advisory Committee is required to meet once a year, initially at the end of the second trimester of enrolment and at the same time in subsequent years.

Failure to comply with this requirement may have consequences for the student's formative evaluation (and therefore for his or her progress) and for his or her right to receive student funding from the faculty.

If the Advisory Committee or the student deem it necessary, meetings may be held more frequently. The purpose of these meetings is to provide assistance, ensure the progress of the research project, clarify annual objectives, suggest further reading and oversee the overall progress of the student's studies. The student is

responsible for scheduling committee meetings. Between meetings, students may also consult individual members of the Committee.

For the exercise to be most profitable, the student must send his or her Committee members the following documents at least two weeks before the meeting:

1. **Periodic report on research and training activities**, describing progress made over the past year, including research project progress, outreach and scholarly activities, and objectives for the coming year;
2. **Student Funding Declaration** (copy of e-mail received following submission of declaration).

Annual meetings should be organized as follows:

1. Meeting of the committee in the student's absence: members discuss the progress of work and progress, based on documents submitted and the opinion of the supervisor and, where applicable, the co-supervisor.
2. Meeting of the committee members with the student in the absence of the research supervisor and, if applicable, the co-supervisor: members discuss the progress of the research project, challenges encountered or any other element relevant to the student's progress.
3. Meeting of all committee members with the student: the student presents the progress of his or her work, including a plan of objectives for the coming year. This presentation is followed by a discussion between the members and the student.
4. Meeting of the committee in the student's absence: the committee members discuss progress and requirements for the coming year and prepare the Advisory Committee Report.

Although it is not the function of Advisory Committee meetings to resolve conflicts between students and their supervisors, this type of problem can still be discussed with the Committee, which will inform the graduate program director and subsequently the other persons concerned.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR ORGANIZING AND BENEFITING FROM THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

### **Research project**

The student presents his or her research project and discusses it from a scientific, methodological and feasibility point of view with the members of the Advisory Committee. Given the limits on the duration of studies, i.e. 2 years (6 semesters) at the Master's level and 5 years (15 semesters) at the PhD level, the Committee can ensure that the research project is neither too difficult nor too ambitious for the time available. Suggestions from members help to enrich the project and possibly foster collaborations between colleagues.

### **Progress report**

To ensure the success of their studies, students must make steady progress. The preparation of a periodic Activity Report explaining the progress of the work will enable the student and his or her supervisor to gather data, critically analyze it and take stock of the progress of the research project, specify the objectives to be pursued over the coming year and guide the development of the dissertation plan. Comments from Advisory Committee members can help enrich the research project and revise certain objectives if necessary.

### **Preparing for the Doctoral Comprehensive Examination (*Examen général de synthèse*)**

Once the examination jury has been constituted and the scope of the examination established, members of the Advisory Committee can help and advise the student in preparing for the examination. This can be

facilitated if a member of the Advisory Committee, in addition to the supervisor and co-supervisor where applicable, also serves on the examination jury. In this way, the student and the Committee can establish guidelines for the content and scope of the examination from the outset of doctoral studies, giving the student maximum time to prepare. Of course, Advisory Committee members are not required to serve on the jury.

### **Career development and cross-disciplinary skills**

The meeting with the Advisory Committee should also be an opportunity for the student to discuss his or her career plan, so that he or she can benefit from the sound advice of Committee members, whether in terms of cross-disciplinary skills development, networking strategies or outreach activities. Another important contribution of the Advisory Committee is to provide sympathetic support in this process. To this end, students can use the tools available in the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies section of my UdeM to fuel their reflection.

### **FOLLOW-UP**

Following the Advisory Committee meeting, all members must sign the Advisory Committee Report. The student must also countersign this document to certify that he or she has read the report.

**It is the student's responsibility to submit his or her Report to the graduate program director (*Responsable de programme*) no later than three weeks after the meeting. This Report must be accompanied by the evaluation documents submitted by the student ahead of the meeting.**

Any problematic situation - be it a delay in progress, various obstacles to the completion of the research project and training in general, or problems relating to the research supervision - must be clearly explained in the Advisory Committee's Report.

The graduate program director must then read the report, check whether any problem situations have been reported and, if so, discuss the matter with the department head to determine the type of follow-up required. In fact, if it seems appropriate to intervene with the student, the graduate program director has primary responsibility. However, if it is necessary to intervene with the research supervisor, this is the responsibility of the department head. If the situation warrants, the vice-dean's support may be sought.

### **CONCLUSION**

The use of a Advisory Committee contributes to the integration of students into the scientific community of the unit, department or research center. This is particularly beneficial for graduate students who have rarely had contact with professors outside the more impersonal context of undergraduate research courses or internships, or for those who are new to their host department. The Advisory Committee can also play an important advisory role in preparing for an academic career, through the diversity of role models and increased networking opportunities, both within and outside academic circles.

More broadly, this policy encourages the entire student community to connect with members of their unit, department or center, thereby fostering a sense of belonging. Members of the Advisory Committee should be seen as resource persons, mentors and potential referees for letters of recommendation.