

CANDIDATURE AND SUPERVISION

A/PROF WILLIAM SEWELL
Director of Graduate Students
Faculty of Medicine

23 Feb 2011

OUTLINE

- Annual Progress Reviews & Confirmation of Candidature;
- Marginal/Unsatisfactory Progress Reports and Termination of Candidature;
- Upgrade/Downgrade;
- Leave;
- Change of Supervisor;
- Supervision policy.

ANNUAL PROGRESS REVIEWS

- Includes a panel review with at least 2 experienced academics independent of supervisors
- Review process varies widely across Schools
- Ideally the student should have the same panel throughout, but may be difficult to achieve
- Can include an opportunity for the panel to speak with the student alone and the supervisor alone
- Confirmation review should particularly assess:
 - Will the project lead to a PhD?
 - Does the student have sufficient research skills to get a PhD?

PROGRESS REVIEWS

- For many good students, the panel review is uneventful.
- Nevertheless the review and the associated research presentation gives students a chance to reflect on their project and progress.
- For problem students/projects, the review process prevents problems dragging on (for years...)

CASE

EARLY SUBMISSION

- A student is in her second semester of her fourth year of part-time PhD enrolment. The project has gone very well and the supervisors have recommended she write up and submit this semester.
- What do you advise?

CASE EARLY SUBMISSION

- HDC must approve submission in under 3 years FT or 4 years PT.
- Early submission must be approved by the HDC.
- Evidence needed by HDC:
 - Support from supervisors
 - Satisfactory progress review
 - Papers published or at least submitted will support argument.

PROBLEM REVIEWS

- Go to Panel section of Review Form

CARROTS/STICKS

- Inducements to reluctant students or supervisors:
- Students need satisfactory progress report(s) for:
 - Confirmation of candidature
 - Upgrade from Masters to PhD
 - Extension of APA after 3 yrs
 - Submission of PhD by publications
 - PRSS funding
 - Commercialization Training Scheme funding
 - Early submission of thesis
 - ? Extension of candidature

CASE

SUPERVISOR CONTACTS PGC

- The supervisor rings the PGC to say that a PhD student, who started 6 months ago, has poor comprehension of the discipline, and is unlikely to get a PhD. The student, who has a relevant coursework masters, believes his skills are satisfactory and has refused to discontinue. The supervisor wants to get rid of the student and asks you for advice.
- What do you do?

CASE

WHAT CAN THE PCG OFFER?

- Get opinions from supervisor and student
- Can hold an early progress review
 - Would help PGC to decide if the student really is weak, or if there is a problem in the supervisor/student relationship.
- Could look into alternative supervisors/project
 - But it may be difficult to find an alternative supervisor who disagrees with the original supervisor's evaluation.
- The student may need to go through the process of an unsatisfactory progress report.
- Keep written records

TRANSFER FROM MASTERS TO PHD

- Needs:
 - Request from student
 - Support from supervisor
 - Satisfactory Progress Review
 - Recommendation from Review Panel
 - (Faculty of Medicine) A first author abstract refereed for conference presentation

TRANSFER FROM PHD TO MASTERS

- Needs:
 - Agreement from student (may be difficult)
 - Agreement from supervisor
 - Agreement from Head of School/PGC
 - Should have had at least one marginal progress report

CASE – SUPERVISOR MOVE

- One May, a Senior Research Fellow unexpectedly advises that she is moving interstate to another Go8 university. She has 3 PhD students; one started over 2 years ago, one started over one year ago and one started in February.
- The student who started in February comes to you to say he has no intention of moving interstate. He asks if he can change to another UNSW supervisor. He has an APA which he does not want to lose.
- What is your advice to him?
- What options are available to the other 2 students?

CASE – SUPERVISOR MOVE

- The student at 3 months:
 - can afford a major change in project.
 - may already have an alternative supervisor in mind.
- There is some responsibility on UNSW to find an alternative supervisor/project.
- Internal transfer of supervision & APA.
- Student in Year 3 stayed at UNSW on same project, with co-supervisor taking a bigger role in supervision.
- Student in Year 2 moved interstate with original supervisor, transferred to other university.

CHANGE OF SUPERVISOR

- Needs agreement of:
- Student
- Old supervisor
- New supervisor
- New Head of School/PGC

BREAKDOWN IN SUPERVISOR/STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

- Supervision policy states:
- If a breakdown of the supervisory relationship occurs, appropriate attempts at mediation should be made by the Head of School or the Postgraduate Coordinator.
- The Associate Dean (Research/Research Training) in the Faculty must be advised of the issues that have arisen and be involved in mediation if the issue is not able to be resolved by the School.
- Independent mediators may also be used.

CASE

BREAKDOWN IN SUPERVISOR/STUDENT RELATIONSHIP - 1

- Towards the end of his third year a student approaches you to say he wants to submit his thesis by the end of the Session, but he says his supervisor believes he has not done enough work for a PhD. There has been a breakdown in the relationship and the student does not want to spend any more time in the supervisor's laboratory.
- What do you do?

CASE

BREAKDOWN IN SUPERVISOR/STUDENT RELATIONSHIP - 2

- Give the student a full hearing.
- Discuss the issues with the supervisor.
- Organize a meeting for the student, supervisor and you (may not be productive).
- The student remains adamant that he wants to submit ASAP.
- What do you do?

CASE

BREAKDOWN IN SUPERVISOR/STUDENT RELATIONSHIP - 3

- Get 1 or 2 independent and experienced academics to review the draft thesis and judge whether it is suitable for submission.
- These reviewers reported that the thesis was suitable.
- What are the options with supervision?

CASE

BREAKDOWN IN SUPERVISOR/STUDENT RELATIONSHIP - 4

- The co-supervisor could become the supervisor.
- The PGC could find another supervisor.
- The PGC and the HDC could take responsibility for the remainder of the candidature.

PGC HAVE AUTHORITY TO APPROVE:

- Leave of up to 2 sessions
 - Further requests for leave go to HDC
- Change between full-time and part-time enrolment
- Change of supervisor within School
 - May be prudent to involve the Head of School
- Change of topic within School
 - In practice this is not often notified, and GRS does not police topics
- (Change of both topic and supervisor within School goes to HDC)

SUPERVISION

- UNSW HIGHER DEGREE RESEARCH SUPERVISION GUIDELINES suggest supervisors should do the following for each student:
 - Use a checklist early to cover aspects of candidature
 - Agree with student early on a communication plan
 - Conduct and record a training needs analysis

SUPPORT SERVICES

- PGC should be aware of UNSW support for students:
 - UNSW Student Counselling Service
 - Health
 - The Learning Centre - offers support in academic skills, academic writing for international students, thesis writing support, individual consultations
- For supervisors:
 - Supervisor workshops
- For supervisors and students:
 - Ethics guidance