

Re-envisioning Graduate Supervision at UBC Okanagan

Dr. Paul Shipley (PI), Associate Dean; Dr. Margaret Reeves, Associate Dean; Dimuth Gamage, Graduate Academic Assistant; Naeem Nedae, Graduate Academic Assistant – College of Graduate Studies, UBC Okanagan

Introduction

This study explores the strengths and challenges of graduate supervision at UBC Okanagan and aims to create a student-centered model that highlights what works best for students and where improvements are needed.

Methodology & Student Recruitment

- Institutional Ethnography as the research methodology
- Semi-structured Interviews
- 33 Participants from MSc, MA, MASc, MFA, MSN, MEd, EdD, and PhD degrees
- 40–60-minute interviews covering a range of topics on graduate supervision experiences.

Project Objectives

- Develop a comprehensive, systematic training program for graduate supervisors.
- Improve graduate student learning outcomes, well-being, and satisfaction by addressing supervisory challenges.
- Identify the student perspective of the graduate supervision practices at UBC Okanagan.

Findings

Communication

Communication emerged as the most critical concern among students who reported negative experiences with their supervisors.

Positive Findings

1. Stable communication leads to academic success.
2. Supervisors who are responsive avoid delays in program milestones.
3. Supervisors who Support Outside Research have greater success in creating Student Well-Being and Satisfaction.
4. Flexible communication methods make communication effective.

Gaps and Challenges

1. Lack of timely communication hurt student progress.
2. Insufficient Communication navigating early challenges of the program.
3. Lack of communication leads to mismatch expectations.
4. Thesis only communication limits comprehensive graduate supervision

Pedagogy in Supervision

Positive Findings

1. Student centered supervision lead for greater satisfaction.
2. Students who receive constructive feedback report improved academic performance.
3. Setting up alternative feedback structures avoid disruption in feedbacks.
4. Collaborative lab culture increase pedagogical opportunities.

Gaps and Challenges

1. Imposed Research Topics Without Proper Support
2. Lack of Pedagogical Guidance in New Research Areas
3. Generic and Insufficient Feedback
4. Toxic and aggressively competitive lab culture disrupts learning process



Diversity and Inclusion in Supervision

1. Cultural tensions can emerge even among students and supervisors from similar cultural backgrounds
2. Some female students reported challenges within male-dominated supervision and lab environments.
3. Support services, including mental health resources, often lack cultural sensitivity and awareness.

Conclusion

The findings emphasize the need for structured training for supervisors that prioritizes student-centered practices, timely and constructive feedback, and an inclusive academic environment.

Based on the findings of this study we are working on developing three training courses covering three major focuses in the study. We expect to deliver the message from the students and putting together potential solutions for the recognized issues.