PhD Supervisory Committee Meeting Guidelines

Department of Biochemistry & Biomedical Sciences
Discovery. Innovation. Inspiration.

University regulations require all graduate students meet formally with their supervisory committee to discuss their progress. Committee meetings provide a tool for both communicating and documenting students' accomplishments and their supervisory committees' expectations.

Supervisors are responsible for assembling their student's committee members. The research interests of all committee members will encompass the thesis topic of the student. The committee will consist of the student's supervisor plus two other members (at least one must be a full-time faculty or associate member from the Biochemistry and Biomedical Sciences Department). A third member, whose scholarly interests include the area ofthe student's main interest, may be from outside the department.

Students are responsible for scheduling their committee meetings. To ensure committee meetings are on time, we ask students to enter the date, time and committee members by completing the Committee Meeting MS Form.

Doctoral students will use the online form through *Admin Tools* to document their committee meetings. Each student will receive an automated email from the School of Graduate Studies containing a link in order to access the system. It is the student's responsibility to confirm their committee members and complete their portion of the virtual forms before submitting. Once rated, the student must review their supervisor's comments and submit the completed form to the Assistant Dean of the Biochemistry graduate program for approval using the online system.

Students will be assigned one of five grades by each of their committee members: "excellent", "good", "satisfactory", "marginal" or "unsatisfactory". If marginal is given by any one member, another committee meeting must be held within 3 months to re-assess your progress. In cases where a student receives "unsatisfactory", the program will determine whether the student should be required to withdraw or be allowed to continue in the program until their next committee meeting.

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The goal of this initial meeting is to determine whether the student has a well-defined project and whether the student is making the necessary effort to become well-versed in the background literature to their field. We expect all students to attempt to master this material within their first year of graduate school. At this first meeting, the student should also have made some basic progress towards their research goals although it may be of a preliminary nature.

*Direct Entry Students

Students who enter our PhD program directly with an MSc degree from another McMaster Department or Institution or with only a first degree (BSc) are required to schedule their first Supervisory Committee meeting within **SIX** months of initial registration. A proposal will be prepared and defended at a 2-hour PhD Candidacy Examination following our guidelines at approximately **12** months after initial registration. This meeting will include participation of a chair and their committee members.

*Annual Meetings

Subsequently, doctoral students are required to meet with their supervisory committee on an annual basis within the academic period September 1 – August 31. **NOTE**: ***July and August are busy months for conferences and vacation, therefore we strongly urge students to schedule their meeting before the end of June if possible***. The student's supervisor will report the occurrence of each year's meeting to the departmental Graduate Adviser (Dr. John Whitney). Students are responsible for maintaining their own record of these meetings in order to gauge their compliance with this policy. Continued financial support for a student is contingent upon their making good progress in their program of study, and meeting with their committee every year is part of the expected progress.
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***Committee Report – Submitted to committee members one week prior to your meeting**

Students must submit a maximum 10 page report (double spaced, not including figures) to their committee that briefly introduces their project, the work they have done previously (i.e. prior to the previous committee meeting) and since the last meeting. It is imperative that work completed since the previous meeting be identified so that the committeecan assess the progress that has been made at the bench.

In addition to having sound scientific judgment, nothing is more central to the career of a scientist than being able to clearly explain scientific concepts in writing. We therefore expect our students to master the art of writing scientifically and these reports are part of this process: they will serve as important dress rehearsals for writing papers and theses later on. Any criticisms made of meeting reports will be revisited at subsequent meetings and itis expected that they will have been acted on.

We expect all students to master the literature that is relevant to their project during the first year of graduate studies: this includes those papers that make up the foundation of their project as well as those that deal with relevant technical issues. One way of assessing progress in this area is the reference list at the end of each report: these should be thorough citations and must be made using one of the formats accepted by journals (see for example https://journals.asm.org/writing-your-paper#references).

The standards for presentation of data in these reports are identical to those in the journals: lanes in gels must be labeled, strains on plates must be identified, micrographs must be clearly labeled, graphs must include error bars as appropriate and so on. The last page or two of each report should set out what the student expects to achieve in the block of time (usually 6 or 12 months) leading up to their next meeting. This does not need to be a detailed description of every technique to be employed, rather the goal is to explain the scientific questions to be addressedand briefly outline the approach that will be taken.

***Committee Meeting**

At the beginning of the meeting the student will give a 15-20 minute presentation. The presentation should provide the rationale of the project, a description of the experimental approaches being used an overview of progress, ongoing work, and future directions. The Committee will then discuss the project in detail with the student. Students receive a grade and specific recommendations in writing following each committee meeting. Students whose performance is not considered to be up to par will be graded “unsatisfactory” for that meeting. Depending on the circumstances, two grades of unsatisfactory can be grounds for dismissal from the program.

***What happens at a committee meeting?**

Typically, students will come prepared to give a 15-20 minute presentation based on what they have described in their meeting report. Students should feel free to bring up any issues on which they would like guidance. The most common format is that committee members will interrupt the student as they proceed through their work and ask questions about anything that is relevant to the topic. This can include challenges on the interpretation of data, first principles and scientific questions that are relevant to the topic or to planned experiments. Committee members may ask the student to briefly explain any of the references they cite in their report.

Students are asked to bring lab notebooks containing relevant experimental observations to each meeting. One important aspect of the scientific method is the reproducibility of each important observation: typically the most publishable version of an experiment will be shown in the meeting report, however, students must be able to provide evidence that each observation has been made more than once.

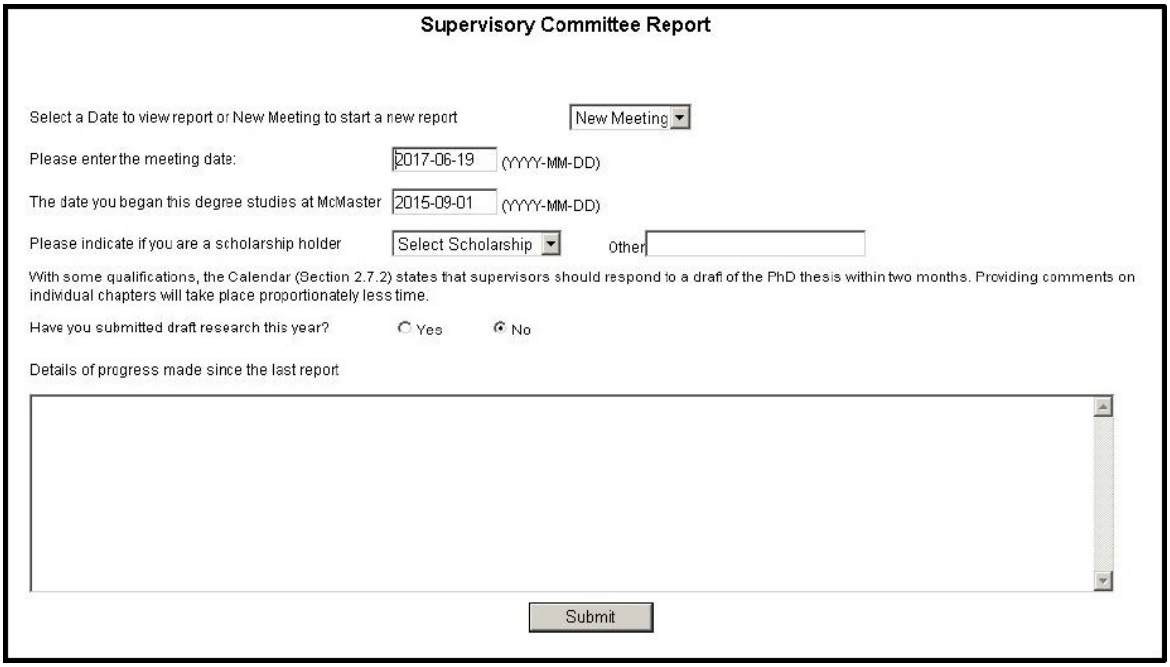
***What happens if I only have negative data?**

Anyone who has worked as a scientist knows that even with determined effort, there will be periods when the only progress one can make is to learn that the avenue being investigated is a dead end. A student, who has made a good effort, carried out technically competent, well-controlled experiments but not cracked the puzzle they are working on, will not be penalized. A good committee will know when a student needs encouragement in this regard and indeed, many students find that a committee meeting can be a good way to assess whether they should move on to some more profitable line of investigation.

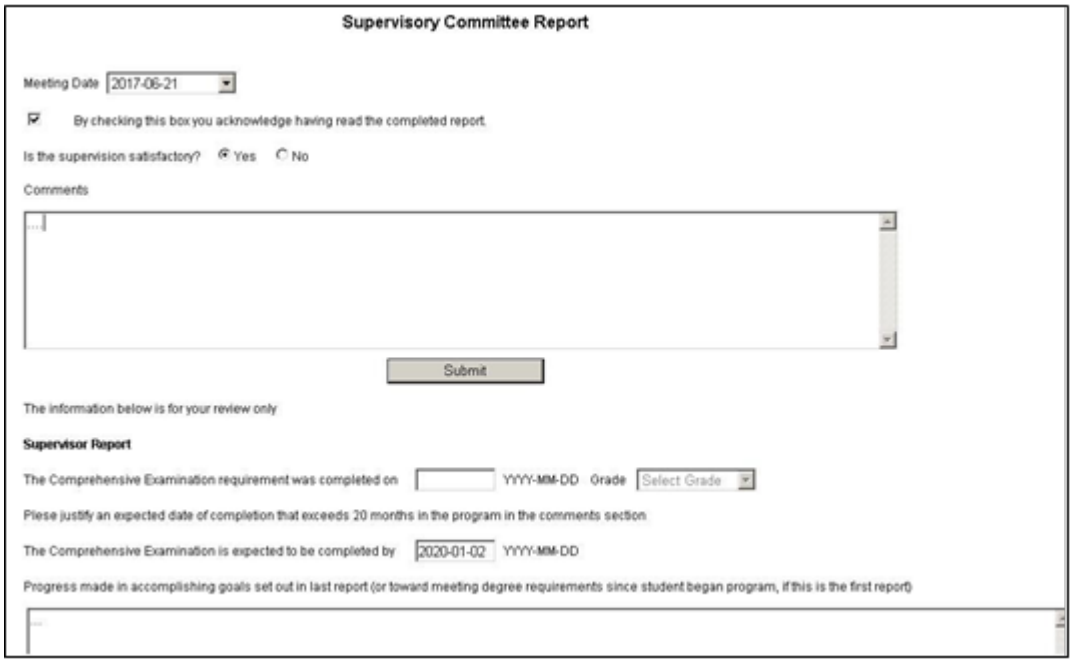
Supervisory Committee ONLINE Meeting Report Guide for Doctoral Students

***Important Note:** this document refers to the online process for PhD committee meeting forms; not to be confused with the ten page committee report.

1. You will receive an automated email from the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) inviting you to begin your report (i.e. digital committee meeting forms). The email will be sent from the BBS graduate program office once your meeting is confirmed. If you do not receive an email, please notify the grad program office
2. Click the link in the email to review your supervisory committee members on a new screen using *Admin Tools*.
    - If any changes need to be made, please notify the grad office **before** continuing
    - If the 'continue' button is greyed out and not clickable, please contact the grad office
3. Click 'continue' to notify SGS that your committee is correct as listed.
4. Once you've confirmed your committee, you'll be brought to the screen below. Enter your new meeting details, or you can use the below screen to review past meeting reports (for those which have been documented using this system).
    - Please be sure to enter your progress since your last report (or if this is your first meeting, your progress since starting your research)



5. Click submit to send your report to your primary supervisor.
    - Your supervisor will receive an email inviting them to review your submission and fill-in their portion of the report
    - Your supervisor will submit the report to your committee members
6. Once your committee members review your report and submit their rating, you will be sent another email with a link to access the completed report:



7. Please read the completed report, and check-off the box indicating that you have done so.
    - You are also able to indicate whether you feel your supervision is satisfactory, and add comments
8. Click ‘submit’ to send the final report to the Assistant Dean of the Biochemistry graduate program for approval.
9. Once approved, the report will be sent to SGS, and a milestone will be added to your student record.