

Faculty of Medicine: Complaint Procedures for PGR Students Possible Remedial and Disciplinary Actions

Preamble:

The supervision of postgraduate students can be viewed as a mentoring role for a research apprenticeship: by the end of the studies the student should be capable of initiating and developing independent research with a commitment to high standards of professional conduct. The aim of the supervision process is to ensure that the student has access to supervisors whose skills complement each other, such that they are able to provide the combination of appropriate skills, expertise and support for the student's research program.

In considering the nature of the student-supervisor relationship, it should be remembered that one of the aims is for continuous effective intellectual interaction and oversight of the research at all times. Therefore, careful thought needs to be given to the issue of personal compatibility as well as a common academic interest. In addition, there should be clear definitions of the responsibilities and expectations of each of the parties (student, supervisor, and associate supervisor).

From time to time complaints may arise from students or supervisors relating to academic or procedural issues relating to the research candidature, issues relating to the work environment, or issues relating to the supervisory process itself. These guidelines have been developed to assist students, supervisors, Postgraduate Coordinators, and Discipline Heads in the fair and successful resolution of such conflicts.

General Procedural Principles:

Complaints should be dealt with as sensitively as possible. It should be remembered that the complainant may be unsure or apprehensive about making the complaint, and concerned about possible repercussions.

The principles below apply to any dispute needing resolution:

Timeliness:

Disputes should be resolved as quickly as possible. Unresolved disputes can have a very negative impact on student and supervisor performance. Wherever practicable, time-lines should be developed, and the student and supervisor kept informed as to progress in the resolution of the dispute.

Confidentiality:

All conflicts between students and supervisors must be treated strictly confidentially at all stages of the resolution process, and information relating to the procedure limited to staff who need to know about it in order for it to be dealt with appropriately.

Without Disadvantage:

A student or supervisor making a complaint should be confident that they will not be disadvantaged in any way, especially by way of victimisation.

Procedural Fairness:

All staff involved in the resolution process should ensure that the principles of natural justice are followed, including:

- the opportunity of all individuals involved to put their points of view forward (either in the form of written documents or at the time of interview as appropriate);
- handling of the procedures in an unbiased manner;
- protection of the rights of all parties concerned;

- clear communication in sufficient detail as to the basis on which decisions have been made

Support:

Whilst a conciliatory approach is to be encouraged, on occasion it may be necessary for an individual involved in the conflict resolution process to have another person present as a support person, or to speak on his/her behalf.

Record-keeping:

Once a complaint has been made, it is essential that proper records are maintained of the procedures followed and outcomes, and should include note taking of any informal discussions.

Access:

Students and supervisors would normally have right of free access to all formal documents relating to the resolution of the conflict, with the exception of any documents for which the University claims legal professional privilege.

Purpose of the Annual Progress Report (APR)

The annual progress report form and the annual review process are mechanisms whereby the faculty can be assured that satisfactory progress is being made. It is also a very useful means of informing the Faculty if there is a problem. The APR form is the place to put on record any difficulties which may or may not have been unavoidable including, for example periods of personal illness or misadventure, difficulties with supervision and technical difficulties.

Specific Procedures:

***PG Coordinator and Head of PSAU (in discussion with Chair, CBPGS)
then, if unresolved***

Institute Director/Precinct Sub-Dean Research (or Sub-Dean PG Students)

1. Discussion and explanation of issues
2. Advice and counselling for both parties
3. Reassignment of Student to another Supervisor
4. Referral to Faculty Director of Research and Head, PSAU, in association with Chair, CBPGS

Faculty Director of Research and Head, PSAU, in association with Chair, CBPGS

1. All of above, plus:
2. Recommendation that Supervisor attend Supervisors Courses from ITL
3. Recommendation that Supervisor be not allowed to continue as a Primary Supervisor until:
 - Supervisor has completed ITL courses, and/or
 - Supervisor has satisfactorily completed time as Associate Supervisor for a number (to be recommended) of PGR students
4. Recommendation that Supervisor's immediate Academic Senior be requested to take issues into account in PM&D
5. Referral to Dean of Faculty

Dean of Faculty

1. All of above, plus
2. Formal reprimand be entered onto staff file
3. Withdrawal of Supervisory privileges
4. Withdrawal of a sum equivalent to the PGR load payment to Medical Research Institutes from the School Budget or the Medical Research Institute payment under the MoU with the Faculty
5. Show cause with a view to Dismissal

Vice Chancellor

1. Matters referred to the Vice Chancellor from outside the University

Initial Interview and Discussion:

The person making the complaint should be assured that no further action will be taken without consultation. If the complainant is not prepared to have the other person involved informed then the complaint cannot be acted upon.

The complainant should be advised that he/she may bring a support person to the interview if desired. At that interview, the University's relevant policy (if in existence) should be clarified with the complainant, including the rights of all concerned, and there should be discussion as to the options available.

The complainant may have intended only to draw attention to a problem, and may request no further action. If, however, the Postgraduate Coordinator, Head of Discipline or Chair of the Board of Postgraduate Studies feels that the issue warrants further action (eg for a safety issue), the complainant should be informed that the matter will be investigated further.

During any formal interviews it is advisable to have another staff member present or, depending on the complaint, an independent observer. If the complaint involves another individual, that individual must be informed of the complaint, and assured that his/her rights will be protected. Where a formal interview takes place, all those attending should be informed beforehand who will be present.

A formal report of the interview should be prepared, and all parties at the interview should be given a copy of the report, and have the opportunity to make a written response within seven days.

Investigation:

Depending on the nature of the complaint, Faculty may refer matters or seek advice or assistance from University staff and services including the Chair of the PhD Award Subcommittee, Director of the Student Centre, Director of EEO, Safety Officer, Risk Management Office, HR Services/Industrial Relations, Security, the Office of General Counsel.

Some examples of issues and where they would be handled appear in the table below:

Issue:	Referred to:
Poor supervision	Faculty
Plagiarism	Faculty
Research misconduct	Faculty
Authorship	Faculty/Business Liaison Office
Intellectual Property	Faculty/Business Liaison Office
Bullying or harassment	Staff and Student Equal Opportunity Unit
Disability or Illness	Counselling/Disability Unit
Corruption or maladministration	Internal Audit

Resolution and Follow Up:

All parties involved should be in agreement before the matter can be considered completely resolved. An agreement may be reached which does not fully resolve the matter, but which is accepted as a workable solution by those concerned. Those involved in handling the complaint initially should be informed of the outcome. Steps should be taken to ensure where possible that the problem does not recur, and to prevent possible victimisation. It may also prove necessary to provide additional support (eg provision of counselling services, further training or other remedial action) for the parties concerned.

Additional Support Services:

Counselling Service

<http://www.usyd.edu.au/stuserv/counselling/>

The Counselling Service can be accessed by all local students at the University of Sydney. The service helps students achieve academic and personal goals by developing strategies to deal with immediate issues and help build new skills for long term change. The types of issues dealt with are:

- Dealing with Interpersonal relationships
- Communicating with academic staff and students
- Managing Stress and anxiety
- Loneliness or isolation
- Traumatic events
- Procrastination and Study Issues
- Mental Health
- Grief and Loss

International Student Support Unit

<http://www.usyd.edu.au/stuserv/issu/>

The International Student Support Unit (ISSU) provides support to International students through the provision of information, activities, advice and counselling. The service is open to all full degree and study abroad/exchange students and their families or partners. The counsellors have experience in helping people cope with many issues including cross-cultural concerns.

Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA)

<http://www.usyd.edu.au/supra/>

SUPRA is the postgraduate student organisation at The University of Sydney and is run by postgraduate students for postgraduate students. SUPRA represents all postgraduates at the University of Sydney and all postgraduates can look to SUPRA for representation and confidential support and assistance with any issue that may confront them - both academically and personally - during the course of their candidature.

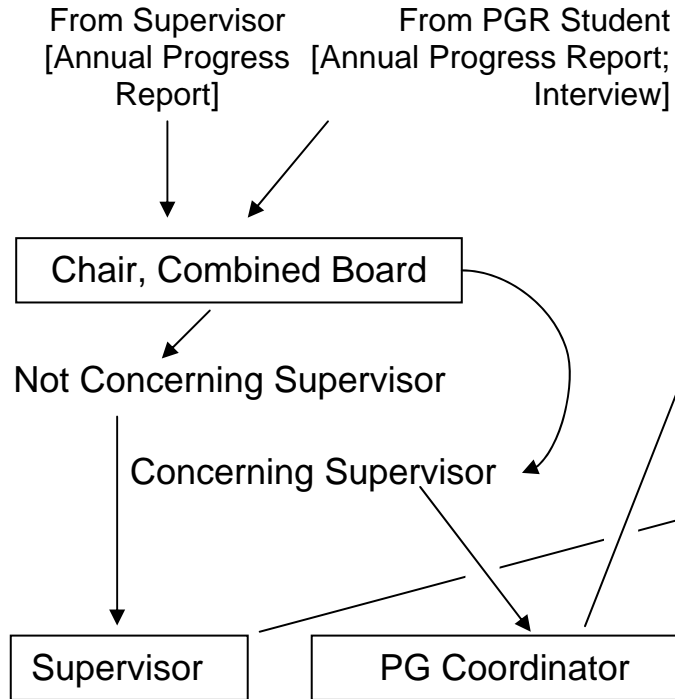
SUPRA advises and acts on behalf of individual students and can assist with supervisory problems, appeals, or anything that may impact on a postgraduate student's academic or general welfare.

RELEVANT POLICIES INCLUDE:

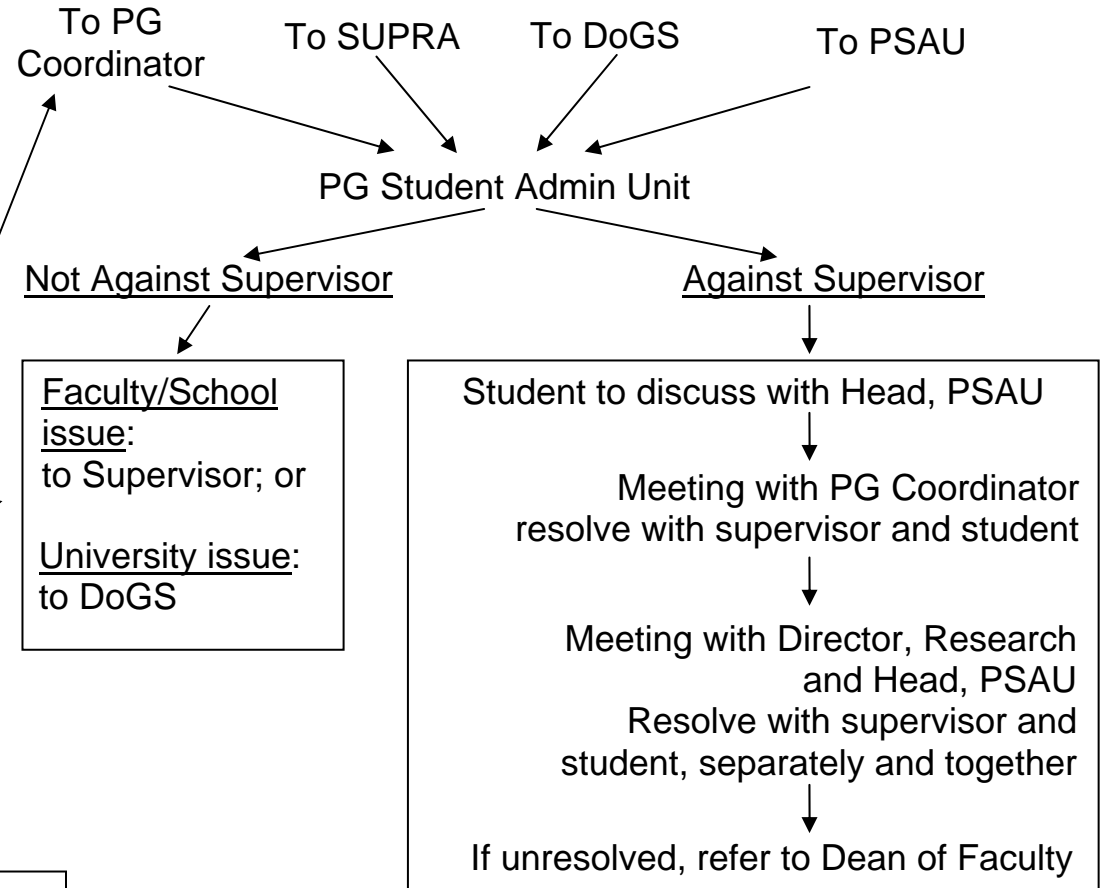
- A. Code of practice for supervision of postgraduate research students
<http://www.usyd.edu.au/ab/policies/Supervision_PG_Rsch_Students.pdf>
- B. Research: Code of Conduct for Responsible Research Practice and Guidelines for Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct
<http://www.usyd.edu.au/ab/policies/Rsch_Code_Conduct.pdf>
- C. Research Principles <http://www.usyd.edu.au/su/ab/policies/Research_Principles.pdf>
- D. Discrimination prevention policy - your rights and responsibilities
<<http://www.usyd.edu.au/eeo/docs/discrim.pdf>>
- E. NSW Animal Research Act (1985) and the Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes 7th Edition (NH&MRC 2004)
- F. National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans
<<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/Publishing.nsf/Content/404Ref.htm>>
- G. University of Sydney (Intellectual Property) Rule 2002
<http://www.usyd.edu.au/hr/policydev/Intellectual_Property_Rule.pdf>
- H. Higher Degree Theses <http://www.usyd.edu.au/ab/policies/Higher_Degree_Theses.pdf>
- I. Resolution of Complaints Policy
http://www.usyd.edu.au/senate/policies/Resolution_of_Complaints.pdf

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Informal Complaint/Feedback



Formal Complaint



Abbreviations
 DoGS: Dean of Graduate Studies
 PSAU: Postgraduate Student Administration Unit
 SUPRA: Sydney University Postgraduate **R**epresentative **A**ssociation