

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO FACULTY OF LAW

SJD SUPERVISION GUIDELINES

Incorporating university guidelines, the current view of best practice in the University, and the results of consultation with graduate students and faculty, we have prepared the following guidelines for doctoral students regarding the Law Faculty's expectations in respect of SJD supervision.

Please review the following guidelines and contact either Associate Dean Mariana Mota Prado or Assistant Dean Judith McCormack with any questions.

1. Once a supervisor has been selected, you and the faculty supervisor should establish a program for the year. If you are not regularly handing in written work, it is incumbent on both you and your supervisor to discuss this issue. You and your supervisor should together establish the committee – made up of two other faculty – and the decision about its composition should be made by the end of the first term.
2. As a general matter, **you should NOT include committee members from outside the University of Toronto**. A faculty appointment would be required for an external expert to be eligible to serve on the supervisory committee, and this is quite difficult to do for non-UofT faculty. In exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to appoint an external expert to the supervisory committee. In such a situation, you or your supervisor must discuss the matter with the Associate Dean before approaching the individual in question. To be clear, external experts may be involved informally in advising a student, or later be part of the examination committee as a non-voting member. And, of course, there will always be an official external examiner at the end of the doctoral program.
3. When written work is handed in to the supervisor, you may reasonably expect that it is returned with oral and/or written comments **within 2-3 weeks**. These comments should be precise enough to contribute directly to the improvement of the written work. Obviously, the work might be handed in at a very bad time for the supervisor and you have to be sensitive to this fact. In such cases, the supervisor must give you a firm commitment to a later meeting on a specific date. Students must keep in mind that the longer the draft submitted, the more time required for feedback. When you are approaching the throes of finishing, you must meet with the supervisor well before to establish a feasible schedule for feedback under more time-constrained conditions.
4. The relationship between the student and the other members of the committee (normally two faculty members) is more difficult to formalize. This relationship is best worked out between the supervisor and the other members so that there are clear expectations. One of the other members (and probably only one) might want to wait until there is a full draft of the thesis before participating in feedback. Generally, it is better if the committee comments on chapters as these are produced. In the latter case, there is a lot to be said for revising in light of one set of comments before submission to someone else, as this allows for progressive improvement.
5. It is imperative that you **meet with your entire committee at least once a year**. We are required by the School of Graduate Studies to enter a record of this meeting into ROSI and collect a signed "Annual Meeting" form; SGS is now conducting random audits of units to check that this

is being done. Students can find Annual Meeting forms on the Faculty of Law website [under Graduate Program Policies & Forms](#).

6. Research leaves by faculty members, including sabbaticals and teaching relief, are not regarded by the University as breaks from one's SJD supervisory obligations. Regular supervision should be continued through e-mail, Skype, and other means of communication.
7. In order to continue into the second year, all SJD students have to pass an **area exam at the end of the first year**. The point of the area exam is to ensure that you are working productively in the first year and are ready to go forward with the thesis in subsequent years. This area exam brings our program into line with the other departments in the Humanities and Social Sciences, by imposing a formal test for progress in the first year of the doctorate. The main aim of the exam is to ensure that students have begun serious work on their theses in the first year. A secondary aim is to ensure that the committee system is up and running in the first year. The exam must be passed before the end of June of the first year. There are two models:
 - a. The first, and the one most law students adopt, requires the student to hand in a draft chapter or a detailed overview of the thesis (between 30 and 50 pages). The student then meets with the committee to discuss the written work and its relation to the thesis. The committee must be satisfied, on the basis of both the written work and the discussion, that the student has put in place the foundation for further work and has a sense of how to go about that project. It is important therefore that the written work not amount to a mere survey of material. It should also demonstrate the student's ability to argue.
 - b. The second model is for students who do not feel ready to hand in written work and who prefer to demonstrate their command of the central theoretical issues that they will have to address. Instead of handing in written work, these students will compile with the committee a reading list focused on the area of their thesis. Once the students have mastered that reading list, the committee will set a written exam – 3 hours, with a choice of 3 out of 6 or 7 questions. Following that exam, the student will meet with the committee for an oral discussion of the written exam, which can include discussion of the unanswered questions. Again, the committee must be satisfied on the basis of both the written and the oral components that the student is capable of continuing with the doctorate.
8. **Please note that the area exam is a real exam.** If the committee does not think that you have produced sufficient material for the area exam, or if you have not performed adequately at an area exam, you must be informed and given precise direction about how to improve your performance. In the latter case, a second exam should be scheduled as soon as possible. If at this second exam you again fail to perform adequately, we will discuss with the committee whether you should be asked to withdraw from the program. The same is true if you fail to produce sufficient material for an area exam to take place in the first place. We urge supervisors to ensure that the committee is in fact confident that the student has demonstrated an ability to proceed with the thesis. After completing the area exam, students must submit the completed Area Exam and Annual Meeting forms to the Graduate Program Coordinator.

9. **In the second year, SJD students must present** an overview of their dissertation and one chapter in a public presentation including their committee members, other interested faculty, the Associate Dean, the Assistant Dean, and fellow SJD students. Students must canvass the Associate Dean and faculty supervisor first for availability, then request scheduling and invitations with the Assistant Dean and Graduate Coordinator. At least four weeks' notice on this is appreciated to ensure proper turnout, and therefore the most valuable feedback. As well, the Graduate Program Coordinator must be advised of the confirmed date/time at least four weeks in advance in order to book the room and send out a mass-invite to students. Most presentations take place between March and June at the end of the second year.
10. As a rough guide, it is reasonable to expect that an SJD student will have completed drafts of around three chapters by the end of the second year, and have a draft of almost the whole thesis by the end of the third year. Please note that in March/April of each year, our office is thinking about funding decisions for the next year. SJD students are guaranteed funding for three years; funding thereafter depends on what we have available. Needs always outstrip our resources and our view is that the exercise of discretion about funding into the fourth year should depend on the extent to which the supervisor and committee are able to certify that you are within striking distance of completing the thesis. Our resources for fourth-year funding are very limited and in some years, formal application must be made.
11. When an SJD oral exam or **defence** is in sight, the Graduate Program Coordinator must be approached so that she can explain the process. A defence normally takes 10-12 weeks to schedule from the time it is first discussed with the Graduate Program Coordinator. The exam should take place at a time when the supervisor and the committee are in Toronto. School of Graduate Studies regulations do allow the use of a speaker phone. Of course, it may be possible to coordinate the exam date with a speaking engagement at the Faculty or University (and so cover the visit from a workshop or conference budget).
12. If a problem arises in regard to supervision, please inform the Graduate Office and we will try to assist in resolving it.
13. What follows is a rough set of markers for successful completion of a SJD thesis:

Year 1

- September – meet with Associate Dean and Assistant Dean about the program requirements and supervision.
- September – meet with supervisor to discuss thesis and agree on at least two more meetings for the term to develop the proposal and decide on the committee.
- January – meet with committee to discuss developed proposal and the area exam.
- March/April – get comments from supervisor on draft of chapter, which will then be revised for the area exam or finalize reading list that will be the basis of the exam.
- June (at the latest) – have area exam.

Year 2

- September – meet with supervisor to discuss plans for the year, including the draft chapters you will produce. Set up mode of communication with your committee.
- Before the end of April, meet with committee to discuss progress and direction; submit annual meeting form.
- At some point before July, present account of work in progress to committee and fellow SJD students at an SJD presentation, scheduled through the Graduate Office.

Year 3

- September – meet with supervisor to discuss production of the final draft.
- Beginning of March – meet with committee to discuss progress so that supervisor can establish a timetable for completion of the thesis.

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