GUIDE TO FINDING A GRADUATE SUPERVISOR
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Introduction

Your supervisor will be a guiding light as you navigate through your thesis-based graduate program. It is important to choose a supervisor who shares your research interests and makes you feel comfortable to share your ideas and concerns. Your supervisor is integral to your graduate program and should show the same passion for the thesis research as you do.

At uLethbridge, several of our research-based programs require securing a potential supervisor in your desired field of research and discipline, prior to submitting an application.

Be sure to start contacting prospective supervisors early as it can take time to receive a response. Making an informed decision on your supervisor choice is of utmost importance.

Whether you are currently completing your undergrad degree or you are returning to post-secondary education to advance your knowledge, this guide will provide useful tips and instructions to help you find a supervisor that is right for you.

Before You Start
Do you need to select a supervisor? Every graduate program at uLethbridge has different admission requirements and procedures. While some thesis-based programs require securing a supervisor prior to applying, others require supervisory support after submitting your application or starting your program. Make sure to carefully read the admission requirements of the graduate program into which you are planning to apply, available on our website. If it is unclear whether your program of interest requires securing a supervisor, contact us by filling out our inquiry form.
Undergraduate Considerations

The process of finding a faculty member you want to learn from can start as early as your undergraduate degree, while you are still taking classes and are narrowing down your research interests. Prior to choosing a graduate program, there are helpful steps you can take to decide if the program or a supervisor is right for your future academic career aspirations:

- Take courses in the department with supervisors you are interested in learning from, and
- Volunteer or participate in an independent or applied study course with a potential supervisor whose research areas align with your interests.

Doing so will give you firsthand experience with a supervisor and his/her teaching and mentoring styles, as well as develop a foundation for a professional supervisor-student relationship.

Role of the supervisor in a thesis-based program

The role of your supervisor is to provide academic mentorship and guidance, and to evaluate your performance and progress as a graduate student. Supervisors must provide professional guidance and aid, and support you in your academic journey to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to plan and conduct original research. Read the School of Graduate Studies Policy and Procedures to learn more about the role and responsibilities of a graduate supervisor, including:

- Make a commitment to supervise the student throughout the program and help the student to achieve the highest levels of academic achievement.
- Ensure the student has adequate supervision at all times during one’s program.
- Be open and accessible to the student.
- Give the student ongoing guidance on expected academic standards and rigorous research.
Deciding on Potential Supervisors

Identifying your needs as a graduate student
Now that you know more about the role and responsibilities of the supervisor, you should begin asking yourself questions about your own research interests and learning style:

- What topics of research do I want to explore? Why do I find a particular topic or area of study interesting? How familiar am I with this topic?
- What skills and knowledge do I have that compliment my research interests? What expert knowledge do I want to acquire? What skills do I want to enhance or develop?
- What level of supervision do I thrive under when completing independent learning? Am I an independent learner and worker, or do I require more supervisor involvement and guidance?

These questions will help you understand your personal needs as a graduate student. It is important that both the student and supervisor are able to communicate clearly and to understand roles, responsibilities, and expectations.

Deciding on potential supervisors
Once you've determined your field of study, and, if the graduate program of your interest requires securing a potential supervisor at pre-admission stage, you can begin your search.

The Future Student Website provides information on the research interests of each supervisor. Specifically, on the Search Supervisors page you are able to filter supervisors by various search options. Based on the program and shared research interests, decide on a dream list of potential supervisors. If you don’t find what you’re looking for in one department, look at the research profiles of Faculty in a related field!
When looking for a potential supervisor, use these various search options to narrow down your list of potential supervisors:

**Faculty search:** Choose the faculty that offers the program of your interest

**Discipline search:** Use this search if you are looking for an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary graduate program offered by uLethbridge (e.g., MA or PhD majoring in Cultural, Social, and Political Thought, MA/MSc majoring in Individualized Multidisciplinary, etc.).

**Department search:** Select a department from the dropdown list to see the available potential supervisors in that department or area.

**Keyword search:** Type the keywords related to a research area, discipline or topic that interests you to find a faculty member with similar expertise. This search option is also helpful when you are looking for a faculty member for an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary program.

**Note:**
A program search parameter is not available, which means you cannot filter faculty members by your desired graduate program. However, the four search options described above will help you find a faculty member in your discipline/research area of interest. For example, if you are looking for a supervisor for the MSc in Remote Sensing program, you can a) look under the ‘Geography’ Department search option; or b) type in ‘Remote Sensing’ in Keyword search field or c) simply filter the list by ‘Sciences’ Discipline search.
Contacting a Supervisor

The Search Supervisors page mentioned previously provides a Student/Supervisor Contact form that you can access by selecting a faculty member's name and clicking the Contact Me button on his/her information page.

This is the preferred method for contacting a prospective supervisor, and the best method for receiving a timely response. It is advisable to have a CV/Resume prepared with your educational history, research interests, and CV/Resume highlights (e.g., work experience, scholarships, publications, conference papers) to aid you as you fill in the contact form. **Do not copy and paste your CV into the form.**

When drafting your responses, think of it as your introduction to a potential supervisor who you want to have a positive first impression of you and your background. Be concise but informative by choosing relevant highlights that emphasize your skills, knowledge, and research interests. As soon as you submit the Contact Form for the faculty member of your choice, both you and the faculty member will receive an email copy of your submission.
As the faculty member receives your electronic submission as an email, not as a file attachment, there is no option to alter the formatting of text. Therefore, we highly encourage limiting the total number of words for each submission to a maximum of 500 words to avoid sending lengthy and unreadable emails. **Remember: a positive first impression is your goal.** There are various tools (e.g., Microsoft Word, WordCounter) available online that can help you determine the word count for each of your submission.

Below are the short answer questions included in form:

![Image](image-url)

**Note:**
Some faculty may request additional information such as unofficial copy of transcripts, CV, a sample of writing, and research proposal.

After contacting a potential supervisor, please allow 5 business days for the faculty member to respond. Faculty members are very busy and it may take time for them to respond to your email. You may wish to send a follow-up email that includes copies of your CV, your transcripts and any references that you might be able to provide. If you still do not hear from the faculty member after sending a message followed by a reminder, start looking for an alternative supervisor to contact. It may be that this supervisor is not currently taking graduate students or not available to supervise for the intended start date of your program of interest.

Some faculty members may not respond to an email from a potential student that appears generic, too vague, lacking preparation, or unrelated to that supervisor’s particular field of study.
When making contact with potential supervisors, keep in mind these tips:

• First, familiarize yourself with their research areas and projects by viewing their profiles online and reading a couple of their publications.

• When filling out the Contact form (available on each faculty member profile) indicate your awareness of their research and how the potential supervisor’s expertise and research areas fit/align with your interests (be specific, refer to their publications, and link your research interests with their research areas and projects).

• Address your message carefully. For example, if you are submitting a contact form to “Susan Smith, PhD”, address as “Dear Dr. Smith” in your message. (Note: Greetings such as “Respected Sir/Madam” and or “Dear Ms. Smith” demonstrate a lack of prior research on the faculty member’s rank, position, and gender).

• Let them know your intention to apply to a relevant major in a specific graduate degree program and your reasons for wanting to work with them.

• Tell them a couple of relevant highlights/points about your background and your experience with research projects, if applicable.

• Ask if it is OK to list him/her as a prospective supervisor in your application.

• Customize every email or response submitted to each faculty member as much as possible to begin developing a positive first impression and building a student-supervisor relationship.

• Keep your responses concise and informative, think of it as your first impression as you introduce yourself to a potential supervisor.

• Proofread your email or have someone proofread it for you. Grammatical slippages and and spelling errors reveal a lot about your academic abilities and your attention to detail.

• If you already have funding, state the amount, duration and source.

Reach out to the Department Chairs
If you are still struggling with identifying a supervisor, reaching out to the Department Chair might be beneficial (listed in the University Directory). Each Department Chair is familiar with the research areas of each member of the department and may direct you to faculty members who are available to supervise graduate students. Remember, professors are busy people and they may not respond to your email immediately.
Developing a productive supervisor-student relationship with your research supervisor and supervisory committee is one of the most important and rewarding aspects of graduate education. Once you have contacted a potential supervisor, consider meeting with him/her in person, or via video conference/skype for an interview. This will provide an opportunity to start building a professional relationship and learn more about your graduate program, research opportunities, the University and Lethbridge area. Some helpful questions you may want to ask are:

- How many students have you supervised? What are they doing now?
- How often do you meet with students? Hold lab meetings?
- Do you have any planned leaves of absence during the period of study?
- Will I get the chance to present at conferences?
- Will I be working independently, or as part of a research team?
- May I contact at least one of the supervisor’s current graduate students?

Asking the potential supervisor questions shows your passion and excitement for graduate research and provides an opportunity to determine if the faculty member is a good fit for your graduate program and your research interests. Provide a copy of your CV/Resume prior to the interview with the potential supervisor. Your CV/Resume provides a snapshot of your qualifications, and help you steer the interview towards your areas of expertise!

The supervisor will be your mentor and advisor for the next two or four years. Success in the graduate program will be more easily attainable if you choose a supervisor that suits your graduate needs!
Talk to Graduate Students
Graduate students are an excellent resource to find out more about your potential supervisor. They will have firsthand knowledge on current projects, supervisor availability and supervisory style, student workload, etc. This information will give you a better sense of how the faculty member will fit your individual educational needs and how to narrow down your dream list.

Supervisor/Student Roles and Responsibilities
When entering into a graduate program, there are student and supervisor roles and responsibilities, and expectations that need to be understood to create a positive experience in your graduate program and to develop a professional student-supervisor relationship. A list of roles and responsibilities are outlined in the Student-Supervisor Guidelines document that can be used as a discussion framework to establish guidelines for supporting and managing your relationship and interactions.

Meeting the minimum admission requirements and securing a potential supervisor do not guarantee admission to the University of Lethbridge due to enrolment limitations.