

## Guide to Selecting a Supervisor

(July 2020)

An important step for those undertaking to write a major research paper or a thesis in the graduate program is finding a research supervisor. Since Ph.D. students enter the program with a supervisor already identified, this is principally a challenge for M.A. students.

The first step is for the student to identify the broad outline of the research question that sparks the student's interest. You are not required to show up at a professor's door with a fully realized proposal, but you should be ready to discuss your idea. At a minimum, you should have a sense of a general research question, a geographical area of interest, and whether you want to do a fieldwork or desk-based study. We suggest you look at the thesis or MRP proposal guidelines in order to begin to structure your thinking on the topic.

Thesis: <https://socialsciences.uottawa.ca/international-development-global-studies/programs/masters-thesis>

MRP: <https://socialsciences.uottawa.ca/international-development-global-studies/programs/masters-major-research-paper>

If you are having trouble narrowing down your topic, you can always make an appointment with the M.A. Coordinator to discuss it ([dvmMA@uottawa.ca](mailto:dvmMA@uottawa.ca)).

A second step is to identify professors that could supervise your research project. This is often intimidating to students, but you should be assured that it is part of a professor's job to supervise and therefore you should not worry that it is an imposition. You should begin by sending an email to professors with similar research interests to ask if they are taking on supervisions. You can always look at the list of professors on the EDIM website to see their profiles as well as to get their contact information. <https://socialsciences.uottawa.ca/international-development-global-studies/about-school/professors>

Remember, you can look for a supervisor in another department, and the fit doesn't have to be perfect – generally you should look for a professor who does research in EITHER a similar thematic OR geographical area. Looking at the departmental webpages (other departments in the Faculty of Social Sciences), and professor profiles listed on UNIWEB is also a good place to start:

<https://uniweb.uottawa.ca/>

You can also look up professors' research on webpages such as Google Scholar, academia.edu, researchgate.net, or via the university library databases.

We realize that professors can be difficult to reach, particularly in July and August. If you are looking for a supervisor during the regular semesters (Fall and Winter) a good strategy is to contact a professor during their office hours. If you have tried to meet with a potential supervisor and failed (failed to get an answer, been rebuffed, etc.), please contact the Secretariat ([EDIM.SIDGS@uottawa.ca](mailto:EDIM.SIDGS@uottawa.ca)) or the M.A. coordinator so that we can discuss options with you, and/or follow up with potential supervisors.

A third step is to arrange a meeting in person/telephone/video conference. Often that first meeting with a possible supervisor will help you determine if the fit is good, and help you narrow down the topic. In general, you should look to get the following information from such a meeting:

- A sense of how you could focus your topic, and whether the professor would be interested/available to supervise the project
- A sense of the professor's supervisory style and how that fits with your needs as a student, and your style of working. (How "independent" does the professor expect you to be; how often are meetings to be held; how much time to turn-around chapters that you produce; expectations regarding fieldwork; vision of a timeline for the research project.)
- Next steps to officialize the student-supervisor relationship. (Many profs will ask you to produce a draft proposal before officially signing on to be your supervisor – and this is effectively a requirement for the MRP process).

Once this step is accomplished, you should be well on your way to beginning your research project.

#### **Timelines:**

There is not an official timeline for you to find a supervisor, but the earlier the better.

However, it is absolutely necessary to have agreement in principle from the potential supervisor by the end of the second semester of your graduate program (April).

Coop. It is very important that students in the Coop program have a supervisor chosen by April (at the end of the second semester) since we find that it is essential that students have some clear plan for their research project before they begin Coop. When students don't have the plan and supervisor in place before their first Co-op placement, they tend to forget about that aspect of their studies while working, and find it very hard to start up again on a thesis or MRP once the work placement is complete. In other words, *not having a supervisor and research plan in place before beginning a Coop placement is almost certain to extend the length of your program, unnecessarily, by a semester or two.*