

Choosing a Supervisor

There are a number of web sites with information on 'choosing a thesis supervisor' but some of these make generalizations based on research in the sciences as much as the humanities and social sciences. They may not take into account work in an interdisciplinary program like ours, or the specific nature of the university you are at. I have listed some web sites below that you can look at, though I would urge you to do so carefully and critically. I have taken a few points directly from the first web site listed below (Canadian Association for Graduate Studies) with some additions:

- In the social sciences and humanities, research topics generally originate from the students themselves so they do not need to make sure that your supervisor has a research grant in your area. You will still want to **identify research topics in which potential supervisors are interested and knowledgeable**. The supervisor does not need to work directly in the same area as your thesis topic but he or she should be aware of the scholarly terrain, relevant writing, debates and theoretical issues involved in this area of work.
- Determining whether a supervisor is an **active and productive scholar** and researcher is important. You can secure some information on their research from the website of their departments and programs, as these often list most recent publications. Look in the library catalogue for their recent books or articles. See what kind of journals they publish in, what the range of their work is over time, and READ something they have published to get a sense of their work. Obviously, your assessment will differ for junior as opposed to more established scholars.
- You can also questions of a potential supervisor about their **research interests** and their **approach to thesis supervision**. You can also ask them and the Director questions about their **supervisory load** (how many students they are already working with).
- Potential supervisors also have **track records** in other areas that you can ask about: eg. do they offer feedback on papers, are they available for consultation? Graduate students inevitably share information on these issues, but I urge you to check out supervisors yourselves as well. What fits for one person may not fit for another.
- Will the supervisor **challenge you as well as support** you? As graduate students, you should welcome critical questions of your research, ideas and work. A supervisor who asks critical questions will help you develop your research and writing more effectively than one who does not.

Canadian Association for Graduate Studies. "Choice of Supervisor" in *Graduate Studies: A Practical Guide*, page 2.
<http://www.cags.ca/pages/en/publications/cags-publications.php>

Graduate Students' Union, University of Toronto. (2005) "Supervision."
<http://www.gsu.utoronto.ca/academiclife/supervision.html>

Bell, K. (1999) 'Choosing a thesis supervisor.' <http://www.camlang.com/sp003.htm>

Canadian Association for Graduate Studies. in *Guiding Principles for Graduate Student Supervision. CAGS, 2008*
<http://www.cags.ca/pages/en/publications/cags-publications.php>