



## COSUPERVISION

### Student Perspective

I have two supervisors for my dissertation research project: Dr Oldbie has been here for years, has supervised lots of dissertations and is an expert in the topic area of my research. Dr Newbie is a new lecturer who started at this university this year and has experience in the methodological approach I'm using in my project. At first I thought "Oh great! Having two supervisors, it's going to be more interesting because there's going to be more debate and an extra person to run things past". And initially we all met together and I thrived on having input in my project from two different sources. It was good because they kind of had different, not expertise but different experience. So they had different kind of things to pull together and tell me. They were really friendly and that helped and both of them offered something a little bit different so it was actually I liked having two because you get sort of the best of both.

More recently though, most meetings have only been attended by one supervisor. I know they're busy with teaching and research and other things, and I'm grateful that at least one of them makes time to see me. However, things aren't going so smoothly any more. For example, one week I was struggling with an aspect of the methodology for my research. Only Dr Oldbie attended the meeting. I tried to ask a few questions, but she just couldn't answer, or help me with any of that, so that wasn't such a good week because I don't feel I could progress with what I wanna do. It just kind of puts a bit of a halt on everything. When I have meetings just with Dr Newbie she is sometimes unsure if what I am proposing is acceptable. It just would have been nice to have someone at the meeting who is more familiar with the way things work at this university. She is new to the university as well as new to supervision, so the processes of it all. I'm finding that sometimes the advice given by one supervisor one week is contradicted by the other supervisor the next week. There is one supervisor that might say, "Yup, go ahead do that," and then I'll come in the next week, and I'll say, "Look what I did," and the other supervisor is like, "Why would you do that?". It's like they don't even talk to each other between meetings.





Now, even where both supervisors attend a meeting, they don't always agree. Dr Newbie will say "Well you could do this," and "You could do this," and "You could do this," and "You could do this," and Dr Olbie's like, "No you can't do this. You've got to do it this way". It was like watching parents fight almost. I got to the stage where I would think, "Oh, do I really want to go this meeting?" And it went from "Oh, I need this information, I need to know about this, I have a couple of questions about this, I'm not really understanding terminology here" to "Do I watch them fight again?", "Do I watch them argue again?". I'm starting to feel like I'm falling behind and going around in circles.





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### New Supervisor Perspective

I'm a new academic and started work at this university at the beginning of the year. I welcomed the opportunity to be involved in supervising a student's dissertation project. I'd never supervised before and had received no training in how to supervise. I suppose it's a 'learn as you go' type of thing. I'm co-supervising with an experienced supervisor. I thought by co-supervising I could sit-in and learn how it's meant to be done. How to manage the students, and the deadlines and how much work you put into each student, those kind of things. I've been following my co-supervisor's lead.

I think we started off well in supervising Stu Dent. We were all meeting regularly and Stu seemed to be making good progress in planning the research. However, lately I've felt snowed under with the teaching and marking load and haven't been able to attend some meetings. My co-supervisor has also missed some meetings due to other commitments. I find myself floundering a bit when my co-supervisor isn't there- I don't know enough about how 'the system' works. I think, if at the beginning I got more of an idea of what to expect and what I need to provide students to ensure that they're okay or will be okay, that would have helped. My co-supervisor and I are both so busy that we don't always manage to touch base when meetings are missed. When we do all meet, sometimes I feel like we have been pulling in different directions. I feel I'm losing touch with Stu's project and realise now that you have to be at every meeting otherwise you don't know what's going on.

There should be more hours allocated to supervision I think so that I have time to attend every meeting. We are given guidelines in terms of what supervisors are expected to do in terms of hours per week, reading of drafts, those kinds of things, so that stuff is fairly clear. However, in co-supervising we're spending a lot more than our allocated hours. So you end up, probably with the co-supervision, even though you're allocated half the hours you probably spend three quarters of the time doing it. So probably the only thing you save time on is reading the drafts. Presumably, there's also teaching and research and other stuff which I should be doing in the meantime, not bloody supervision. It has a spill-over effect into your other responsibilities.





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### Coordinator Perspective

People aren't allowed to primarily supervise dissertation students at any level around here unless they've been involved in supervising a dissertation student to completion successfully. In this way we do provide some support for new supervisors mainly through mentoring, because they join in initially with another experienced supervisor. So they sort of learn by doing. If you have two supervisors, one of them might have a strength in the knowledge area and one of them might have strength in the methodology area.

We also provide our supervisors with information. I do encourage the staff, the new supervisors, to look at the handbook because that provides relevant information for what can be expected of supervisors. I encourage them to but, you know, I don't have any sort of feedback about whether they do or not.

It's always good, in my opinion, to have two supervisors. It gives the student an opportunity to go and have a whinge to one or the other if they need to! I occasionally have some students come to me about issues with co-supervision: students who come and say, my supervisors are fighting. I can then work with the student and/or supervisors to resolve the problem. However, some students choose not to take issues they are experiencing to me as the coordinator, they try to cope by themselves. I may only find out about the issues after the year is over.

