



## DIFFERING EXPECTATIONS

### Student Perspective

I came into honours not knowing much about the whole process of working with a supervisor. You have to remember, like a few years ago I thought honours, I thought “No chance”, and that’s so far away in the future I’m not even going to worry about that, and then you get closer and think, “Oh, I might actually have a chance”, but you only really know that it’s a prestigious thing to do and possibly not much more than that.

You have this ideology of what supervision should be, okay, and when you think about what it is and who the people who are involved, you envisage a mentor. We are students; we need to be shown. Although by this stage, we should have the skills and the knowledge to be able to articulate and put together a major piece of research as we’re doing we still need to be taught the fundamentals of how to do it properly and what we really need to do and scrutinise every bit and all that kind of stuff.

There’s an expectation I guess by the time you get to your research project that your supervisor will really guide you and really will help you rather than just facilitate a process which you’re driving, so I guess it’s just that I had the wrong idea of what my supervisor’s role is going to be. I thought that they would probably be more driving the process and trying to keep more tabs with me rather than me managing their time.

The first few weeks of supervision I found really hard. At first I wasn’t getting the quality of supervision I was wanting, and I can’t say that it was a standard of supervision to expect because I don’t have guidelines as to what the standard is. I think we had made a few assumptions about what each other was thinking or how the honours year plays out and I didn’t necessarily know much about honours at all. I remember the first few weeks of semester as being especially stressful. My mum actually said “oh, it’s Wednesday again, obviously you’ve had supervision”, because I was really grumpy. It took a while to work out what was expected of each other and what my responsibility was as a student versus the supervisor.





Looking back, I think maybe even before the start of the year, it would have been helpful to have a bit more of an expectation of what is expected of me, and how the honours year sort of plays out. I should have probably setup at the beginning of the year and said “I want this and I think I’d like this sort of support, how does that work with you?”





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### New Supervisor Perspective

I'm a new supervisor and have taken on my first students to supervise this year. I haven't received any training in supervision, and I haven't had the opportunity to co-supervise with a more experienced supervisor.

Mostly, things seem to be going OK. However, not so with one of my students I supervise. I saw her initially, and then I didn't see her much again. And I've dropped emails just to say "Did you want to catch up? Where are you? How are you going?" And I don't get a response. I don't feel like I'm providing enough support to her. I think she could benefit from a little bit more guidance but I don't see her and things get submitted before I've had adequate time to review them. It's perhaps a function of me not explaining my expectations clearly enough. I'm now taking a firmer line. I've now realised it's all a matter of getting those expectations sorted between the two people at the beginning.

I like to take students as I find them. In terms of differences between the levels of students, it's funny because I think, and I have a bit of an issue with this, that there are perceptions about how well students should go based on whether they get into Honours or a pass stream degree. Yes, you can see that there are differences, literally academic differences because it's competitive to get into Honours. But I'd be reluctant to say that that somehow predisposes what the outcome of student's work is going to be. I feel like sometimes there's maybe some mythology about what level of achievement is possible based on what program you get into and it feels like it's a little bit perpetuated within the school.





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### Coordinator Perspective

With many of the issues brought to me, I've looked at it as a difference in expectations. The student will come to me saying, "I was expecting my supervisor to do this" or "I was a bit disappointed with the feedback they gave me." I think they base their expectations on what they think a supervisor should do. What it usually comes down to is, I think, the expectations of the supervisor differ from that of their student. The main area of conflict the students are having seem to be their expectations clash so differently with their supervisors that they can't really see a way around it. I say, "The first thing you should be doing is sitting down and discussing what your expectations are, so you're both on the same page."

Part of the problem seems to be moving between coursework and research. Students are still expecting a high level of structure and support for their dissertation research, and it's just not there. There's a gap between the expectations and the reality of what happens once you hit that level of no structure. Some students are fairly unrealistic in their expectations of what a supervisor is, and I think that's something that could be addressed at some point with students. Some students don't want to make a decision of any sort, on their own. It's essentially their research, so they have to demonstrate from beginning to end that they can do it, but they want to be told what to do, in every little detail: "What should I read?", "What's the analysis for this?" and "What sort of measures should I use?". Really, very, very detailed stuff, every step along the way.

We do actually have quite an extensive guide to supervisors and students but it also says what a supervisor should expect from their student and what a student should expect from their supervisor. I do encourage the staff, the supervisors to look at the handbook because that provides relevant information for what can be expected. So, I guess in a way we do provide a bit of guidance there.

