Graduate Student Progress Reports: Recommendations from the SGPS Academic Affairs Standing Committee (AASC)

In early 2011, the AASC reviewed a small sample of progress reports across various disciplines at Queen’s (n=7) and at another institution (n=1), identified a number of strengths and weaknesses in reporting strategies, and developed a set of guidelines for departments to use when creating these documents.

Considerations that informed these recommendations:

• The objective of progress reports is to document students’ movement through degree requirements and thesis research.

• Consistent and clear communication between graduate students and supervisors and/or dissertation committees is essential to the academic success of Master’s and PhD candidates

• Progress reports offer one method for students to communicate with supervisors and/or committees, and vice-versa

• Graduate students may also be evaluated according to the information supplied by the student and the supervisor and/or committee in progress reports

• An unfavourable evaluation on a progress report may lead to academic setbacks for students including, but not limited to, recommendations for substantial revisions to a dissertation or a recommendation for withdrawal on academic grounds

Given these considerations, the AASC supports the use of progress reports on campus that promote ample and productive dialogue between students and superiors and/or committees.

The committee encourages graduate departments to include the following elements in progress reports to facilitate meaningful dialogue:

• clearly outlined processes and timelines for supervisors and/or committees to submit feedback to students on the content of progress reports
• space for students to articulate their expectations about their research progress and plans for the future
• space for students to document any of the following: extracurricular activities, professional development (such as conferences, teaching, RA work, publications), and any existing or former barriers to research or academic studies
• space for students and supervisors and/or committees to reflect on supervision activities to date