Graduate Student Expectations

This document is a summary and clarification of what we currently expect from our Graduate students in the School of Computing Science at SFU. It is intended to complement:

- the Dean of Graduate Studies regulations at SFU http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/current
- our Graduate Curriculum - http://www.cs.sfu.ca/gradpgm/Recruiting/gradcurriculum.html
- our online resources http://www.cs.sfu.ca/gradpgm

Each student must be and remain in “good standing” with the School of Computing Science throughout their program and what follows summarizes our definition of “good standing.” This is basis of funding decisions and can affect your funding allocations (Teaching Assistantships, Research Assistantships, Graduate Fellowships, Internships or Scholarships) from and/or on behalf the School.

**Graduate students in good standing are expected to:**

- Maintain a grade point average of 3.0 or higher
- Follow the academic plan as outlined in the following pages
- Maintain an active relationship with their supervisors
- Perform well in their duties as Teaching and Research Assistants (see details below)
- Submit a yearly completed progress report by the deadline (January 15th)
- For PhD students—your depth exam must be completed prior to the end of your second year of study
- Apply for all scholarships, Teaching Assistant appointments and Research Assistant appointments that they are eligible for annually and/or each semester
- Check their email daily as a way for the School, Course Instructors and Supervisor(s)
- Respond to emails no longer than 24 hours after receipt

Note: Always keep the Breadth Requirements in mind when planning your course choices http://www.cs.sfu.ca/gradpgm/Recruiting/gradcurriculum.html

Note: University regulations require that you formally declare your Senior Supervisor on this form PRIOR TO THE END OF YOUR SECOND SEMESTER: http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/forms.html

Students “not” in good standing should see the Graduate Director immediately to rectify any problems and to seek assistance and support. If this is not addressed in a timely fashion, you can expect to experience funding difficulties and/or possible withdrawal from your program of study.

**Seeking Help**

Ask your buddy! Ask one of our Program Assistants!

Being a graduate student is challenging, we know this and want to support you as much as possible. It is very important that you discuss and relate problems you encounter with someone.

Often your fellow graduate students are either experiencing the same problems or have successfully negotiated the challenges that you are facing. The “Buddy program” created by the Computing Science Graduate Student Association (CSGSA) http://www.cs.sfu.ca/~csgsa/ is unique and you should consider your buddy one of your best resources – s/he can provide a lot of assistance and guidance, especially during your first few months of your program. You can also approach the president and other officers of the CSGSA or visit the Computing Science office for assistance.
Other people that are happy to help you by listening, providing resources or assisting in finding the “right people” with whom you can discuss any issue with, include the:

- Dr. Funda Ergun, Graduate Director – funda@sfu.ca
- Tracy Bruneau, Manager, Administrative and Academic Services – cmptmgr@sfu.ca
- Val Galat and Gerdi Snyder, Graduate Program Assistants – csgrada@sfu.ca
- Health and Counselling Centre at SFU http://www.sfu.ca/hccc/

**Always keep the Breadth Requirements in mind when planning your course choices**
http://www.cs.sfu.ca/gradpgm/Recruiting/gradcurriculum.html

**PROGRAM ACADEMIC PLANS**

For MSc Course students:

Semester 1: Complete 2 graduate courses (GPA of 3.0 or higher)
Semester 2: Complete 3 courses (GPA of 3.0 or higher)
Semester 3: Complete 3 courses (GPA of 3.0 or higher)
Semester 4: Complete course requirements and submit your extended document

For MSc Project students:

Semester 1: Complete 2 graduate courses (GPA of 3.0 or higher)
Semester 1: Choose a permanent Senior Supervisor using this form
http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/forms.html
Semester 2: Choose and complete 3 courses (GPA of 3.0 or higher)
Semester 2: Have a **COMPLETE supervisory committee in place by the end of semester 2**, using this form
http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/forms.html
Semester 3: Have a clear idea of your project topic and begin the research
Semester 4: Complete course requirements in order **to fulfill your breadth requirement** and submit for approval using the appropriate form - http://www.cs.sfu.ca/Forms/Grads/
Semester 4: Project report should be 50% complete
Semester 5: Complete and defend project report

For MSc thesis students:

Semester 1: Complete 2 graduate courses (GPA of 3.0 or higher)
Semester 1: **Choose a permanent Senior Supervisor using this form**
http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/forms.html
Semester 2: Choose and complete 2 graduate courses (GPA of 3.0 or higher)
Semester 2: Engage in research projects with your Senior Supervisor
Semester 2: Have a **COMPLETE supervisory committee in place by the end of semester 2**, using this form
http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/forms.html
Semester 3: Complete course requirements in order to fulfill your breadth requirement and submit for approval using the appropriate form - http://www.cs.sfu.ca/Forms/Grads/
Semester 3: Have a clear idea of your thesis topic and begin the research
Semester 4: Focus on research project full time
Semester 5: Complete research and most of the writing
Semester 5: Submit theses to supervisory committee
Semester 6: Defend, at the latest, during the middle of the semester to allow time for including the suggestions of your committee into your final draft for library submission
MSc Program – Breadth Requirement
http://students.sfu.ca/calendar/computing_science/cmpt_sc_MSc.html

Thesis MSc students must complete a breadth requirement consisting of five graduate courses (which is equivalent to 15 units). At least four of the courses must be drawn from Table 1 so that at least one course must be from Area 1 (Algorithms and Complexity Theory) and two of the four courses must be from two other areas.

Project MSc students must complete a breadth requirement consisting of eight graduate courses (which is equivalent to 24 units). At least six of the courses must be drawn from Table 1 so that at least one course must be from Area 1 (Algorithms and Complexity Theory) and such that the six courses must cover at least three different areas.

Course MSc students must complete a breadth requirement consisting of ten graduate courses (which is equivalent to 30 units). At least six of the courses must be drawn from Table 1 so that at least one course must be from Area 1 (Algorithms and Complexity Theory) and such that the six courses must cover at least three different areas.

Any 700 division course used to satisfy the MSc breadth requirement might be waived and replaced by an 800 division course. Students must produce convincing evidence to the graduate program committee that they have completed a comparable course or have comparable training in industry.

For PhD students:

Semester 1: Complete 2 graduate courses (GPA of 3.0 or higher)
Semester 1: Choose a permanent Senior Supervisor using this form [http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/forms.html]
Semester 2: Choose and complete 2 graduate courses (GPA of 3.0 or higher)
Semester 2: Engage in research projects with your senior supervisor
Semester 2: Have a COMPLETE supervisory committee in place by the end of Semester 2, using this form [[http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/forms.html]
Semester 2: Choose and complete 2 graduate courses (GPA of 3.0 or higher)
Semester 2: Engage in research projects with your Senior Supervisor
Semester 3: Fulfill your breadth requirement using the appropriate form and submit for approval [http://www.cs.sfu.ca/Forms/Grads/]
Semester 3: Have a clear idea of your thesis topic and start the research
Year 2: Complete all course requirements
Year 2: Depth Exam must be completed
Year 3: Thesis Proposal completed
Year 4: Thesis Defended

PhD Program – Breadth Requirement
http://students.sfu.ca/calendar/computing_science/cmpt_sc_PhD.html

PhD students who already possess an MSc in computing science or a related field must complete a breadth requirement of four graduate courses (which is equivalent to 12 units). At least three of the courses must be drawn from table 1 so that they are all in different areas.

PhD students who do not possess an MSc in computing science or a related field must complete a breadth requirement of eight graduate courses (equivalent to 24 units). At least six of the courses must be drawn from Table 1 so that at least on course must be from Area 1 (Algorithms and Complexity Theory) and so that the six courses cover at least three different areas.
Computing Science Breadth Requirement Tables

For your reference, we have included the five areas of instruction. For purposes of defining the MSc and PhD breadth requirements, courses are grouped into the five major areas in Table 1. Courses not related to the breadth requirements are shown in Table 2. Any courses taken outside the School of Computing Science must be approved by the student's senior supervisor and the director of the graduate program.

The courses used to satisfy the breadth requirements must include either CMPT 705 or 710, unless Students already have credit for one of these courses (or equivalent) from a previous degree as determined by the graduate program breadth committee.

TABLE I

Area I – Algorithms and Complexity Theory
CMPT 701-3 Computability and Logic
CMPT 705-3 Design and Analysis of Algorithms
CMPT 710-3 Computational Complexity
CMPT 711-3 Bioinformatics Algorithms
CMPT 813-3 Computational Geometry
CMPT 814-3 Algorithmic Graph Theory
CMPT 815-3 Algorithms of Optimization
CMPT 881-3 Special Topics in Theoretical Computing Science

Area II – Networks, Software and Systems
CMPT 730-3 Programming Languages
CMPT 731-3 Functional Programming
CMPT 745-3 Software Engineering
CMPT 755-3 Compiler Theory
CMPT 760-3 Operating Systems
CMPT 765-3 Computer Communication Networks
CMPT 771-3 Internet Architecture and Protocols
CMPT 777-3 Formal Verification
CMPT 816-3 Theory of Communication Networks
CMPT 885-3 Special Topics in Computer Architecture
CMPT 886-3 Special Topics in Networks, Software and Systems

Area III – Artificial Intelligence
CMPT 721-3 Knowledge Representation and Reasoning
CMPT 725-3 Logical Methods in Computational Intelligence
CMPT 726-3 Machine Learning
CMPT 823-3 Formal Topics in Knowledge Representation
CMPT 825-3 Natural Language Processing
CMPT 826-3 Automated Learning and Reasoning
CMPT 827-3 Intelligent Systems
CMPT 882-3 Special Topics in Artificial Intelligence
Area IV – Databases, Data Mining and Computational Biology

CMPT 505-3  Problem Based Learning in Bioinformatics
CMPT 740-3  Database Systems
CMPT 741-3  Data Mining
CMPT 829-3  Special Topics in Bioinformatics
CMPT 842-3  Concurrency Control in Database Systems
CMPT 843-3  Database and Knowledge-Base Systems
CMPT 884-3  Special Topics in Database Systems

Area V - Graphics, HCI, Vision and Visualization

CMPT 761-3  Image Synthesis
CMPT 764-3  Geometric Modeling in Computer Graphics
CMPT 773-3  User Interface Design
CMPT 767-3  Visualization
CMPT 768-3  Computer Music Theory and Sound Synthesis
CMPT 820-3  Multimedia Systems
CMPT 821-3  Robot Vision
CMPT 822-3  Computational Vision
CMPT 888-3  Special Topics in Computer Graphics, HCI, Vision and Visualization

TABLE II

CMPT 880-3  Special Topics in Computing Science
CMPT 894-3  Directed Reading
CMPT 889-3  Special Topics in Interdisciplinary Computing

GENERAL INFORMATION

- Students should make and maintain a strong commitment in order to devote the required time and energy needed to engage successfully in graduate work and research, write a thesis, and contribute fully to the scholarly and intellectual life of the University.

- Students should show continuous dedicated efforts to gain the background knowledge and skills needed to pursue graduate work successfully, and adhere to the highest standards of ethical behaviour to assure academic integrity and professionalism at all times.

- Students should maintain registration throughout the program and ensure, that where required, visas and employment authorization documents are kept up-to-date.

- Students should be aware of and conform to program, Faculty of Graduate Studies, and University requirements relating to deadlines, thesis style, award applications, and other graduate requirements, etc.

- Students should pay due attention to the need, to maintain a workplace which is safe, tidy and healthy.

- Students should respect the work and equipment of others, and show tolerance and respect for others sharing the same facilities. This would include, for example, cleaning up a work space when finished, and complying with all safety and work regulations of the lab/program/University.

- Students should inform the program (i.e., Graduate Director), in a timely fashion, of any serious difficulties which may arise in supervision. These might include, but are not limited to, major
professional or academic disagreements, interpersonal conflicts, or potential conflict of interest situations.

- Students should be thoughtful and reasonably frugal in using lab resources, and assist in obtaining resources for the research of other group members, when applicable.

- Students should be reasonably available to meet with the Senior Supervisor and Supervisory Committee when requested, and be able to report fully and regularly on thesis progress and results.

- Students should give serious consideration and response to comments and advice from the Senior Supervisor and Committee members.

- Students should, very early on, discuss and formulate with their Senior Supervisor a plan of study for completion of degree requirements and thesis work, with clear milestones denoting progress. This would include, for example, setting a viable time schedule and adhering to it for all graduate work, including thesis progress and completion. Any variations to this schedule, including prolonged absences by the student, should be discussed. More generally, Students should maintain open communication and feedback with the Senior Supervisor on all issues, including supervisory practices.

Your Supervisor
If you are a PhD, MSc or project option student you have already been assigned a potential supervisor and in most cases this relationship develops well and you finish your program with the same supervisor. In some cases, due to various reasons, students decide that they would like to work with a different supervisor – this is something that we support and if you make this decision, your first step is to discuss the change and reasons for it with the Graduate Director.

University regulations require that you formally declare your Senior Supervisor on this form PRIOR TO THE END OF YOUR SECOND SEMESTER:  http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/forms.html

Your supervisor is one of your best resources and s/he can provide guidance on program expectations, course choices, area of study, etc.

Research
The way research is conducted differs from area to area and supervisor to supervisor. Hence, you are encouraged to talk to your supervisor to discuss and confirm his or her expectations of you. We also suggest that you work with your Senior Supervisor to document these expectations and any changes that occur throughout your program.

Funding
Most of you will have been made funding promises in your offer letter and YOU are responsible for working with your supervisor and the office staff to help ensure that these promises are met. Your funding will come from different sources, such as; teaching assistant appointments, research assistant appointments, graduate fellowships or scholarships, etc. Please keep in mind that your funding plan should be just that – a PLAN. You should be able to work with your Supervisor to have a tentative plan in place for at least one year and the only way to do this is to openly discuss this with your supervisor. If you have concerns or questions about this, please contact the Graduate Director or Tracy Bruneau.

Teaching Assistant (TA) Appointments
Since TA work impacts directly on the educational experience of students, it is important that you take your TA assignment(s) seriously and keep in mind that you are acting as a representative of the School of Computing Science. It will also provide you with invaluable experience in your graduate education. Furthermore, if you plan for a career in industry, it will give you experience in communicating ideas clearly and succinctly, and in dealing with those less experienced than you. If you plan for a career in academia, it will provide you with teaching experience.
a. TA Application Process

All graduate students are eligible and encouraged to apply for a TA position regardless of your funding promises and/or current funding position. Please keep in mind that in order to apply you MUST be a fully registered student and in good standing with the School. We encourage everyone to apply so that they may be considered, unless you have confirmed funding in place for the semester being applied for. Please consult the TA Guidelines for detailed information. http://www.cs.sfu.ca/gradpgm/useful/TA-guidelines.pdf

You will have to apply for a TA position by the deadline using the Computing Science web site http://www.cs.sfu.ca/Forms/Grads/TAapp/ - you can expect to receive an email requesting applications about 2 months before the next semester. You should apply to TA only for those courses where you feel confident in not only your understanding of the subject matter but that you can communicate this understanding to students who are learning from you. Assignments are generally completed one month prior to semester start and offers are sent to each individual via email. Once you have accepted the offer made and have signed your appointment contract, it is your responsibility to contact the course instructor and set-up a meeting to discuss your responsibilities during the semester, possibly in conjunction with other TAs assigned to the course.

Your TA contract specifies that you will work a specific number of "base units". A "base unit" is a standard amount of work performed over the semester. What constitutes a base unit varies depending on the exact nature of the work that you are performing. In most cases, one base unit is equivalent to 42 hours of work over the semester. It is important that you complete the Time Use Guideline form provided by the TSSU and as well, you are expected to provide a completed copy to the School. If you have any questions about whether your workload exceeds the amount required in your contract, the work assigned etc., you should first contact the Manager, Administrative and Academic Services to review this.

b. Tasks:

Different courses and different instructors will likely have different expectations for the work performed by their appointed TAs, some of these may be:

- Hold, prepare for and run tutorials and/or labs
- Hold office hours on a regular basis
- Mark assignments and exams
- Record and manage grades
- Answer emails from students

You must discuss and reach an agreement with the instructor and the other TAs (if more than one) in the teaching team about how the work is distributed and how you will communicate among the teaching team. You must keep the instructor informed about how your activities develop as well as about any problems that arise, which could, in any way, affect the normal development of the course, whether they are problems involving the students and/or general problems or concerns about your TAing duties.

c. Communication:

It is important that you communicate well with the instructor of the course throughout the entire semester and always in a timely fashion. Some things that you may wish to discuss and clarify are; any
misunderstanding regarding your duties, problems that arise related to any of the student(s) in the class, any situations that arise that prevent you from doing the work you have committed to do, or any other details or situations that come up during the semester – again, please ensure that you are in constant communications with the instructor.

You will evaluate students and as well, you will be asked to evaluate the instructor you have worked with. Similarly, the students and the instructor evaluate you. These evaluations are considered when reviewing the TA appointments and you should ensure that you are in “good standing” with the School based on your performance. If you have any inquiries on this please contact the Manager, Administrative and Academic Services (cmptmgr@sfu.ca).

You must also keep in mind that you are expected to be available for work as a TA from the beginning until the end of the semester and this is clearly marked on the Contract that you sign. Please know that this includes the exam period and the weeks following that period until all marking and grading is completed. If you are considering or know that you will be absent during any of these times you MUST let Tracy Bruneau know prior to accepting the TA appointment so that a decision can be made whether you can actually accept the appointment or not. If an unplanned absence may occur you must notify Tracy Bruneau and discuss the absence with the course instructor, once this has been done a decision will be made as to whether you can continue with the appointment or if it will be cancelled – this will affect your funding for that semester.

In the case of an emergency, please ensure that you also contact Tracy Bruneau and the course instructor so that alternate arrangements can be made with you.

d. Training:

You should attend every possible TA/TM day organized once per semester by the Learning and Instructional Development Centre (LIDC) [http://www.lidc.sfu.ca/] or other relevant training workshops that you are made aware of. If you have any communication difficulties in particular because of language difficulties you should consider attending the ITA Seminar [http://www.sfu.ca/cstudies/lang/ita/what.htm].

All of these workshops are available to any graduate student and are offered before the beginning of each semester. For further information please contact the Manager, Administrative and Academic Services.

e. In summary:

There are three important points that you should keep in mind: communicate well, be respectful and require that you are respected.

As a TA you have to work closely with the course instructor and/or the teaching team. You are encouraged to seek pedagogical support as needed. Respect the other members in the teaching team: if you have committed to a certain share of work, keep your word.

Respect the students too. They may not know about or understand some topics covered in the course, but they deserve your respect, patience and prompt replies, in a polite manner. Inform the instructor if any unusual problems appear. Require that you are respected. Do not let the students or teaching team members (including other TAs or the instructors) assign you more than what you have committed to and are able to do.
Also keep in mind that there are people in the School that can provide assistance, give support and answer questions - we encourage you to seek them out if the need arises.

Some of these people include: the Manager, Administrative and Academic Services, members of the CSGSA, Graduate Program Assistants and the Graduate Director.