TORONTO SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
GRADUATE CENTRE FOR THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

PhD Annual Supervisory Reports
A Guide to Some Current Problems and Misconceptions (October 22, 2021)

At its most recent meeting (October 12, 2021), the TST Graduate Studies Council altered one of the requirements for PhD students' Annual Reports. The signatures of all the members of the Advisory or Supervisory Committee are no longer required. The supervisor signs on behalf of the committee, and then the student, after reviewing the report, signs it and submits it to the GCTS. (This change will be reflected in a revised edition of the Graduate Conjoint Degree Handbook at §A8.5.2.)

It is hoped that this small change will make it easier for committees and students to complete and submit these reports every year before the deadline. (The deadline for new students is **Friday in the first week of classes in the Fall term**; for returning pre-General Exams students, **October 1**; for returning post-General Exams students, **June 1**.)

But the GCTS has encountered a lot of misunderstanding about other aspects of the Annual Report. These problems are listed below, with references to the sections of the Graduate Conjoint Degree Handbook that state what is required. The list is followed by a section containing all the relevant passages of the Handbook, for ease of reference.

Problems the GCTS encounters with these forms
Listed below are some common problems and misconceptions that the GCTS encounters in reviewing PhD students' Annual Reports. Following each item is a reference to the portion of the Graduate Conjoint Degree Handbook that states what is required.

- Students sometimes simply do not submit annual reports, in some cases for years. The GCTS therefore has no documentation of the committee's assessment of the student's progress (whether satisfactory or unsatisfactory) and lacks a basis for approving, for example, a student's request for a Program Extension, or (in cases of "unsatisfactory progress") a college's recommendation that a student be terminated from the program. **(See Handbook §A8.5.2, §C1.5, §C4.2.)**
- Supervisors sometimes fill out reports without having convened a meeting of the whole committee with the student. The whole committee is required to meet with the student **at least** once a year, and the annual report documents the consensus of the committee at that meeting. It is not sufficient for the supervisor to fill out a report and send it to the committee members "for information." **(See Handbook §A8.5.2, §A9.2, §C4.2, §C4.3.)**
- Some supervisors who are more familiar with the regulations of the old ThD mistakenly assume that annual reports are not required in a year when the student has completed the Thesis Prospectus, the General Examinations, or the Thesis Proposal. But the Handbook very clearly requires submission of a report **every year** by either October 1 or June 1. This is crucial to ensure that the student's file contains documentation both of "satisfactory

progress" and of regular oversight by the whole committee. **(See Handbook §A9.2, §C4.2, §C4.3.)**

- Annual Reports often include lists of committee members who lack eligible GCTS appointments or whose appointments have expired. Faculty with "Associate (Restricted)" GCTS status need explicit permission in their letters of appointment to serve on a student's committee. If a proposed committee member does not have a GCTS appointment, has an expired appointment, or has restrictions that preclude service on the student's committee, the supervisor should ask the relevant college to submit the appropriate applications to the Graduate Appointments Committee. The GCTS cannot approve the composition of committees whose members do not have the necessary GCTS appointments. **(See Handbook §A9.2, §C4.3.)**

- Changes of committee membership must be formally approved by the GCTS. The membership of a student's Advisory or Supervisory Committee listed on the Annual Report for one year is sometimes different from what appeared on the form the previous year, and the GCTS can usually find no correspondence indicating that there was a request for a formal change to the committee. This occasions e-mails to the student and supervisor asking for clarification. **(See Handbook §C4.3.)**

- The pre-General Exams annual report form includes space for all Program Language Requirements be listed. The Advisory Committee determines what research languages the student must have, and the first report form submitted (once approved by the GCTS) is like a "contract" binding the student. But sometimes the student fills out the language section in an unclear way, with too many or too few languages, and with changes from year to year, and these ambiguities are not noticed by the committee when it approves the form. This can make it seem that the Advisory Committee wants to change the required languages. The GCTS cannot let a student proceed to the General Examinations stage if the language requirements have not been met. This results at best in unwanted correspondence from the GCTS, and at worst in distressing delays in the student's progress. **(See Handbook §C6.1, §C6.2, §C6.5.)**

- The level of skill required for a language (Competence, Proficiency, Expertise) is often not indicated. By contrast, sometimes the same language is listed several times, at different skill levels, giving a record of levels that the student has achieved during the program. This is unnecessary. The form should only list the final skill level that will be required, and only for the languages that the committee has determined as "required." **(See Handbook §C6.1.)**

- The Methodology coursework requirement is sometimes not indicated. **(See Handbook §C5.2.)**

What the Handbook says about Annual Reports

A8.5.2 Doctoral Supervision and Satisfactory Progress
A student is expected to meet with this committee at least once a year, and more often if the committee so requires. The student is responsible for submitting to the GCTS each year an Annual Report Form which must be completed and approved by their supervisory committee during the annual meeting. See §C1.5.

At each meeting, the Supervisory Committee will assess the student's progress in the program and provide advice on future work. In each of two consecutive meetings, if a student's Supervisory Committee reports that the student's progress is unsatisfactory, the college may recommend to the GCTS the termination of registration and eligibility of that student. A student who encounters difficulties arranging a meeting of this committee should consult the GCTS Director in advance of the relevant deadline for doing so. A student who, through their own neglect, fails to meet with the Supervisory Committee in a given year will be considered to have received an unsatisfactory progress report from the committee.

A9.2 Doctoral Supervision
The GCTS is responsible for monitoring the progress of doctoral students registered in its programs. Each doctoral student, at minimum, should have a Supervisory Committee that:
1. consists of the Supervisor and at least two graduate faculty members;
2. meets with the student at least once per year to assess the student's progress in the program and to provide advice on future work; and
3. verifies information that the student has added to the Annual Report Form, and comments and makes recommendations in the appropriate section about the student's progress.

The student must be given the opportunity in the Annual Report Form to respond to the Supervisory Committee's comments and recommendations. Copies of the report must be given to the student and filed with the GCTS and college by dates published in the Handbook.

C1.5 Satisfactory Progress
Students are expected to complete the components of their degree requirements in a timely manner. Supervisory Committees are required to review, assess, and report to the GCTS on this matter. Each year, students are responsible for submitting the appropriate Annual Report Form to the GCTS by October 1 (students in the Coursework, Prospectus or General Exam stages) or June 1 (students in the Proposal or Thesis Writing stages).

C4.2 Doctoral Advisory Committees
In late August or early September, before the commencement of classes, each student will meet with the designated committee. The purpose of this meeting is to prepare a plan of study for the student. A report of this meeting must be submitted to the GCTS by the last day to add courses for the fall semester (see "Key Academic Dates" at www.tst.edu). Advisory Committees may subsequently meet at any time of the year, as needed, but an Annual Report Form must be submitted each year by October 1 regarding student progress in the program (see §C1.5). Supervisors (or Co-supervisors) are responsible for regular supervision even while on sabbatical. The Advisory Committee continues to assist the student and often remains as the Doctoral Supervisory Committee for the dissertation, unless a change in committee members occurs.

The Advisory Committee assists the student in designing a course of studies, with attention to their educational objectives as well as to meeting program requirements for coursework, languages, examinations, residence requirements, limitations on reading courses, advanced standing and transfer of credit and encourages the development of professional skills of the student. The Advisory Committee must authorize the student's course of studies.

C4.3 Doctoral Supervisory Committees

The committee must meet at least once each year with the student and submit an Annual Report Form (see §C1.5). Failure to submit this report in a timely fashion may affect student status and/or funding. ...

Only Full Graduate (Advanced Degree) Members of TST's GCTS may be appointed Doctoral Supervisors, while Associate Members may only serve as Co-Supervisors or Supervisory Committee Members. ...

Changes in the membership of a student's Supervisory Committee may be made by the GCTS, acting upon the request of the student or members of the student's committee.

C5.2 The Core Courses

The course fulfilling the methodology requirement is recorded in the annual Advisory Committee report.

C6.1 General requirement [Program Language Requirements]

The student's Advisory Committee determines the two required languages. The languages, and a brief statement of their relevance to the student's research, are recorded in the annual Advisory Committee report. The two languages then require the final approval of the GCTS.

C6.2 Additional language requirements

An Advisory Committee may require a student to demonstrate language skills beyond the above requirements to support research in their area of specialization. Any additional language requirements are recorded in the annual Advisory Committee reports (which are then sent to the GCTS Office), which the student must then fulfill.

C6.5 Change in program of study [Program Language Requirements]

If a student at a subsequent stage of the program changes their area of research so that an approved language is no longer vital for the program of study, the student's Supervisor Committee will decide whether additional language requirements are necessary. ... Any such changes are reported to the GCTS Office according to the approval requirements noted above.

We hope that this information will be useful to all PhD students and their committees. The GCTS does not want to have to harass students and faculty with requests for further information or clarification. The best way to avoid this is for students and their committees to provide complete and accurate information on every annual report, and to do so on time every year.

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