

# SoMS Honours course: Guidelines and expectations for honours supervision

Version: 2.0

Responsible person: Convenor, SoMS Honours Course

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## 1 Preamble

### 1.1 Purpose and scope

This document sets out a framework for how honours supervisors and students can establish a working relationship to undertake a research project in the School of Medical Sciences (SoMS) Honours Program. This document establishes the minimum expectations for the supervisor and student that forms the basis for the framework. It is applicable to all students enrolled in the SoMS Honours course and all supervisors of such students.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with other relevant documents that set out more general expectations for behaviour and conduct. These include:

- SOMS4888/4884 course outline
- UNSW Student Code of Conduct
- UNSW Research Code of Conduct
- UNSW Behaviours

### 1.2 Context

The SoMS Honours course is offered to students either full-time (SOMS4888) or part-time (SOMS4884, over six terms), as a 48 units-of-credit course. It follows the completion of an undergraduate degree in anatomy, pathology, physiology, pharmacology or other relevant science specialisation. Enrolment in the course requires a minimum weighted average mark (WAM) and students need to arrange a supervisor and suitable project.

The course convenor has responsibility for administration of the course and the SoMS Honours Committee has oversight of the course assessment tasks. The committee members contribute to student support and development through the SoMS honours mentoring program. Each committee member will be responsible for mentoring a group of students in the SoMS Honours course.

### 1.3 Administration

In general, the course convenor has responsibility for administering these guidelines. In the absence of the convenor, the responsibility will be delegated to the course co-convenor or another member of the SoMS Honours Committee.

## 2 Aims and expectations of the SoMS Honours course

The expected learning outcomes from the SoMS Honours course are described in the SOMS4888/4884 course outline.

The honours course employs standards-based assessment and the rubrics for all assessment tasks are provided to students, which describe the expected standard of performance for each grade band. Students are not ranked or compared to each other when determining the assessment of their performance.

The course introduces students to medical research over 3 terms (or equivalent, part-time). The expectations for achievement of the proposed honours projects should be realistic over this timeframe, which is approximately seven months of research activity plus approximately two months to produce and submit a literature review and a project manuscript. The proposed project should be able to yield results in a timely fashion, so that there is sufficient time for the student to engage with analysis, reflection and discussion of the results before completing the project manuscript. The emphasis should not be on the quantity of results, but on the research skills that are developed with respect to reproducibility of data, appropriate data analysis (including statistical analysis), analytical thinking (for example, interpretation of results) and critical thinking (for example, ability to identify limitations).

To achieve the research aims, supervisors and honours students work collaboratively to develop a research plan that includes a timeline of the experimental / project tasks and associated milestones. This timeline is to be submitted at the start of the honours year and will be reviewed by the honours committee. Progress against these milestones will be reviewed by the honours committee mentors (see section 5 Monitoring of Progress) approximately half-way through the honours year (the date will be set in the Course Outline). The purpose of this research plan and review is to ensure the honours committee is well-informed of the commitment and progress made by the student and supervisor in undertaking an honours project. Further details are provided in section 5 Monitoring of Progress.

### 3 Expectations and responsibilities of supervisors

#### 3.1 Eligibility to supervise students

The eligibility to supervise students is set out in the SOMS4888/4884 course outline.

#### 3.2 Responsibilities of the supervisor

The role of the supervisor is described in the SOMS4888/4884 course outline. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that their student(s) meet the course attendance requirements and assessment deadlines of the honours program. This includes ensuring attendance at the School/Department/Institute research seminars. Supervisors are asked to regularly review the students' Seminar Notebooks ensuring that they are attending at least 80% of relevant seminars, taking notes and reflecting on selected seminars throughout the year (see "Research Performance and Seminar Engagement" in the course outline). Supervisors should also regularly check up on the students' laboratory books to ensure experimental details and protocols are being effectively recorded.

Supervisors are also required to participate in the assessment activities of the honours course. This includes attending the two oral presentations of their honours student(s) (the Introductory Seminar and the Final Seminar). Supervisors are required to assess their student(s) performance mid-year, using the "Research Performance and Seminar Engagement (formative)" assessment rubric that is to be submitted by the student along with their mid-year progress report. Supervisors will also assess their student(s) using the "Research Performance and Seminar Engagement (summative)" assessment rubric and submit this at the end of the honours project. These assessment forms outline the criteria for assessing the student's performance. Supervisors will also be asked to be an examiner for another SoMS honours student, and this role is part of the responsibility of supervision of a SoMS student. This entails examining the literature review, introductory seminar, final seminar and final project report.

#### 3.3 Responsibilities for offering an honours research project

When offering an honours project, it is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure the feasibility of the

project. Supervisors must take account of the training, administrative, financial and material support needed to ensure the project is achievable by the student in the time available. The planning for meeting these responsibilities must be evident in the research plan and time-line included in the SoMS Honours enrolment form. Failure to adequately plan and meet these responsibilities may result in future projects offered by the supervisor being refused by the SoMS Honours committee.

Supervisors must also identify any other commitments they may have during the year that could have an impact on the honours student. For example: any extended absences from the research group; intensive time commitments like grant review panels; or short absences to attend conferences / symposia. Where these can be identified in advance, they must be considered in the research plan with respect to the timing of assessment deadlines and course requirements of the Honours course, and appropriate contingencies put in place. In those instances where circumstances arise unexpectedly, then the supervisor has the responsibility to identify suitable contingencies to ensure appropriate supervision of the student. The circumstances and contingencies must be communicated to the Honours convenor at the earliest convenience.

### 3.4 Training and work place health and safety responsibilities

Supervisors must consider the limited experience of the undergraduate students who come into the SoMS Honours course. Most workplace accidents occur with new personnel working in an unfamiliar environment and with new techniques. The supervisor must therefore assess the level of supervised training and competency that will be required before the student is able to work independently on the project. The supervisor is responsible for informing the student of all relevant training (for example, required safety training, training on equipment and research techniques) necessary to undertake the project and ensuring the training has been satisfactorily completed. Safety training is provided by UNSW Health and Safety. The provision of training in research techniques and methods specific to the research project is the responsibility of the supervisor. This includes ensuring the student has read and understands all relevant risk assessments and safe working procedures before being trained in a technique.

### 3.5 Administrative responsibilities

The supervisor must ensure that all approvals needed for the research project to proceed are in place at the start of the project so that these will not impede the progress of the project. These approvals include but are not limited to: all ethics approvals for work involving human or animal studies, all biosafety approvals for work with genetically modified organisms, all approvals for work with restricted substances (e.g. S8 controlled drugs of addiction, S9 prohibited substances), all approvals and licences required for work with radioisotopes, and any approvals required for working with hazardous chemicals). Where the project is reliant on the recruitment of human participants, consideration must be given to the time required to recruit the participants, when the participants will be available, and time needed to collect the data.

### 3.6 Project financial and material responsibilities

It is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that the honours project(s) that they offer can be financially and materially supported by the laboratory. Supervisors are required to provide a declaration, as part of the enrolment form, that financial support the project for the duration of the Honours year and that all ethics and other approvals required for the project have been obtained. It is essential that supervisors adequately cost the project that they offer, so that there is a reasonable expectation that the project can be completed by the honours student. Supervisors are also responsible for arranging or negotiating the allocation of space and computer resources in the research environment (web laboratory bench space, dry laboratory space and / or desk space) for the student.

### 3.7 Expectations of supervisor behaviour

In line with the UNSW Behaviours, supervisors are expected to embrace and demonstrate behaviours that support a culture of excellence, innovation and collaboration between people. This should provide a model to honours students for these behaviours and encourage the development of these behaviours. These behaviours are: demonstrates excellence, drives innovation, builds collaboration, embraces diversity and displays respect.

In the context of the SoMS Honours course, examples of these behaviours include:

- Demonstrating high performance in the activities undertaken, encouraging student to aspire to a high level of performance, while maintaining accountability and integrity.
- Demonstrating and encouraging creative thinking, problem solving and new ways of working.
- Building effective relationships within and across teams, including with the honours student, to deliver collective outcomes.
- Acknowledging and embracing the contribution, ideas and opinions of all people, to promote an environment of inclusion.
- Treating all people with dignity and respect, including communicating appropriately.

## 4 Expectations and responsibilities of students

As for all UNSW students, those students enrolled in the SoMS Honours course are expected to abide by the Student Code of Conduct. This Code sets out the expectations of students with respect to the primary obligations, academic integrity and behaviour. It also provides a clear statement of the responsibilities of the University towards students in providing an environment that enables the students to achieve their full potential. There are five primary student responsibilities under this code:

1. A condition of enrolment is that students inform themselves of the University's rules and policies affecting them
2. An obligation to act with integrity in academic work, to ensure that all academic work is conducted ethically and safely
3. An obligation to observe standards of equity and respect in dealing with every member of the University community
4. An obligation to use and care for University resources in a lawful and appropriate manner
5. An obligation to not diminish the University's reputation in the carrying out of academic and other associated University activities.

Students should make themselves familiar with the responsibilities and principles that are described in the Code of Conduct. Students who breach the responsibilities and principles set out in the Code of Conduct will be handled according to the Student Misconduct Procedure.

Specific aspects of this Code of Conduct in the context of the SoMS Honours course are expanded upon in the sub-sections below.

### 4.1 Workplace health and safety

In line with the UNSW Student Code of Conduct and Workplace Health and Safety policy, students are expected to follow all relevant procedures to ensure that their conduct does not endanger themselves, others or the environment. Students are required to complete all safety training that is necessary to undertake the research project in a safe fashion. Students are expected to apply themselves to this training, achieve the expected competency level and do so within an appropriate time frame.

## 4.2 Responsibility for engaging with the research project

While the structure and nature of the research project is often determined by the supervisor, there is opportunity for the student to be involved in the design of the project. The extent of this involvement will be determined by the prior experience and the level of expertise of the student and will be undertaken by negotiation with the supervisor. It is the responsibility of the student to actively engage with the research project to the best of their ability, to learn aspects of undertaking research, specialised training relating to the research tasks, and develop skills in critical thinking and scientific communication. This aligns with the course aims.

It is the student's responsibility when engaged in the SoMS Honours course to manage their time to ensure they can meet each of the deadlines for assessment items and to complete the other requirements of the course. These include (but are not limited to): meeting the reasonable milestones set out in the research plan; meeting the deadlines for the literature review, introductory seminar, final seminar and final project manuscript; attendance at seminars and workshops; and attendance at research related activities such as training sessions, laboratory / group meetings, scheduled research activities and supervisor meetings. In completing these activities and assessment items, there will often be times when feedback will be sought from the supervisor / co-supervisor. Students need to be aware that supervisors / co-supervisors are engaged in a variety of activities and may not be able to provide feedback at short notice. The time required to provide feedback at key stages of the honours year needs to be included in the research plan and take account of the other commitments of the student and supervisor / co-supervisor (for example, attending conferences).

This is balanced by the responsibilities of the supervisor (see section 3 Expectations and Responsibilities of Supervisors), in ensuring that the attendance requirements are met and providing guidance to students in the best use of their time to meet the assessment deadlines.

## 4.3 Changes in circumstances

If there is a change in circumstances that could impact upon student's meeting the expectations and responsibilities of the course, then they need to communicate this to their supervisor as soon as it is practicable. The supervisor will then convey the change in circumstances to the Honours committee. Where this is not possible or if the student prefers, the change in circumstances should be communicated to the allocated mentor, other committee member or directly to the course convenor(s). Where the change in circumstances involves illness or misadventure, the student will be advised as to the process for special consideration. In other circumstances, the convenor, in consultation with other parties as appropriate, will assist the student in finding a solution, where possible, to meet the expectations and responsibilities of the course in the changed circumstances. In considering any solutions, the best interests of the student will be the guiding principle and needs to be within the guidelines and policies of UNSW Sydney.

## 5 Monitoring of progress

At enrolment, the supervisor and student negotiate the scope of the research project and a plan of the research activities and milestones is determined. This research plan must identify the key stages in the training, data collection and / or analysis, and interpretation of results. Each stage needs to identify milestones and when these are likely to be achieved. The timing of the milestones, including when assessment items need to be completed for feedback, needs to be considered with respect to the other commitments of the supervisor. This research plan is reviewed at the time of enrolment to check that adequate time is available to meet the milestones in the plan and an adequate scope of research activity can be undertaken in the time available. The review is undertaken by the Honours committee member that has been assigned to the student as a mentor.

A progress report will be provided jointly by the supervisor and honours student halfway through the honours course. The date that this progress report is required will be set out in the course outline. The progress report will comprise the research plan with brief comments against each of the milestones to indicate what progress has been made as well as the completed “Research Performance and Seminar Engagement (formative)” assessment rubric. The honours committee understands that there will be instances where delays might arise or where projects may need to be refocused because of changes in circumstances or availability of key resources. If there are changes to the research plan, then these need to be incorporated into a revised plan at the time of review. The review process is intended to be focused on a discussion between the supervisor and the student with a single progress report submitted to the Honours committee by the student (via Moodle upload). The progress report will be reviewed by the relevant Honours committee mentor. Action will only be taken in response to the progress report if there are issues that are specifically raised by the supervisor / student for assistance by the mentor, or if there are issues that haven’t been addressed / resolved in the report. If there are issues that haven’t been resolved by discussion between the supervisor and student, then they are able to submit separate reports to highlight the concerns and issues to be resolved. These will be considered by the Honours mentor and convenor in the first instance, who will attempt to resolve the issues in consultation with the student and supervisor, or where necessary to invoke the appropriate complaint or dispute process according to UNSW policies.

## 6 Failure to meet the expectations and responsibilities

### 6.1 Failure of students to meet expectations

Day-to-day behaviours in undertaking a research project as part of the SoMS Honours course will be apparent to the supervisor, co-supervisor or other person(s) in the lab who are assisting in training the student. Meeting the expectations and responsibilities associated with attendance of the student at research seminar series and other academic activities is also monitored by the supervisor and course convenor. In the event where the responsibilities and expectations are not being met by the student, they should be dealt with as soon as they arise. The supervisor and honours student should meet to discuss the situation and identify, for example, if there are any changes in circumstances, personal events, or misunderstanding of the expectations and responsibilities. This informal process should be undertaken in a confidential and fair manner to allow the supervisor to convey the observed behaviour that is of concern and the student a fair opportunity to respond. This process should aim to identify a mutually acceptable solution that addresses the circumstances that were preventing the expectations being met, or to provide additional support and training to assist the student in meeting the expectations and responsibilities.

Repeated or ongoing behaviour by the student that does not meet the expectations should be brought to the attention of the course convenor and may form the basis for a complaint from the supervisor (see section 7.2). Where the behaviour means the student has not met the attendance requirements for the course and the research project (set out in the research plan), the course convenor may exclude the student from continuing enrolment in the course or exclude from submitting a final thesis for assessment.

Where there is behaviour relating to the expectations and responsibilities that amounts to misconduct, the matter will be dealt with according to the Student Misconduct Procedure. In this case, the matter will be referred to the relevant designated officer as defined in Appendix B of the Student Misconduct Procedure. In the context of the honours course, misconduct could include careless waste of research resources or disregard for the ethics and safety of the research undertaken. In such circumstances, it may be appropriate to remove access to the research laboratory or facilities while the matter is being investigated and resolved.

## 6.2 Failure of supervisors to meet expectations

Meeting the expectations and responsibilities associated with student supervision will be monitored by the SoMS Honours Committee. Where the behaviour of the supervisor is not in keeping with the expectations of the honours program, the supervisor will be restricted to supervising one student and will be closely monitored by the SoMS honours committee. Where there are repeated failures to meet the expectations and responsibilities, the SoMS honours committee will make a recommendation to the Head of School (SoMS) that the person concerned should be excluded from supervising, co-supervising or hosting (i.e. supervised by someone else in the same research group) an honours student for a set period of time, after which they will be restricted to a single honours student and closely monitored by the SoMS honours committee. Where the failure to meet the expectations and responsibilities constitutes misconduct, the issue will be dealt with according to the appropriate policy / procedure.

# 7 Resolution of complaints, disputes and conflict

## 7.1 Complaints raised by students

Students may initiate a complaint relating to activities and aspects of a student's experience while enrolled at UNSW, as provided in the Student Complaint Procedure. There are three types of complaint dealt with by this procedure: those relating to academic decisions and matters; those relating to a person; and those relating to administration or process. Other types of complaint are dealt with by separate specific procedures, such as the Research Code of Conduct (see following sections). As described in the Student Complaint Procedure, it is preferable that complaints are dealt with promptly and as close to the source of the complaint as possible, through an informal process of discussion, cooperation and, where appropriate, mediation. Generally, this is most likely to be handled by the supervisor, the course convenor or the SoMS honours committee mentor that has been allocated to the student. If the student is uncomfortable with raising the issue with any of these people, then the complaint can be made through the School Grievance Officer or the Head of School. This will be handled in a sensitive manner and with regard to procedural fairness and confidentiality. The student making the complaint should not suffer any disadvantage as a direct result of making a complaint. If the complaint is unable to be resolved locally or if the complaint is of a more serious nature, then a complaint can be submitted through a central process with the Student Integrity Unit. There is also a provision to appeal the outcome of the investigation from the Student Integrity Unit.

## 7.2 Complaints raised by supervisors

Complaints may also arise from supervisors, where the student is not meeting the responsibilities and reasonable expectations outlined in this document and the Student Code of Conduct. Complaints relating to academic misconduct will be dealt with by the Student Misconduct Procedure and referred to the relevant designated officer as defined in Appendix B of the Procedure.

Complaints that do not amount to academic misconduct but are a source of conflict between the supervisor and the honours student will be handled in the first instance by the SoMS Honours course convenor. The guiding principles for the process are those indicated in the student complaint procedure. That is, the complaint should be dealt with promptly, through an informal process of discussion, cooperation and, where appropriate, mediation. The complaint will be handled in a sensitive manner, with procedural fairness and confidentiality. If the complaint is unable to be resolved, or at the request of the supervisor, the Head of School will mediate the process. The aim of the process should be to find an equitable outcome that resolves the conflict whilst upholding the principles encapsulated in the Student Code of Conduct and the UNSW Code of Conduct. A

distinction should be made between complaints that relate to behaviours that are inconsistent with the expectations and the Student Code of Conduct, and those complaints that relate to the performance of a student. Complaints regarding the performance of a student, while they may generate tension or conflict between the supervisor and student, are generally unwarranted provided the student is performing to the best of their ability. In such cases, the complaint will be dealt with to resolve the conflict by discussion and cooperation to establish reasonable expectations of both the student and supervisor.

### 7.3 Complaints about research activities

All complaints about research activities and outputs, including authorship, intellectual property and research misconduct are handled according to the UNSW Research Code of Conduct and the related UNSW Procedures, including:

- Authorship and resolving disputes between authors procedure
- Handling allegations of research misconduct procedure
- Handling research material and data procedure

Complaints should be referred to the SoMS Honours course convenor in the first instance and may be referred to the Head of School.

### 7.4 Complaints with respect to plagiarism

All breaches of the Student Code of Conduct regarding plagiarism will be dealt with under the Plagiarism Policy.

## 8 Conflict of interest

In all circumstances where there is an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest between the convenor, mentor or other delegated person in administering these guidelines and the supervisor and / or student raising a matter, then the conflict of interest should be declared. The responsibility for administering the matter will then be delegated to the course co-convenor, or to another member of the SoMS Honours Committee, or the Head of School. Examples of conflict of interest include where the administering person is also the supervisor of the student raising the matter; has collaborative grants or shares material research interests with the supervisor of the student raising the matter; has a close personal or family relationship with the supervisor or student raising the matter. The handling of the conflict of interest should be in accord with the UNSW Conflict of Interest Policy.



## 9 Referenced documents:

School of Medical Sciences, Honours SOMS4888/4884, course outline. Available from:  
<https://medicalsciences.med.unsw.edu.au/course-outlines>

Structure of Honours Programs Policy, UNSW Sydney, version 1.1, 29 Feb 2016. Available from:  
<https://www.gs.unsw.edu.au/policy/documents/thestructureofhonoursprograms.pdf>

Research Code of Conduct, UNSW Sydney, version 2.2, 14 Aug 2017. Available from:  
<https://www.gs.unsw.edu.au/policy/documents/codeofconduct.pdf>

UNSW Behaviours, 2017. Available from:  
<https://www.hr.unsw.edu.au/services/peopleandculture/UNSWBehaviours.html>

Student Complaint Procedure, UNSW Sydney, version 3.4, 15 Aug 2017. Available from:  
<https://www.gs.unsw.edu.au/policy/documents/studentcomplaintprocedure.pdf>

Authorship and Resolving Disputes between Authors – Procedure, UNSW Sydney, version 1.3, 30 Aug 2018. Available from:  
<https://www.gs.unsw.edu.au/policy/documents/researchauthorproc.pdf>

Student Code of Conduct, UNSW Sydney, version 2.3, 14 Aug 2017. Available from:  
<https://www.gs.unsw.edu.au/policy/documents/studentcodepolicy.pdf>

Student Misconduct Procedure, UNSW Sydney, version 2.9, 16 July 2018. Available from:  
<https://www.gs.unsw.edu.au/policy/documents/studentmisconductprocedures.pdf>

Student Complaint Procedure, UNSW Sydney, version 3.4, 15 Aug 2017. Available from:  
<https://www.gs.unsw.edu.au/policy/documents/studentcomplaintprocedure.pdf>

Conflict of Interest Policy, UNSW Sydney, version 1.3, 15 Aug 2017. Available from:  
<https://www.gs.unsw.edu.au/policy/documents/conflictinterestpolicy.pdf>

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