

Conflicts of Interest in UBC Botany Graduate Student Supervision

Botany faculty members who have spouses/partners (SPs) in the Department of Botany or other units at UBC must be careful to avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest (collectively referred to as COIs) during student supervision. Partners have interests in maintaining a personal relationship with each other, which may conflict with their professional interests of providing objective guidance and support for students. Partners can't (be perceived to) reliably provide objective/discordant viewpoints, so they in essence should be considered as a single person. An outcome of concordance in viewpoints may also arise in a couple simply from living and working together over a long period of time – thus, diversity in opinion may be lost. However, there may be benefits from having spouses serve in these capacities, and the potential COIs do not outweigh these – they just need to be managed.

(See general UBC policy <https://universitycounsel.ubc.ca/coi/managing-conflicts/>)

This document summarizes prohibited and managed COIs, and the recommended courses of action for managing COIs when spouses/partners (SPs) are formal co-supervisors or serve on the same student supervisory or examination committee. SPs should only co-supervise or serve on the same supervisory or examination committee when there is clear academic necessity.

Several general principles apply to spousal/partner (SPs) conflicts of interest:

- (1) SPs must declare the COI using the UBC RISE system when they start at UBC (if there is an existing relationship) or immediately when there is a new SP relationship. These principles will be taken to apply to faculty pairs who no longer have an SP relationship. PI COIs must be declared annually on the UBC RISE System. The COI declaration must include an appropriate management plan. RISE declarations can refer to principles outlined in this department policy document.
- (2) Supervisory committees involving both SPs must include one more member than the minimum number required for MSc or PhD students.
- (3) SPs are prohibited from serving on the same PhD or MSc final examination. In either situation, the other SP can be present as a non-participating observer in the audience.
- (4) It is recognized that having an SP (or one of two co-supervising SPs) participate in non-final exams (e.g., MSc defence-of-thesis proposal, PhD transfer exams, and PhD candidacy exams) may enrich the examination experience. Consequently, SPs may serve on exams as regular examiners (if on the supervisory committee) or as one of two co-supervisors, where supervisor examination is allowed or expected. However, in these cases the other SP cannot also be an examiner, as only one vote is allowed between the two.
- (5) When a supervisory committee includes both SPs or the SPs co-supervise the student, the departmental exam must be chaired by a graduate advisor who is not an SP.
- (6) Current rules for TASA require that faculty members who have SPs in the Botany department should not be involved in evaluating applications of:
 - a. prospective students to be supervised by their SP
 - b. students supervised by their SP for fellowships, scholarships, or awards

The possible compositions of Botany graduate student committees are summarized below.

MSc/PhD Committee

- A. Supervisor + a minimum of 2 committee members
- B. Supervisor + SP + a minimum of 2 committee members
- C. SP co-supervision + a minimum of 2 committee members

Summarized below are the current compositions of Botany graduate student examining committees and how they may be affected by conflicts of interest.

MSc Defence-of-Thesis proposal

Scenario #1 (Typical)

- Chaired by supervisor, who asks questions
- Includes 2 committee examiners

Scenario #2 (SP on committee or serving as co-supervisor)

- Chaired by Graduate Advisor¹
- Includes 2 committee examiners
- Either SP (but not both) serves as an additional examiner. This person provides only one of the three votes

PhD Candidacy and Transfer Exams

Scenario #1 (Typical, Supervisor does not ask questions)

- Chaired by Graduate Advisor¹
- Supervisor present, but does not ask questions
- 2 committee examiners and 2 non-committee examiners
- SP may serve as one of the committee or non-committee examiners

Scenario #2 (Supervisor added as 5th examiner)

- Chaired by Graduate Advisor¹
- Supervisor present and permitted to serve as a 5th examiner
- 2 committee examiners and 2 non-committee examiners
- SP may not serve as examiner in any capacity

Scenario #3 (Supervisor and SP as co-supervisors, no 5th examiner)

- Chaired by Graduate Advisor¹
- Co-supervisors present and do not ask questions
- 2 committee examiners and 2 non-committee examiners

Scenario #4 (Supervisor and SP as co-supervisors, with 5th examiner)

- Chaired by Graduate Advisor¹
- Co-supervisors present, and one of the two is permitted to serve as a 5th examiner
- 2 committee examiners and 2 non-committee examiners
- 5th examiner has one vote, and the other SP does not participate but can be present as an observer

MSc Defence

Scenario #1 (Typical)

- Chaired by Graduate Advisor¹
- Supervisor present, but does not ask questions
- 2 committee examiners and 1 university examiner
- SP may serve as a committee examiner, but not as a university examiner

Scenario #2 (Supervisor and SP as co-supervisors)

- Chaired by Graduate Advisor¹
- Supervisor and/or SP present, but neither asks questions
- 2 committee examiners and 1 university examiner

PhD Defence

Scenario #1 (Typical)

- Chair designated by Grad Studies
- Supervisor present, has one vote, and also represents the External Examiner (if not attending)
- 1-2 committee examiners and 2 university examiners
- SP may not serve as an examiner in any capacity

Scenario #2 (Supervisor and SP as co-supervisors)

— Chair designated by Grad Studies

— Supervisor and/or SP co-supervisor are present, but only one may participate in the examination, vote, and represent the External Examiner. If present, the SP may only observe.

— 1-2 committee examiners and 2 university examiners

¹ Graduate Advisors cannot be an SP in any scenario