



UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA

Finding a Graduate Program Supervisor

If you are applying to a thesis-based program at the University of Alberta, you may be required to identify a potential supervisor before applying or before an admission decision about your application can be made. Finding a strong match with a supervisor is one of the most important factors in both your admission success and your long-term research achievement. Use this guide to navigate the process of finding a graduate program supervisor strategically and professionally.



1

UNDERSTAND THE ROLE OF A SUPERVISOR



Graduate supervisors guide the development of your thesis topic, research methods and academic progress so it is important that your supervisor have expertise that aligns with your intended research direction. Programs vary in their requirements –

some expect you to secure a supervisor before applying, while others allow you to connect with a supervisor after you apply. Always check your program's specific guidelines.

2

IDENTIFY POTENTIAL SUPERVISORS

Start with your academic and research interests.

Review department research pages, faculty profiles and current projects to identify instructors or researchers working in your area of interest.

Be selective. Create a short list of faculty members whose expertise closely aligns with your proposed research. Quality outreach is more effective than mass emailing.

Engage through your coursework. If you're currently studying at the U of A, begin building professional relationships in your classes:

- Attend lectures regularly and participate actively.
- Use office hours to ask questions and learn more about the instructor's work.
- Inquire about research opportunities or ways to get involved.

3

PREPARE BEFORE REACHING OUT

Before emailing a potential supervisor:



- Read their **directory profile, publications and research web page** to understand their work.
- Follow **any instructions** they provide for prospective students.
- Prepare a **current CV/resume** and an **unofficial transcript**, as faculty often request these.



5

AFTER YOU EMAIL

- **Be patient.** Faculty balance teaching, research and supervision, so response times vary.
- If needed, send a polite follow-up after 2-3 weeks.
- Prepare thoughtful questions for a meeting – ask about research projects, expectations, supervision style and opportunities for involvement.
- **Don't be discouraged** by non-responses or rejections. Faculty may be at capacity for new students.

4

CRAFT A PROFESSIONAL, TARGETED EMAIL



A strong outreach email should:

- Include a clear and descriptive subject line.
- Introduce yourself briefly (name, program, year, research interests).
- Explain **why you are contacting this specific supervisor** and how their work aligns with your goals.
- Request a **conversation or meeting** to explore mutual fit – don't ask for a position outright.
- Reflect your own voice and professionalism.
- This initial conversation is an opportunity for both sides to determine alignment in research interests, expectations and working style.

6

FOSTER POSITIVE PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

If you have an ongoing connection with an instructor:

- Take initiative by asking about opportunities and expressing genuine interest.
- Show appreciation for their time, whether or not the interaction leads to a position.
- Share updates if you secure a research opportunity as a result of their guidance.

Final Advice

Finding a supervisor is about mutual fit, research alignment and professional communication. Taking a thoughtful, targeted approach will strengthen your application, build meaningful academic relationships and set the foundation for a successful graduate career at the University of Alberta.



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