

A Quick Guide for Supervisors

in SIS and across Carleton

MA in Human Rights and Social Justice · School of Interdisciplinary Studies

(Companion to the HRSJ Graduate Handbook 2026–2027)

AT A GLANCE

The lens:

This MA treats human rights and social justice through anticolonial, decolonial, antiracist, transnational, and community-based frameworks. Supervisors are not asked to be experts in those traditions, only to be open to them, to examine their own disciplinary assumptions, and to seek co-supervision where a project needs knowledge/expertise that is beyond their research scope.

The scale:

MRE ≈ 15,000 words or 60 double-spaced pages (1.0 credit, supervisor + second reader, letter grade).
Thesis ≈ 25,000 words or 100 double-spaced pages (2.0 credits, oral defence, SAT/UNS).

The deadlines:

A supervisor-approved, examinable thesis normally reaches the department by April 1 (to finish in time for June graduation) or July 15 (to avoid incurring fall term tuition). Your own final-draft deadline must be well before that. Confirm current dates each year.

Before you commit:

Send the student's name and proposed research plan to the Graduate Advisor for approval.

After you commit:

Sign the [MA Thesis or MRE Application Form](#) which is a part of the student's application package (to be submitted to the undersigned on or before 15 May).

Questions:

Graduate Advisor Shazia Sadaf (shaziasadaf@cunet.carleton.ca)

Graduate Administrator (iisgrad@carleton.ca).

Before you agree to supervise

- **Confirm intellectual fit.** You can guide the project's subject matter, methods, or form — and will respect its HRSJ orientation.
- **Confirm capacity.** Discuss availability, leave, workload, meeting frequency, draft limits, and likely feedback time.
- **Confirm eligibility.** Ask the HRSJ program about supervisory status before making a commitment.
- **Test feasibility.** Review the proposed pathway, scope, ethics needs, access, resources, and completion target.
- **Agree on roles.** Put milestones, communication, authorship, data, confidentiality, and conflict-resolution expectations in writing.
- **Contact the program.** Send the student's name, research plan and proposed arrangement to the Graduate Advisor and Graduate Administrator before it is treated as final.

1. THE HRSJ SUPERVISORY LENS

The MA studies human rights and social justice as fields of inquiry and of political advocacy. The program emphasizes social-justice frameworks arising from anticolonial, decolonial, antiracist, transnational, and community-based knowledge processes and practices. The required seminars: HRSJ 5901 (Critical Approaches) and HRSJ 5902 (Critical Methodologies) reinforce that orientation, and students arrive expecting their research to continue it.

What this means in practice

- **Historicize rights claims.** Ask how colonialism, racial capitalism, state power, borders, institutions, and social movements shape the problem and the very terms used to describe it.
- **Treat knowledge as situated.** Support serious engagement with Indigenous, Black, racialized, feminist, queer and trans, disability, diasporic, Global South, community, and activist knowledge traditions.
- **Require reflexivity.** Help the student explain positionality, power, access, relationships, interpretive authority, and the limits of the research.
- **Avoid extractive research.** Where communities or organizations are involved, discuss reciprocity, consent, benefit, risk, ownership, return of results, and obligations beyond institutional clearance.
- **Protect interdisciplinarity.** Evaluate the work by standards suited to its question and form. Do not force it into the conventions of your home discipline where those conventions do not fit.
- **Make feedback accountable.** Critique arguments and methods directly, while avoiding racialized, colonial, ableist, or gendered assumptions about authority, rigour, voice, and professionalism.

WHAT IS NOT REQUIRED

A supervisor need not be expert in every critical tradition, nor agree with a predetermined conclusion. The expectation is openness to the program's intellectual commitments, willingness to examine one's own disciplinary assumptions, and readiness to seek co-supervision or additional expertise when the project requires it.

Probable questions to raise at the first substantive meeting

- Whose definition of human rights or justice is being used, and what does it make visible or obscure?
- Which communities, knowledges, languages, histories, and forms of evidence are central and which risk being treated as peripheral?
- How will the project address positionality, power, consent, access, safety, and accountability?
- Who are the intended audiences, and what form of contribution would be useful to them?
- Would a co-supervisor, advisor, Knowledge Keeper, community partner, or methodological consultant strengthen the work?

2. ELIGIBILITY, APPROVAL, AND ROLES

Potential supervisor	What to do before agreeing
SIS faculty member	Confirm subject/method fit, capacity, and the proposed pathway with the HRSJ Graduate Advisor.
Carleton faculty member outside SIS	Contact HRSJ first. University policy generally links supervision to the unit(s) in which the faculty member holds a supervisory appointment; co-supervision or an exception may be required.
Teaching-stream or lecturer appointment	Do not assume eligibility. Current University policy requires exceptional approval for supervisory status.
Adjunct, emeritus, Knowledge Keeper, or faculty at another institution	Prior approval and a Carleton co-supervisor may be required. Begin the appointment process early, and do not ask the student to manage it alone.

Co-supervision: the most common arrangement for outside supervisors

If you are outside SIS, co-supervision with an HRSJ-appointed colleague is often the simplest route, and frequently the strongest one. It resolves the appointment question, gives the student disciplinary depth alongside grounding in the program's orientation, and spreads the feedback load.

- **When it is advisable:** your appointment sits outside SIS; the project needs methodological or field expertise you do not have; the work is research-creation; or it engages communities, languages, or knowledge traditions requiring specific accountability.
- **How it is set up:** the student names both supervisors on the MA Thesis or MRE Application Form and the advisory committee form. The Graduate Advisor and Graduate Administrator confirm eligibility and the appointment; do not treat the arrangement as settled until they do.
- **Divide the labour explicitly:** agree at the outset who reads which drafts first, who gives the final word on readiness for examination, expected turnaround for each of you, and how you will resolve disagreement without putting the student in the middle.
- **At examination:** co-supervisors are each members of the examination board and are each allotted questioning time.

The working relationship

Supervisor	Student	HRSJ / School
Guide scope, approach, ethics, analysis, and presentation.	Develop the work, prepare for meetings, and meet agreed milestones.	Approve pathway and supervisory arrangements.
Maintain regular communication and give timely, constructive feedback.	Submit complete work at agreed times and respond thoughtfully to feedback.	Confirm registration, forms, internal deadlines, and examination steps.
Say clearly when work is or is not ready for assessment or examination.	Maintain registration, ethics compliance, records, and communication.	Support problem-solving and route formal requests or exceptions.

Record these expectations early

- Project scope, intended contribution, methods or creative form, and criteria for a successful MRE or thesis.
- Meeting rhythm, preferred channels, response times, draft schedule, and the number or type of drafts normally reviewed.
- Target completion date, interim milestones, planned absences, and what happens if progress changes.
- Roles of co-supervisors, advisors, second readers, community partners, and other contributors.
- Data stewardship, confidentiality, intellectual property, authorship, acknowledgements, and research-creation rights.
- How concerns will be raised, documented, and taken to the Graduate Advisor when informal resolution is not enough.

FEEDBACK BASELINE

Carleton's supervision policy calls for regular communication and timely, constructive feedback. If feedback cannot be provided within one month, the delay must be handled in consultation with the student. Agree on a more specific working norm wherever possible.

3. KNOW THE PATHWAY AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

The MA is 4.0 credits. Every pathway includes HRSJ 5901 and HRSJ 5902; the table below covers the two supervised research pathways.

Feature	Research essay (MRE)	Thesis
Research component	HRSJ 5908 (1.0 credit)	HRSJ 5909 (2.0 credits)
Other approved graduate courses	2.0 credits	1.0 credit
Typical final length	≈15,000 words, excluding references and appendices	≈25,000 words, excluding references and appendices
Proposal	≈2,000–2,500 words	≈3,000–3,750 words
Current eligibility guide	Program currently considers students with MA-level grades at A- or above; consult the Graduate Advisor about exceptions.	Same current guide; approval is not automatic.
Assessment	Supervisor plus second reader; letter grade through the program	Oral defence; Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory
Final step	Corrections, clean electronic copy to the Graduate Administrator, grade processing	Required revisions and final electronic deposit after supervisor approval

LENGTH IS A GUIDE

Final length, structure, and format must fit the project and be agreed with the supervisor. Research-creation may combine creative and written components where form, documentation, evidence, and assessment criteria are settled in advance.

Application package

Applications for the MRE or thesis pathway go to the HRSJ Graduate Committee by the internal deadline communicated each year, normally **15th May**. The package normally includes:

- MA Thesis or MRE Application Form and the applicable advisory-committee or second-reader form;
- proposal at the pathway-appropriate length;
- realistic work plan and timeline;
- preliminary bibliography;
- recent, ungraded academic writing sample; and
- any additional material requested by the Graduate Committee.

A supervisor's proposal review

- **Significance:** Is the problem important within human rights and social justice, and is the contribution clear?
- **Critical orientation:** Does the proposal examine power, history, positionality, and the assumptions built into its concepts and evidence?
- **Fit and feasibility:** Can the questions, access, methods, ethics, and resources be managed at MA scale?
- **Methodological coherence:** Do the methods or creative practices suit the question and the knowledge traditions engaged?
- **Completion plan:** Does the schedule include ethics, research, drafts, feedback, assessment or defence, revisions, and final submission?

4. ETHICS, CARE, AND PROJECT GOVERNANCE

Screen for ethics and governance while the proposal is being designed — not after the methods are fixed. Human-participant research must receive clearance from the appropriate Carleton University Research Ethics Board before recruitment or data collection begins, unless the Board confirms that review is not required. Because HRSJ sits in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, protocols normally go to CUREB-A. General enquiries: ethics@carleton.ca.

Ask early whether the project involves

- interviews, focus groups, surveys, participant observation, or identifiable secondary data;
- Indigenous Peoples or communities, community protocols, collective rights, or Indigenous data sovereignty;
- community organizations, activist groups, people in dependent relationships, or populations facing elevated risk;
- work across jurisdictions, another institution's ethics process, organizational permission, translation, or cross-border data transfer;
- sensitive personal information, safety plans, confidentiality limits, secure storage, future data use, or public-facing creative work.

INDIGENOUS RESEARCH ETHICS (IREB)

Research involving Indigenous Peoples, communities, languages, lands, waters and territories, cultures, or knowledges must be reviewed by Carleton's Indigenous Research Ethics Board. In practice: a proposal submitted to CUREB that involves Indigenous participants or communities is routed to the IREB, and the researcher attends an IREB support session to obtain a signed and locked Indigenous Research Ethics Assessment Tool, which is submitted alongside the CUREB application. If the proposal does not satisfy the initial reviewer, it goes to a full IREB board review. Start early — and note that supervisors are encouraged to attend the support session with the student. Contact: anako@cunet.carleton.ca.

PLANNING ALLOWANCE

Allow roughly 2–3 weeks for minimal-risk review and 4–6 weeks for full-board review, plus time for revisions. Busy periods and complex projects take longer, and IREB review adds time. Only the Research Ethics Board determines the required route and clearance.

Supervisor checks

- Review the complete protocol and appendices; Carleton requires a signed REB Supervisor Approval Form for student protocols.
- Make sure the proposal, ethics materials, recruitment language, consent process, and actual research plan all say the same thing.
- Treat institutional clearance as a minimum. Discuss relational accountability, reciprocity, community expectations, dissemination, and possible harms.
- Require an amendment before approved methods, participants, instruments, data practices, or research-team roles materially change.

Discuss permitted uses of generative AI or automated tools, confidentiality risks, documentation, authorship, and any funder or publication rules.

5. PLAN BACKWARD FROM COMPLETION

Target	Normal deadline (verify each year)	Meaning for the supervisor
Spring graduation	Normally April 1	Last day for a supervisor-approved thesis in examinable form to reach the department. For students targeting spring graduation processing. Confirm the exact date.
Summer submission	Normally July 15	Last day for a supervisor-approved thesis in examinable form to reach the department. May have implications for fall registration and fees.
Winter graduation	November 1	Last day for a supervisor-approved thesis in examinable form to reach the department. For students targeting winter graduation processing. Confirm the exact date.
MRE completion	Internal date set by HRSJ	Allow time for second-reader assessment, corrections, grade entry, and graduation processing.

NOT A WRITING DEADLINE

A listed thesis date is the deadline for a supervisor-approved, examinable thesis to reach the department — not the date the student stops writing. Your own final full-draft deadline must be substantially earlier. Exact dates change annually; confirm them on the Academic Year page and with the Graduate Administrator.

6. FROM FINAL DRAFT TO COMPLETION

For a thesis

- **Set the hand-in date.** Work backward from the University deadline and agree when the complete final draft must reach you.
- **Confirm readiness.** State clearly whether the thesis is in examinable form and meets HRSJ and Graduate Studies requirements.
- **Alert the School.** At least two weeks' notice is expected before the intended submission date; earlier coordination is strongly preferable.

- **Build the examination window.** Allow at least four weeks from submission to the department to the intended defence unless an approved alternative is confirmed. The examination copy must be uploaded through Carleton Central at least three weeks before the defence.
- **Select External and Internal examiners.** Send an email to the Graduate Administrator (iisgrad@carleton.ca) and copy the graduate Advisor (shazia.sadaf@carleton.ca) the following information:

Student being examined name and ID:

Supervisor name, email, and Banner ID if possible:

Title of the Thesis:

Date of Examination:

Time of Examination:

Format of Examination: in person or zoom or hybrid.

External examiner name, home institution and department, and email:

Internal examiner name and email:

- **Close the loop.** After the defence, verify required revisions and approvals. The degree is not complete until the final copy is uploaded, approved, forwarded to Graduate Studies, and all program requirements are satisfied.

YOUR ROLE AT THE DEFENCE

Carleton master's defences are chaired and tightly timed. In the first round the external examiner has about 20 minutes and the internal about 15; you are allotted roughly 15 minutes (each, if co-supervising) and may forego your time. A more open second round follows, then the candidate leaves while the board deliberates. A master's defence normally does not exceed two hours. The Chair — not the supervisor — runs proceedings. Full detail is in the HRSJ Graduate Handbook.

For an MRE

- Agree on a final submission date that leaves enough time for supervisor review.
- Send the supervisor-approved MRE to the second reader through the School's specified process.
- Coordinate required corrections and confirm the clean final copy.
- Ensure the Graduate Administrator receives the final electronic copy and that the grade is processed.

Live forms, policies, and templates

HRSJ forms — application, second-reader, and advisory-committee forms.

(<https://carleton.ca/iis/resources-and-forms/>)

Program requirements — official pathway and course-credit rules.

(<https://calendar.carleton.ca/grad/gradprograms/humanrightsandsocialjustice/>)

Supervision expectations — University responsibilities and problem-resolution framework.

(<https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/graduate-supervision-responsibilities-expectations-policy/>)

Appointment status — eligibility policy and appointment process. (<https://carleton.ca/secretariat/wp-content/uploads/Grad-Supervision-Appts-Policy-2024.pdf>)

Thesis resources — formatting, templates, examination, deposit, and checklist.

(<https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/resources-page/thesis-requirements/>)

Academic dates — current Senate-approved deadlines. (<https://calendar.carleton.ca/academicyear/>)

Research ethics — review process, forms, consent, recruitment, and data templates.

(<https://research.carleton.ca/researchethics/>)

Indigenous research ethics (IREB) — policy, process, assessment tool, and support-session request form.

(<https://carleton.ca/anako/indigenous-research-ethics-board/>)

AI in research — current Graduate Studies guidance. (<https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/ai-considerations-for-research/>)

WHEN IN DOUBT

Contact the Graduate Advisor and Graduate Administrator before changing pathway, supervision, scope, registration, ethics status, examination timing, or submission plans. Graduate Advisor: shaziasadaf@cunet.carleton.ca · Graduate Administrator: iisgrad@carleton.ca.