



Supervisory relationships

Part 1

Professor Jassan is a highly successful mid-career researcher in sociology. They are known in the field as an excellent mentor who enables a comprehensive learning experience for their students.

Jane, a high-calibre PhD student supported by federal scholarship, is passionate about sharing her research and teaching. She regularly takes on teaching assistantships and contract faculty positions as opportunities arise. Professor Jassan fully supports Jane's interest in teaching, as long as she makes steady progress on her research. They value Jane's ability to translate knowledge and to inspire others' interest in sociology.

Dr. Jassan recently published a book, which summarized decades of their research. They asked Jane to write a review of their new book, with a goal of increasing the book's visibility and ultimately optimizing sales. Jane appreciated the acknowledgement of her strengths and would like to show her appreciation by supporting Dr. Jassan's new book launch. However, she is hesitant to take on this task given her current teaching and research commitments.

Questions for consideration

1. What are some factors that may impact Jane and Professor Jassan's relationship?
2. What would you recommend Jane do?

Part 2

Jane shared concerns regarding her current capacity with Professor Jassan. In addition to analyzing the data and preparing a progress report for her federal scholarship, she has to complete her marking and return feedback to her students within the next few weeks; she did not think she will have enough time to write the book review. Dr. Jassan points out that Jane had took on these additional responsibilities herself and they had always supported her goals and ambitions. They told Jane to prioritize writing the book review given the book launch timeline and suggested that doing so will likely elevate her own profile in the field.

Jeopardizing her relationship with Dr. Jassan over this request could mean that she may not be able to receive timely feedback on her research and may impact her ability to pursue future teaching opportunities. Jane completed the book review as she felt she did not have an alternative.

Questions for consideration

3. Is Professor Jassan justified in asking Jane to write a book review for his new book, even though it is unrelated to her dissertation?
4. Does it matter that Jane's funded by a SSHRC doctoral scholarship?
5. What resources are available to graduate students who have questions about unique or challenging elements of a supervisor-student relationship?

We thank our colleagues at UBC and beyond who provided perspectives and feedback that greatly improved the relevance of these case studies to members of our research community. Their contribution and support are central to our efforts to promote education on, and raise awareness of, the importance of the responsible conduct of research.

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Part 1

1. What are some factors that may impact Jane and Professor Jassan's relationship?
 - Potential mismatched expectations around whether writing a book review is within the scope of a graduate student's responsibility
 - Power dynamics with Jane not wanting to decline this request and consequently jeopardize her positive and supportive relationship with Professor Jassan.
2. What would you recommend Jane do?

Some options available to Jane include:

 - Be aware of her responsibilities to herself, Professor Jassan, her students, funding agency and others relevant stakeholders.
 - Be transparent in sharing her concerns, needs, and expectations around this request
 - Ask for clarification around the scope of this book review
 - Explore how this request is in alignment with her goals, responsibilities and studies
 - Seek support and guidance from fellow graduate students, her supervisory committee or graduate advisor

Part 2

3. Is Professor Jassan justified in asking Jane to write a book review for his new book, even though it is unrelated to her dissertation?

Normally, supervisors should be wary of "expecting" their students to do research or work outside their main research topic/focus. It should be clear that this is an invitation, not a demand. Supervisors should always be aware, however, of the power differential in a student-supervisor relationship and not put students in difficult situations by making unreasonable "requests", which could be interpreted as demands.

Dr. Jassan's request is especially problematic, given the book review aims to promote their book sales and does not necessarily further Jane's career training.
4. Does it matter that Jane's funded by a SSHRC doctoral scholarship?

Yes, the [Tri-Agency Guide on Financial Administration](#) explicitly stated that federal funding must not result in personal gain for members of the research team. Writing the book review in her capacity as a graduate student while being funded by a SSHRC doctoral scholarship is considered a breach of federal policies, as her paid time is used to promote Dr. Jassan's book sales.
5. What resources are available to graduate students who have questions about unique or challenging elements of a supervisor-student relationship?
 - Supervisory committee members
 - Graduate advisor
 - Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies and College of Graduate Studies

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