**Letter to Graduate Students & Supervisors from SGS Dean, Joshua Barker**

Dear Graduate Students & Supervisors,

We understand that research-stream graduate students and their supervisors may have concerns about how the COVID-19 epidemic is impacting graduate research and how this will in turn affect students’ academic progress through their programs. Already, most U of T labs have paused their work, research involving direct contact with participants has been paused (or methodologies changed), libraries have closed their physical locations, and research travel has been curtailed. In addition, students and faculty with caregiving responsibilities have had to adapt to school/daycare closures and other challenges. While we do not know how long this situation will last, it is prudent to be planning for the likelihood that social distancing measures and travel restrictions, in one form or another, will be part of our research landscape for some time yet.

As such, the School of Graduate Studies asks that supervisors/advisors and their research-stream **Master’s** and **Ph.D. students** plan to have an online mentoring meeting to discuss the impact of the pandemic on the student’s research plans and academic progress. Strategies to mitigate this impact, if needed, should be discussed and recorded. For doctoral students, this mentoring meeting may be part of the Annual Progress Report meeting; or it may be a special meeting. A supplemental form to document the results of this meeting will be provided to you. When completed, please return it to your Graduate Coordinator, no later than May 15, 2020.

For the graduate student and their supervisor, this mentoring meeting is not only an important check-in, but in light of this disruption, it will also help to ensure that students and supervisors have an opportunity to discuss any concerns that have emerged due to these unanticipated events. Collectively, the information gathered through this exercise will inform ongoing planning by departments, divisions and institutional leaders aimed at supporting students’ academic progress in these challenging times. To address the needs of students whose research has been seriously impacted by COVID-19, we are considering employing a range of tools, such as: program extensions, tuition waivers, research pivot bursaries, and research completion bursaries. Students in the funded cohort need to know that the commitments outlined in their annual funding letters, including research stipendiary payments, continue to remain in effect.

Since this pandemic is still unfolding, we expect the full impacts on much graduate research will only become known with time. For continuing students, we are therefore planning now for a follow-up mentoring meeting in October.

Sincerely,

Joshua Barker
Dean, School of Graduate Studies and
Vice-Provost, Graduate Research and Education