

April 21, 2021

Dear Graduate Chairs, Graduate Coordinators, Supervisors and Graduate Administrators,

On April 16, 2021, the provincial government announced [additional measures](#) related to the [Stay-at-Home order](#) that has been in place since the declaration of the provincial State of Emergency on April 8. The University has carefully reviewed the new Regulations pertaining to these measures, and there are no new impacts on our research activities. However, with rising COVID-19 case counts and the growing prevalence of variants of concern, this is a good moment for all of us to review and reinforce the measures we have in place.

Working Remotely vs. On-Site

Our shared objective is to limit the spread of COVID-19. To do this and to comply with the Provincial public health measures, **the University requires all those whose activities can be performed from their homes to do so until further notice**. We encourage graduate students to please carefully reconsider whether they must be on-site to conduct any of their research activities during this period of enhanced public health measures. If it is essential to come to campus, please continue to follow the Provincial and University guidelines. Anyone coming to campus should complete [UCheck](#), stay two meters apart, and wear a mask and a face shield or goggles if necessary. Those experiencing symptoms should inform their supervisor or graduate coordinator/chair, stay at home, get tested and seek medical attention if necessary.

As a reminder, in cases where on-site research has been approved to continue, **graduate students engaged in research towards their degree completion retain the right to decide whether or not to attend the research site**. Coercion or intimidation of students to attend on-site research activities will not be tolerated. Graduate students who feel uncomfortable coming into the lab or other research site *for any reason* should discuss their concerns with their supervisor, graduate coordinator or departmental chair. They may also contact SGS directly at sgs.vdeanstudents@utoronto.ca.

[As indicated by the Division of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation](#), those who need to come to campus for research and are given divisional permission to do so may be given specific times when they are allowed on campus so that numbers are limited to the same cohort. They are also expected to return home upon completion of their research task or activity (e.g., come to the lab to run an experiment and then return home to continue with other aspects of the research that can be performed remotely). For those working in U of T affiliated hospitals, including their Research Institutes, hospital regulations and directions apply.

Be Flexible and Stay Connected

In our graduate student [Pulse survey](#) about COVID-19, students across disciplines said that flexibility—in expectations, program requirements, and when and where they can work—was fundamental to making academic progress during the pandemic. With that in mind, I encourage everyone to be flexible and to do their best to accommodate any unique needs and challenges. For example, with schools closed it is important for supervisors to be mindful of family obligations of their students and be flexible in scheduling. Supervisors and students are also encouraged to remain connected, especially if working remotely.

Vaccinations

The [priority groups for vaccination](#) are not determined by the University, but rather by the Province and continue to evolve. When you are eligible for vaccination, please consider rolling up your sleeve and getting your first shot. Vaccination provides an extra layer of protection, but all public health precautions should continue to be followed as you may still become infected and can be contagious. The University will continue to follow the guidance of the province when it comes to health and safety requirements, and will provide updated information about vaccines on the [UTogether website](#) when it receives it.

Library services

U of T Libraries have updated their services in keeping with the Stay-at-Home order. Please visit the [U of T Libraries website](#) for more information.

Mentoring Meetings

As you engage in mentoring meetings and annual check-ins, be sure to address ongoing and emerging issues due to COVID-19, including:

- disrupted access to research environments or resources;
- success or problems associated with pivoting research in response to COVID-19 barriers;
- increased stress/workload affecting academic progress.

Graduate student supports

As the pandemic continues, I wish to draw your attention to the [supports available to graduate students](#) and the [guidelines for graduate students engaged in research towards degree completion](#).

Resources for student mental health and wellbeing are available on the SGS [GradHub](#) or through [Navi](#). Supports include:

[My SSP](#) (support available 24/7/365)

[Good2Talk Student Helpline](#)

[Student Mental Health Resource Website](#)

[St. George, Health and Wellness Centre](#)

[UTSC, Health and Wellness Centre](#)

[UTM, Health & Counselling Centre](#)

[University of Toronto: UTogether](#)

[SGS COVID-19 Looking Ahead](#)

Thank you for all your continuing efforts to support one another through these challenging times. If you have any comments or concerns, please feel free to contact me at sgs.dean@utoronto.ca.

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Cc: SGS Council of Graduate Deans

