

From: Joshua Barker, Dean, School of Graduate Studies (sgs.dean@utoronto.ca)
To: All Graduate Students
When: October 26, 2021
Subject: Message from the Dean, School of Graduate Studies

Dear Graduate Students,

I hope this message finds you well and that you are now deeply engaged in your academic work for the Fall term. Much of the SGS team has been fully back on campus for several weeks now, and it is energizing to see in-person activity resuming. The pandemic continues, and with it the precautions, but I am hearing from student leaders that there is a good deal of eagerness to be on campus. This is certainly not universal, and we are by no means returning to a pre-pandemic state of affairs. But it feels to me that we are emerging from an emergency mindset and discovering ways to get on with things as much as circumstances allow.

As we do so, I ask two things of you: patience and understanding. We need your patience because the resumption of some activities is going to take time. The pandemic has strained our systems and our staff, and any changes we make need to be thoroughly examined and done with care, for all of our safety. We also need your understanding because not all members of our community are on the same page right now. This is understandable, as the impacts of the pandemic—in academic, socio-economic, as well as physical and mental health terms—have been so uneven. We must continue to recognize this unevenness and, as a community, work to be flexible so that all members feel supported through what remains a very uncertain time. Across the University, there are a number of changes underway that are relevant to graduate students, so I am listing them below to make sure you are aware of them. For those of you who are new to the University, I also include information about supports that are available to graduate students at the end of this message; I encourage you to make use of them.

Vaccination Policies

You are now aware that the university requires [proof of full vaccination](#) for all students, faculty, staff, and others who plan to be on campus. Thank you to all of you who have taken steps to upload your proof of vaccination on [UCheck](#). SGS has also prepared a set of [FAQs on vaccine validation](#) for those working in hospitals or other third-party sites. Please make sure you are

compliant with all the vaccine policies that pertain to you and your work. If you have questions about your compliance, please get in touch with ovps@utoronto.ca.

Occupancy in Research Laboratories on Campus

As of October 15, divisions have been given the jurisdiction to open academic research labs at full capacity and without 2m distancing, as long as all other public health guidelines are being followed. Divisional leaders will make decisions about lab capacity, considering local contexts and safety provisions, including general building operations to mitigate congestion, line-ups, etc.

If divisions allow for a re-opening, supervisors will then decide when their own lab re-opens. We have encouraged graduate faculty leaders and supervisors in your units to be sensitive to the variety of perspectives and responses from graduate students and post-doctoral fellows regarding these decisions. We have also recommended clear and continuous communication between supervisor(s) and graduate students, and a consultative approach in determining when/how to increase levels of activity in labs. That means there will be some variation in how different research labs, departments, and campuses approach this process. If you have any concerns about returning to the lab, we encourage you to speak with your supervisor.

Conducting Research On-Campus or Off-Campus

For those who have been working remotely: the decision to return to in-person activities is ideally a joint decision with your supervisor, but ultimately the decision to re-enter in-person research rests with the student. To support your return to in-person University research activities either at a university research site or at an off-campus research site, we have created this [form](#) [PDF] that all new graduate students can submit to their supervisor/Principal Investigator. Your access to these research sites is conditional upon your compliance with public health guidelines and local policies.

On-Campus Graduate Student Study Spaces

As more graduate students return to our campuses in person, I know that it is important that there be space on campus for you to study, work, or eat in-between classes. The University has recently published the following [news item](#), listing some spaces that are available to you. We are

also advising departments and divisions that have not yet done so to make available as much graduate student space as they can while continuing to conform with public health guidelines.

Off-Campus International Research Travel

University activities at international sites remain suspended until the end of the calendar year for graduate students. If you are a PhD student or Research Master's student who needs to travel internationally for degree completion, you may request an exception by contacting the Safety Abroad Office (safety.abroad@utoronto.ca).

Mentoring Meetings during the COVID-19 Pandemic

In some units, this is the time for annual mentoring meetings. Even if it is not, it is important to keep a line of communication open with your supervisor. If you are experiencing delays due to the pandemic, keep them informed of this. Guidance on topics to address in these meetings can be found in the [SGS Supervision Guidelines](#).

Financial Supports

If you are experiencing immediate financial hardship, remember that you can apply for an [SGS Emergency Loan](#) or [SGS Emergency Grant](#). Information about additional university financial aid supports and provincial and federal government programs are available through the [Funding Opportunity Directory](#). Students are also encouraged to check their unit websites for possible additional resources.

Graduate students who meet the eligibility criteria may, with approval of their graduate units, register with a tuition fee exemption for up to one academic session. Many of you have applied for and received such an exemption – details of the program continue to be available on the [SGS website](#).

To assist with PhD completion, SGS has increased the budget for the Dissertation Completion Awards by 20% over the past two years. Dissertation Completion Awards are funded by SGS and administered by departments and divisions; please contact your graduate unit for all application procedures and details.

Please also be aware of longstanding SGS financial supports, including the SGS [parental grant](#), the [summer gym bursary](#), the [conference grant](#), and the [travel grant](#).

Looking Ahead

The School of Graduate Studies continues to be open for virtual and in-person services at 63 St. George St. Don't hesitate to [get in touch](#) and draw on these resources and services. You can find an archive of my updates on the [SGS Looking Ahead page](#).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at sgs.dean@utoronto.ca.

Sincerely,

Joshua

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

Supports for graduate students:

[SGS Grad Hub](#)

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

[Good2Talk Student Helpline](#)

[Student Mental Health Resource Website](#)

[Navi](#)

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

[UTSC, Health and Wellness Centre](#)

[UTM, Health & Counselling Centre](#)