20 October 2020

Dear Class of 2024,

Thanks to all of you who participated in our town hall and survey last week on planning for Winter 2021. As you know, this has been a difficult year, and everyone should feel very proud of the work they have done: your participation in the academic and social life of the remote BISC has been outstanding, and you are a very resilient and patient group.

Unfortunately, we have come to the conclusion that we will not be able to offer an in-person experience at the Castle this Winter. The situation in the UK is becoming increasingly difficult. While COVID-19 case numbers remain relatively low in the area local to the Castle, the per capita caseload in the UK as a whole is four times greater than that in Canada. There are an increasing number of travel restrictions and local lockdowns taking place, and for those of you who have seen the UK news, you will have read that the student experience in many UK universities is very poor, with thousands of students isolated in their residence rooms, and even the possibility that they will be unable to return home for Christmas.

In light of this, the BISC leadership team, with the concurrence of the Principal, believe that there are considerable risks in having you come to the Castle in January. While we may be able to manage risks to your health and safety, the experience you would have this Winter at the Castle simply would not be at the standard that either you or we would expect. Many of you have chosen the Castle for its intimate class size, the possibility of travel, and the ability to study in an international setting. We have heard your aspirations and your concerns about coming to the Castle, and we believe that under the current conditions, the best way we can serve you is to continue in our online and remote format for the remainder of the school year. A similar conclusion had already been reached for students on the main Queen’s campus. So, we will extend our current course format into January, and continue to provide the academic and student service programming that you have come to expect. With your help and feedback, we hope to make continuous improvement as we move along in the year. And remember, you have only started your university career: there will be other opportunities to come to the BISC or to study abroad during the rest of your time at Queen’s. If you do decide to come to one of the BISC’s upper year programs at a later date, you will be given priority access.

I realise that this will be a very disappointing outcome for everyone. However, there is still lots to do, and lots to look forwards to. If you do have questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to our academic advisors, or to your academic counsellors. In the meantime, I once again commend you for your hard work and resilience to date, and appreciate all your support and patience during these difficult times.

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