May 20, 2020

Dear SGS community – students, postdocs, staff, and faculty,

It is hard to believe that over six weeks have passed since I last wrote to you. So much has changed yet I continue to be inspired by your resiliency, perseverance, strength, compassion, and creativity in navigating this unprecedented time. This pandemic, and the restrictions and precautions that have come with it, have necessarily shifted priorities and changed the way we live and work, causing disruptions, uncertainty, and stress for ourselves and those for whom we care.

To our graduate students and post-doctoral fellows, thank you for your patience and adaptability in transitioning to working from home. I continue to be heartened by hearing about the innovative ways that you have supported one another, such as virtual check-ins and writing groups. At SGS, we miss providing you with in-person support, but are excited about upcoming virtual iterations of our flagship programming, which will offer the same opportunities to build community, share knowledge, and gain experience. Dissertation Bootcamp and the final of annual 3MT competition are fast approaching, as is the release of the capstone presentations for the PhD-Community Initiative. Staff in SGS and other support units have been working tirelessly to transition these programs to remote formats. We are also working with our partners to provide a more robust and flexible professional and academic development program, such that a dual delivery model is created to suit current uncertainties as well as future student needs. I would like to take this opportunity to also highlight our Certificate in Professional Development, which you can work towards throughout the year. Regarding your teaching responsibilities, I know your undergraduate students appreciate your efforts in transitioning to remote delivery, whether as TAs or lecturers. If you continue with such work over the summer or plan to do so in future, consider leveraging resources like the Centre for Teaching and Learning’s newly developed Transforming Teaching Toolkit.

To our faculty, I commend your proactive and innovative efforts in teaching, supervision, and support. I have learned of instances of repurposing grant money to provide additional funding for students, reshaping research plans and priorities, and simply checking-in with students to
understand how they are faring. Some are experiencing disruptions to their programs, others are confronting financial and other personal challenges. Many students continue to make progress on their degrees. A shift in priorities and planning may be required, but there are resources to support this as well. Please, continue to reach out to your students; it’s important to connect now more than ever. If you are looking for ideas about how to support your supervisees, consider our Guidelines for Effective Remote Supervision.

To the staff at Queen’s – thank you. I would be remiss if I did not highlight Graduate Assistants, who are tireless advocates and sources of support for our graduate students and continue to demonstrate a great capacity for care. Both faculty and students have expressed appreciation for the support of IT Services during virtual defenses. I take this moment to thank them and to congratulate all those who have successfully defended (over 50 individuals!) over the last several weeks. For those of you who are planning ahead, whether faculty or students, please review our procedures for remote thesis examinations. Finally, I would like to commend and celebrate the work of our counsellors and other staff in the Division of Student Affairs who are available to speak with graduate students about their wellness and are actively identifying ways to support the graduate community. Examples include one-on-one counselling sessions, “crafternoon” for students (kids are welcome!), “Grad Connect” socials, Zoom socials for students with children, guided meditation, virtual workouts, and much more. Such resources can be accessed through Student Wellness Services, the Ban Righ Centre, QUIC, Four Directions, the Office of Faith and Spiritual Life, and the Athletics and Recreation Centre. Students who feel that they would benefit from these programs and services are strongly encouraged to utilize them. Another excellent resource is the Division of Student Affairs’ Green Folder, which contains tips to support those in distress as well as resources for support in the Kingston community, which may be of value for students, faculty, and staff, including post-doctoral fellows.

Many members of our community are facing financial challenges. For those in such situations, I encourage you to apply for the COVID-19 Related Bursary Assistance. Almost $1 million has gone to graduate students to date. Please also remember that the Federal Government’s Canadian Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) and Canadian Emergency Relief Benefits (CERB) programs are available to students. Further, you may wish to explore programs and organizations, such as Mitacs, which is an excellent source of funding, internships, and professional and academic development workshops.

In closing, I want to emphasize again that it is imperative that we all prioritize our wellbeing now and in the coming months. With planning at Queen’s continually evolving and adapting, I want to assure you that all decisions have been made and will be made with the best interest of our community at heart. As we continue to traverse the challenges of the present while working towards the future, I encourage you to remain supportive of one another, and to not allow this unfortunate situation to prevent you from taking the time to celebrate your accomplishments at Queen’s.

In an effort to keep our community informed, the SGS Summer/Fall 2019 page will be regularly updated and offers numerous resources and FAQs that may help to alleviate some of the
challenges or answer your questions. **SGS remains available to support you in whatever ways we can.** If you require assistance, please email sgscomms@queensu.ca and we will do our best to address your concerns.

Sincerely,

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