



Hello everyone,

We know these past two weeks have been scary. We are all concerned about loved ones and staying healthy and safe. We were dramatically pushed into a world of social distancing and it has not been easy.

We've heard from many of you about the variety of issues that you are facing, and we would like to reiterate that we are also personally experiencing these same issues related to COVID-19.

The purpose of this letter is to update you on the issues the SGPS has been working on, what steps we have taken, and what we are planning to do moving forward.

ISSUES

First and foremost, students need accurate health and safety information. The SGPS has been working with Queen's University, and KFL&A Public Health to provide you accurate information through our social media and email. We will continue to do this.

The SGPS has also been able to sit at the University's COVID-19 stakeholders' group, with upper-level administration, KFL&A public health, and other student leaders. At these meetings, we are briefed on the ongoing response and management of COVID-19 and we bring up graduate and professional student issues related to the pandemic. We will continue to do this.

Second, COVID-19 and moving to online learning has raised many academic issues across campus. Students in course-based master's programs, as well as professional programs like law, have expressed concerns to us about grading, evaluation, and accommodation. We have relayed all of these concerns to the university administration and emphasized the benefits of moving to a pass/fail system for final exams.

Students are also concerned about lab work and their research and completing their degree on time at Queen's. We have heard these concerns, we share these concerns, and we have informed the administration about them and we will continue to raise them until they are resolved.

Third, for many, social distancing has already had an immediate economic impact as local Kingston businesses have been asked to shut down. We understand that you rely on the income from these jobs to pay your rent, tuition and put food on the table. This problem is only exacerbated in situations where you have family and childcare responsibilities.

Again, we have brought these concerns directly to upper-level administration and will continue to raise them. We will also ensure that students remain updated on the actions taken by Queen's University on these issues.

Lastly, we know that you are concerned about the greater Kingston community that we call home. We have raised issues around housing for the homeless and will continue to raise them.

SGPS ACTIONS ALREADY TAKEN

Along with responding and raises the issues that you have contacted us about, we would like to give you a brief overview of the actions the SGPS has taken to continue to serve you.

We have worked with Queen's University and KFL&A Public Health each step of the way. We remained physically open until unable to do so. In moving online, we have worked to ensure that we remain open virtually to answer your questions. We have also worked to ensure that our council meetings and AGM can continue remotely for as long as required by social distancing.

The SGPS has also made funds available to students directly fighting COVID-19, by providing a group of medical students a grant to help them 3D print PPE for healthcare workers.

WHAT WE PLAN TO DO

First, the SGPS is making funds available for students to access as emergency grants for those of you most affected by COVID-19. Information will be made available on the SGPS website.

Second, we are also in the process of reopening some of our support services like the Graduate Peer Support Centre in a virtual format. It is important to note that our Peer Academic Advisor service has remained open throughout this period. If you wish to speak to a Peer Academic Advisor, please contact advisors@sgps.ca

Lastly, we are actively working to plan and host virtual events for students via zoom or other means.

This year we have all faced an unusual number of challenges, but the SGPS remains committed to advocating for graduate and professional students, fostering a sense of community, and working with stakeholders on campus.

Please feel free to reach out to any of us.

Thanks,

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