

College of Medicine Graduate Studies Update: April 03, 2020

Hello Everyone,

We know it has been an intense and stressful couple of weeks for everyone. We also know our graduate students have many questions. This update is an attempt to address some of the most pressing ones. I would like to extend my profound thanks to the Registrar, CGPS, OVDR, Vice Dean Radomski, Dean Smith and others who have contributed to this document over the past week.

Take care and stay safe.

Dr. David Cooper
Assistant Dean Graduate Studies
College of Medicine

I. I Need Help.

SEEK HELP IMMEDIATELY if at any time you or someone you know is in distress, in crisis, or experiencing thoughts of suicide or death.

Crisis Response

The Student Affairs and Outreach team provides a coordinated response to crisis situations involving a student. A crisis may be caused by events such as a physical or emotional injury or illness, suicidal behaviours, and concerns about safety.

Contact during office hours: Contact (306) 966-5757 or the Manager directly at (306) 966-6079

Urgent After Hours Assistance:

- **Saskatoon Police Service 911 (or 9-911 on campus)**
- **[Saskatoon Mobile Crisis](#) (24/7) (306) 933-6200**
- **[Crisis Services Canada](#) (24/7) 1(833) 456-4566**
- **[Royal University Hospital Emergency Department](#) (24/7) (306) 655-1000**
- **[Campus Protective Services](#) (24/7) (306) 966-5555**

Additional Crisis Services:

- **[Saskatoon Sexual Assault Centre](#) (24/7) (306) 244-2224**
- **[YWCA Saskatoon Crisis Shelter](#) (24/7 - shelter for females) (306) 244-2844**
- **[Saskatoon Interval House](#) (24/7 shelter for females) (306) 244-0185**
- **[Saskatoon Crisis Nursery](#) (24/7) (306) 242-2433**
- **[The Lighthouse](#) (24/7 shelter for males & females) (306) 653-0538**
- **[Sk.211.ca](#) directory for urgent and crisis services**

The University Student Wellness Center now has an individual counselor whose time will be allocated specifically to CoM graduate students. We encourage anyone who feels they need support to contact the Wellness Center at student.wellness@usask.ca and indicate they are a CoM graduate student who is looking to speak with Eman Demmans. From there, you will be guided on how to set up an over the phone appointment.

Please visit the wellness page at the link indicated below for more information on Ms. Demmans including her credentials and therapeutic specialties

Additionally, until professional treatment is received and/or crisis is resolved, students may contact Dr. Erin Prosser-Loose (erin.prosser-loose@usask.ca) who has training in mental health first aid.

Please seek help if you need it and visit the Graduate Student Wellness resource page for more information or updates:

<https://medicine.usask.ca/students/graduate-programs/student-wellness.php>

II. How do I stay connected?

A. Webpages. The University, College of Medicine (CoM) and graduate programs within the CoM have all established COVID-19 Information web pages:

University: <https://updates.usask.ca/>

CoM: <https://medicine.usask.ca/covid19.php>

CoM Graduate Programs: <https://medicine.usask.ca/students/graduate-programs/covid-19.php>

B. Supervisors and Supervisory Committees. All students should be in regular contact with their supervisors and/or supervisory committees at this time. This should be your first line of direct contact. These individuals are best positioned to advise you regarding strategies for maintaining progress (see below) and identifying emerging issues that should be brought to the attention of the CoM and/or CGPS.

C. Graduate Program Chairs and Secretaries. Your graduate program chairs and secretaries are your primary link to your departments (should you be in a departmentalized program). If an issue arises that cannot be handled at the supervisor/committee level it should be brought to the attention of your graduate chair.

D. Assistant Dean Graduate Studies (ADGS) College of Medicine. The ADGS serves in a coordinating role in the CoM and provides an interface to the Dean via the Vice Dean Research and also CGPS. If you have any concerns or questions do not hesitate to contact the ADGS.

Dr. David Cooper: dml.cooper@usask.ca

E. College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS). All graduate students are members of CGPS and subject to its policies. All students have the right to contact CGPS at any time - particularly if they have concerns with any of the lower levels of contact identified above.

F. College of Medicine Graduate Student Society (CMGSS). CMGSS is your student society and has representation from all CoM graduate programs. They are in weekly contact with the leadership of the CoM. You will periodically receive requests for feedback from them - please make every effort to participate. They are also working on initiatives such as a Grad Student Survival Guide and a COVID Kindness Group that should be appearing soon on their webpage: <https://medicine.usask.ca/students/graduate-programs/cmgss.php>

Additional contacts:

<https://www.facebook.com/UsaskCMGSS>

cmgss@usask.ca

III. What should I be doing now?

A. You should not be coming in to work. Indeed, unless you have been given explicit permission (approved by the Office of the Vice President Research) you are not allowed to be in the Health Sciences Building. Those granted permission need to sign a consent form and can revoke their consent at any time. **If you are currently working to maintain essential research and/or maintaining animal colonies - thank you for your service to the University.**

B. You should be in contact with your supervisor/committee and planning a virtual meeting. This is the time of year when many students have regularly scheduled committee meetings. Now more than ever, there is a need to assess progress and stay connected. Things that need to be discussed include:

1. What progress can be made under the current situation
 - a. Data Analysis
 - b. Remote computing
 - c. Writing up manuscripts/research chapters
 - d. Writing introductory thesis chapters
 - e. Writing review papers
 - f. etc...
2. How close to finishing are you?
3. Would modifications to your research plan enable you to finish your degree with the data that you already have in hand?
4. Will funds be available to support an additional term in the program due to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 crisis?
5. If you have course work yet to complete can this be done over the coming months?
 - a. Supervisors can offer 898.3 Special topics courses and these can be approved by Graduate Program Chairs if they exclusively involve graduate content (e.g. no hybrid undergraduate/graduate instruction). CGPS can help review these documents and the April 1 deadline does not apply.
6. Qualifying and Comprehensive exams can be initiated where needed
7. Defenses can proceed via teleconference

IV. Do I have to pay tuition for Spring/Summer?

Changes to University policies regarding tuition and fees can be found here: <https://updates.usask.ca/info/current/money.php#Governmentsupport>

The following changes were recently announced:

Overdue student accounts

“As of April 2020 and until further notice, the university will not charge late fees to students with overdue tuition and student fees. If you have an overdue account, you will continue to have a hold on your account, which prevents you from registering for classes, ordering transcripts and viewing your grades.”

Graduate instalment plan

“The Graduate Student Tuition Instalment plan is suspended for the spring and summer terms”

What does this mean for Graduate Students?

If you are up to date on your tuition and fees (i.e. you have paid for Fall/Winter 2019/20), you will be able to register in the Spring/Summer terms as per normal.

The payment deadlines for the Spring/Summer terms are being extended to **June 2** for Spring term and **August 3** for Summer term, and while you are encouraged to pay Spring/Summer tuition and fees by the payment deadlines, we understand that this may be difficult. Please be assured that you will not be assessed a financial penalty for paying after the payment deadlines. **YOU DO NOT HAVE TO APPLY FOR PERMISSION TO EXERCISE THIS OPTION.**

It is important to note that any tuition assessed in previous terms must be paid before you will be allowed to register in the Fall, 2020 term.

The tuition instalment plan is a means to help students pay tuition at regular intervals during the academic term. There are costs to the student in order to provide this service. The changes described above allow the student to pay tuition in various amounts and intervals throughout the term, or students may pay tuition in one lump sum at the end of the term. Given the changes above, students will be relieved of

late fees, interest and service charges associated with previous processes.

These changes provide flexibility and will enable students to more easily manage their finances and prioritize how available funds are used. If you are in financial crisis please reach out for help. The university has various mechanisms to provide financial support. One example is the **Nasser Family Emergency Trust** managed by Student Central. To seek financial support or to learn more about the support options, please contact Student Central at 306-966-1212 or askus@usask.ca.

V. What Comes Next?

Although we don't know when, we do know this crisis will end. Programs of studies will resume and planning is already underway to ensure things move forward as quickly and smoothly as possible when they do.

Here is a brief overview of things under discussion:

- A. Many graduate students will face additional time in program
 - a. Financial costs (e.g. tuition and fees)
 - b. Some will time out of scholarship opportunities (e.g. time in program restrictions)
 - c. Visa/Immigration issues
 - d. etc
- B. Supervisors may struggle to continue financial support due to dwindling grant funds
 - a. Most graduate contracts will conclude in August
 - b. CoM funding to individual graduate programs was significantly reduced last year
 - c. CIHR has suspended the Spring 2020 grant competition
 - d. NSERC grant results are to be announced mid-April
- C. Employment and postdoc opportunities will be limited, especially at first. If PIs have the means and know of a finishing student, they should consider offering them a position to help accelerate their lab's recovery.
 - a. Term of appointments may be an issue with the PSAC Collective agreement stating:

13.04 Appointments are normally for periods of twelve (12) months or greater. The parties acknowledge that there may be specific circumstances when short-term appointments of less than 12 months may be appropriate. However, the Employer shall not use a series of short-term appointments for the purpose of circumventing the hiring of a single Employee for a period of twelve (12) months or more.

Given the current circumstances it is our sincere hope that short-term appointments will be viewed as preferable to unemployment for our graduates. Discussions have been initiated with CGPS to seek some clarity on this issue.