



April 28, 2020

Dear Members of the OISE Community,

Over the last few days I have received several dozen copies of a common letter sent by students, faculty and staff reminding us of the tremendous challenges that members of our community are facing, especially the financial challenges of our students. I am writing to share some ways in which OISE, the University and governments are responding to these challenges, as well as several other updates.

COVID-19: Current Context and Ongoing Response

We are in a situation that is unprecedented, fluid and immensely challenging. Over a month ago, through the hard work of our faculty and staff, the University of Toronto transitioned almost 6400 courses to alternative formats. OISE faculty, staff and students were asked to study and work from home in order to limit the spread of COVID-19. Every member of the OISE community has had to adjust to working and learning online, while at the same time addressing new or additional child and elder care responsibilities, sometimes in the context of self-isolation and health concerns. Our dedicated staff and faculty have been working tirelessly to support our students within a difficult and rapidly changing context. The [Education Commons](#) and the [OISE Library](#) developed new virtual services. Professor Clare Brett along with her team in CTL developed new resources to assist our faculty and instructors as they transition to [teaching and learning online](#). Professor Earl Woodruff and his colleagues within APHD developed [coping resources](#) for members of our community who are experiencing stress and isolation. We have moved very quickly to mount our spring intersession and summer session courses online, and Department Chairs have been closely monitoring the increasing demand for spring and summer offerings and have expanded the number of courses and course sections. Many students have initiated virtual conversations to build new relationships and assist those in need of connections to help alleviate social isolation. OISE has initiated virtual seminars, summer wellness programs and community outreach initiatives. The Equity Committee of [Faculty Council](#) issued a statement providing suggestions for how we as a community can focus on equity in times of crisis. This is a challenging time, but I have been extremely heartened by how quickly and thoughtfully our community has moved to support the needs of our own members, but also to contribute to broader initiatives to support the most vulnerable within our society.

The University has also worked very hard to address the challenges it is facing, as well as make corresponding operational decisions as transparently as possible through regular [communications and updates](#). I endeavor to do the same at OISE through [weekly notes and updates](#) to the community. We recognize there is more to be done, but these are just some of the efforts underway to ensure that we are responsive, stay connected and that our community continues to be well informed.

COVID-19 Support for Students

We recognize that many of our students are facing a range of financial challenges at this time, and through the advocacy of our universities and national student organizations, governments have been listening. The Government of Canada just [announced a \\$9 billion package of student financial support](#), including important modifications to loan and grant programs, direct payments to students with financial needs, as well as new summer employment and community service initiatives. Once approved by Parliament, we expect that the Government will move quickly to announce operational details and allocate funding to those in need. Other important changes have already been announced by the Government of Ontario, including changes to OSAP and summer work programs, and by the federal research granting councils. Working in collaboration with CUPE 3907, OISE has taken steps to increase the number of Graduate Assistantships that will be available this summer and we have also increased the level of emergency bursary funding. The University has reopened applications for the summer virtual work-study program.

We also recognize that many of our students have faced uncertainties in their academic programs. [The Ontario Association of Deans of Education](#) have been meeting regularly with representatives of the Ministry of Education and the Ontario College of Teachers, and recent changes in [government regulation](#) announced late last week are designed to address the immediate challenges that our teacher education candidates have been facing in relation to practicum and math proficiency test requirements. Others have been working in collaboration with professional associations, such as the Canadian Psychological Association, to clarify professional requirements in this unique situation. The School of Graduate Studies took immediate steps to introduce the flexibility needed to allow students to complete their programs, including extending deadlines and facilitating online final oral examinations.

All of these changes have taken place over the past 5-6 weeks, and we recognize that the current context is still far from stable. Our hope is that the financial assistance package announced by Government of Canada, the largest of its kind in history, combined by recent decisions by the Government of Ontario, the granting councils, and initiatives at the University and OISE, will go some distance to addressing the financial challenges and uncertainties of our students. We will provide more detailed information on the new federal funding initiatives when it becomes available, and we will continue try to find ways of addressing new issues and funding gaps as they emerge.

Spring Convocation 2020

As we noted in a previous communication to the community, the University of Toronto has [announced a virtual convocation ceremony](#) and OISE has committed to a subsequent in-person ceremony for graduates when this becomes appropriate. In addition, OISE has created a working-group to consider the possibility of additional virtual events that will allow the community to celebrate the accomplishments of the spring class of 2020.

Ministry Approval of Doctor of Education in Child Study and Education

I am extremely pleased to announce that the Doctor of Education (EdD) in Child Study and Education received formal approval from the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) on April 22, 2020. Developed in 2018-2019, the new EdD received approval by OISE Council and by the University Governance in the summer of 2019. MCU approval represents the final level of approval for this new program. It is anticipated that the program will enrol its first cohort in September 2020. I want to congratulate the Department of Applied Psychology and Human Development on creating this rigorous and innovative doctorate program to address an important need in the field that will demonstrate OISE's continuing leadership in linking our tremendous research strengths to issues of educational practice. Congratulations to all those who worked to bring us to this final step in the creation of this program.

Special Committee on Teaching Awards

The deadline for faculty and students to submit expressions of interest to serve on the Special Committee on Teaching Awards is May 1, 2020 at 5:00 pm. Established by OISE Council at its meeting held on April 15, 2020, the Committee will conduct a review OISE's [Teaching Awards](#), for which nominations are welcome from the OISE community each year, focusing on the award categories, names, nomination and eligibility criteria with a view to refining and updating these for the 2020-2021 Call for Nominations. If you are interested in serving on the Committee, please e-mail oise.council@utoronto.ca highlighting your expertise/interest in teaching/pedagogical development. Following the submission deadline, the Executive Committee will review the submissions and approve the membership of the Special Committee, which will be announced and reported to OISE Council.

OISE Building Cleaning

The OISE building has received a top to bottom disinfection in the week of March 30, using a spray-applied hospital grade disinfection product that has been approved by the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS), and is known to be effective against a whole host of viruses and bacteria. Caretaking is developing a workplan to detail cleaning of all areas of our buildings in the next few weeks.

Finally, I encourage everyone to please feel free to email us in the OISE Deans Office at dean.oise@utoronto.ca. Let us know how you are doing, what activities and initiatives are underway that could be helpful to share with others, and also to let us know how we as a community can continue to support one another through this challenging time.

Take care,



Glen A. Jones, Ph.D.
Professor and Dean