



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

**Via Email**

**From:** Joshua Barker, Vice-Provost, Graduate Research and Education & Dean, School of Graduate Studies

**To:** All Graduate Units

**Cc:** School of Graduate Studies, Council of Graduate Deans

**When:** Monday, October 19, 2020

**Subject:** Update on SGS Mental Health Working Group & Recommendations

Dear Graduate Chairs, Coordinators and Administrators,

The University of Toronto has a stated mission to provide a transformative education to all of its students. While this commitment has historically included supporting student success and wellbeing, in recent years there has been a growing acknowledgement and understanding of the fundamental role mental health plays in shaping student experience. In recognition of the urgent need to address student mental health, President Gertler [announced a four-part plan of action](#) on student mental health and wellness, which included convening a [Presidential and Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Health](#).

As the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, and as a supervisor to graduate students from my department, graduate student success and wellbeing are a central focus of my professional life. I am deeply aware that while there are common experiences among all students, graduate and undergraduate, there are also aspects of graduate education that require special consideration, especially when addressing mental health. With this in mind, I struck the SGS Mental Health Working Group.

I asked the SGS Mental Health Working Group to examine components of the University experience that have an impact on graduate student mental health and to develop recommendations for the promotion of graduate student mental health through SGS. The working group included 14 members, including 8 graduate students, two of whom served as co-chairs. The Working Group met through Fall 2019 to Spring 2020 and prepared a [Final Report with their recommendations](#).

I am deeply grateful for the time and effort the members of the Working Group invested in their work. Having read and thoroughly considered the recommendations, I have decided to accept all of them. I would like to thank Vice-Dean Charmaine Williams for her leadership and the members of the working group for their open and honest discussion of the ways



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SGS can promote student mental health for all members of our diverse graduate student population.

In order to ensure the timely implementation of the Working Group's recommendations and ongoing accountability in this area, I am establishing a new SGS Mental Health Advisory Committee (MHAC). The remit of the Advisory Committee will be to provide advice and guidance on the implementation of the SGS Mental Health Working Group Recommendations. The membership of the MHAC will include student voices that represent our diverse graduate student population and students who are living with mental illness.

SGS is committed to integrating considerations of mental health into all aspects of our work and into graduate education more generally. We have already incorporated more programming in this area for new students and we look forward to systematically reviewing all that we do with an eye to creating the caring community that students expect. I feel this is critically important, especially now, as our graduate community moves forward in a global pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joshua Barker'.

Joshua Barker, PhD  
Dean, School of Graduate Studies and  
Vice-Provost, Graduate Research and Education