My Dear Colleagues,

Another somewhat roller-coaster-y week. It’s now ten weeks since we embarked on the big shifts to remote teaching and working from home (WFH, which is not quite WTF, but for some reason always makes me think of it). The decision-making about the Fall term picked up some sudden speed in the wake of the memo from the President sent out on May 15. Prospective first-year students will have to confirm their offer of admission by Monday, June 1, so it was important that we make some firm decisions now and communicate them quickly. We should be sending out messages to our incoming class by Tuesday or Wednesday.

In case you haven’t already heard (there’s been a lot of consultation between the Associate Deans and the Chairs and Directors), here is what Arts will be doing:

- All our undergraduate curriculum will be delivered remotely in the Fall of 2020.
- This delivery needs to be asynchronous, although it may be possible to build in some synchronous elements (in such cases, instructors will have to ensure that no students in the class are disadvantaged if they are unable to participate synchronously).
- Most graduate curriculum (including those courses held with senior undergraduate courses) will also be delivered remotely; the previous bullet’s proviso with respect to synchronous elements applies here as well.
- We hope that research graduate students will be on campus and will have access to library resources, research materials, and labs, and will be able to meet with their supervisors and with each other in small groups.
- A small number of graduate offerings that simply cannot be offered remotely will be held on campus. Any courses that fall into this category must be pre-approved by the Dean.
- All graduate course and research activity that takes place on campus will follow the guidelines put forth by the Office of Research and the Safety Office.

The model that Arts will be following this Fall aligns for the most part with the approach that the other Faculties will be taking. In lab-heavy programs, there may be some labs held on-campus (even so, first year Science students will be taking their entire curriculum online), and it’s possible that some programs may offer small live tutorials. I believe that the entire Optometry cohort will be on-campus, since, as we’ve been informed, it’s impossible to train people to evert an eyelid remotely (or rather, remotely train people to evert an eyelid). I guess actually everting it remotely – for the sake of social distancing – would have to entail the use of something like those long poles currently being used for television interviews (“Be careful! You could poke somebody’s eye out with that!”).  

Here’s a piece of very good news from this past week: this year’s Governor General’s Gold Medal for Highest Standing in a Doctoral Program goes to an Arts graduand, Harrison Oakes from...
Psychology! As you may know, there is only one Gold Medal awarded annually at the institution, which means that soon-to-be-Dr. Oakes was in competition with doctoral candidates across all six Faculties. Many congratulations to Harrison, as well as Harrison’s supervisor Professor Richard Elbach. It’s too bad that we won’t be able to get together to celebrate Harrison’s success, as well as the successes of all our other graduands, at convocation in June, but we’ll certainly be doing a live celebration for the 2020 class as soon as we can.

Does anyone else find it kind of surprising that Trump can actually pronounce “hydroxychloroquine”?

My “one good thing to come out of COVID-19” this week springs from Wednesday’s “Ask Our Experts” community presentation. Our guest was Professor Shana MacDonald from Communication Arts; Shana was speaking about the role of social media in a time of social isolation, health concerns, and financial uncertainty. While Shana emphasized that social media is at all times a mix of the good, the bad, and the ugly, she did point out that there are some indications that – at least for now – people are being nicer on social media. I don’t want to run the risk of misquoting her, so I’ll suggest you watch her presentation here. I’m not naïve enough to hope that this will be a permanent phenomenon – but it is good to have that indicator (in addition to all the others) that so many people are responding to the situation with caring for others.

And just a reminder about the upcoming “Ask Our Experts” event this Wednesday (12:00 pm): Professor James Thompson from the School of Accounting and Finance will be addressing the question of “planning for retirement in uncertain financial times”. Book your tickets now – space is limited! (Nah, not really).

All right – I think I’ve taken enough of your time, and in any case, I hope you’re spending this weekend outdoors as much as you’re able, now that we’ve gone straight from winter to summer. Just a few things before I go:

- If a cat has deigned to make you part of its life, this will probably be familiar to you.
- If you are worried about re-humanizing yourself for a return to the world, you can find some tips here.
- And finally, just because I love them: The Knights of the Round Table.

Let me please thank everyone again for your patience, your willingness to adapt to a set of changing and challenging circumstances, and the care and concern you’ve shown for each other and for our students.

Sheila

Dr. Sheila Ager
Dean, Faculty of Arts
Professor, Department of Classical Studies
The Faculty of Arts acknowledges that we are living and working on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River.