

March 30, 2020

Re: Cancellation of Spring 2020 Convocation Ceremonies

Dear President Gertler,

We are writing to you on behalf of undergraduate students across all three campuses of the University of Toronto to urge you to reconsider your decision to cancel Spring 2020 convocation ceremonies. We understand that an in-person convocation ceremony held in Spring 2020 is not currently feasible due to public health concerns. APUS, UTMSU, and SCSU therefore join with the many, many students who are raising their voices in favour of postponing the Spring 2020 convocation to a later date in order to be able to celebrate this significant achievement with their families, friends, and loved ones.

For many students, convocation represents deserved recognition of the countless hours they have poured into their programs and walking across the stage at convocation is an important milestone for both these students and their families. We have heard directly from students that not being able to convocate with their peers would be heartbreaking and incredibly disappointing not only to students but to their families as well.

While convocation is undeniably an important experience for all students, it takes on an additional significance for marginalized students. For students who are the first in their family to attend post-secondary institutions, convocating represents an act of reclaiming spaces from which they have previously been excluded. For Indigenous students, convocating means they have survived a post-secondary education system actively built in opposition to them, and an opportunity to walk across the stage in regalia and demonstrate their perseverance to those who doubted them. For families who have come to Canada for a chance at a better life, witnessing their children and grandchildren's convocation represents a celebration of their resilience. For mature students, convocation may mean the successful culmination of decades of making difficult choices to balance studying while supporting their families. For international students, it means making numerous travel arrangements for family members to witness the success story that comes from being able to pursue education in a place far from home. The decision to cancel convocation may not have been made lightly, but neither were the many personal sacrifices students have had to make to reach convocation.

Other Canadian academic institutions have reasonably opted to postpone their Spring 2020 convocations, or combine their Spring 2020 ceremonies with Fall 2020 ceremonies. We are heartened to hear that the Faculty of Arts & Science has since announced that they are committed to holding an in-person ceremony for Spring 2020 graduates, and that many other faculties are considering similar alternatives. We hope you will make the right choice to ensure all Spring 2020 graduates across all faculties and all campuses have the opportunity to convocate in person and celebrate this powerful moment with their peers and families.

Sincerely,

Association of Part-Time Undergraduate Students (APUS)
University of Toronto Mississauga Students Union (UTMSU)
Scarborough Campus Student Union (SCSU)

Cc

Cheryl Regehr, Vice-President and Provost
Sandy Welsh, Vice-Provost, Students

