

## **A message from the President: Even during a pandemic, Brock is not standing still**

Brock University Communications <universitycom@brocku.ca>

Fri 5/8/2020 5:23 PM

*This letter is the latest communication to the Brock community from University President Gervan Fearon*

Dear Faculty, students and staff

It has now been several weeks since we made the transition to our current situation, along with colleges and universities across the country, and we remain focused on continuing to support the mission of the University, including (a) teaching and learning activities and research and scholarship initiatives and (b) public health and student, faculty and staff health and wellness.

The provincial government recently announced a three-stage process for “re-opening” Ontario. Within this context, we all yearn for signs of positivity of re-opening, and I am pleased to report that steps are also being taken at Brock as we begin planning how we could emerge from the pandemic. We are not yet in a position for absolute answers, but we are examining options for moving forward. These important forward steps are reason for optimism.

We are following this route because the province has indicated it will be taking a careful, measured approach to begin this next phase of recovery.

The coronavirus has forced businesses, schools and social organizations to drastically reduce or suspend their standard operations. At Brock, these challenges have been often met with innovative thinking, and with actions that prioritize our students, researchers, faculty and staff.

As has been the case from the early days of the virus first emerging in January, Brock prioritizes the health and well-being of the entire community in every step we take. You have each been very much a part of the successful efforts that have allowed us to make the transition, not only supporting undergraduate students in completing their academic year, but enabling us to now consider moving forward in other areas, including establishing provisions for field and some laboratory research activities.

For our graduate students and their supervisors, these times have been exceptionally difficult. Many were just weeks away from completing their graduate degrees when the province ordered our shutdown. I am pleased that the Brock Senate has approved [a series of measures](#) to help create new options for our research-based graduate students as they work through this uncertain time.

It has been clear that our researchers, among the best in the country, are eager to return to their labs. The entire University shares that eagerness. A task force led by the Associate Vice-President, Research, and including representatives from across the University is working to determine the best and safest way for Brock to gradually re-open labs.

I am very proud of the flexibility and the innovative approach our research community has taken. I congratulate them on continuing to undertake research and scholarship even in these difficult times, and I am confident that research activities on campus and in the field will be resuming soon, with the safety and health of faculty and staff as our primary focus. I understand that this has been frustrating at times, but we are listening to your messages and we are acting to be able to resume research and laboratory activities, with your input and in line with public health principles.

Even as our world continues isolating, the University is hardly standing still. Another Brock team is working away on plans for a digital and virtual Convocation in June. You will recall that universities had to amend plans for in-person ceremonies this spring, and Brock has committed to hosting the Class of 2020 at an in-person ceremony further in the future, when conditions permit larger gatherings. However, in the near term, our online Convocation in June will be a celebration that honours the achievements of our students and the contributions made by faculty and staff during the academic year. Please watch as we reveal more details in the coming days and weeks.

Meantime, the Spring/Summer Term is being offered online, and demand from students has not only been maintained, but is stronger than it has been in recent years.

We have also made the commitment that the Fall Term will take place on schedule. We await direction in the coming weeks from public health leaders and others before we determine how classes will be held, but faculty members are already planning for a range of possibilities, including online, in-person or hybrid delivery. The most important point is that students will receive the highest-quality academic experience, from a university that is among the tops in Ontario for teaching excellence awards.

We have all tried to preserve the best experiences of the Niagara region. In March, it became apparent that protecting public safety required cancelling Cuvée, the annual celebration of Ontario VQA wines that is sponsored by Brock's Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute. After some brainstorming on the part of our staff and researchers, plans for a virtual version of the event were announced this week. The [Cuvée 2020 Online Experience](#) will start on May 22.

I believe you would share the observation that Canadians have done an outstanding job in coping with the challenges of the times. We have learned how to work under new conditions, and many of us have used the time to reconnect with family and friends over the

range of video-conferencing platforms. Personally, I have lost several Scrabble games, but have enjoyed every moment. I am certain that you, too, can point to some good moments during this period.

We are now moving from preparation and response into recovery (e.g., "re-opening"). There will be challenges along the way, and new information will emerge that requires us to re-evaluate choices and decisions that we made even within the best scenario planning.

Just as you have been vital in our success to date, you will continue to be our priority throughout this period. We may not be able to fully see beyond the horizon today, but we do know we are moving together in the right direction. I thank you for your support and understanding.

Surgite!

Sincerely,

Gervan Fearon, President and Vice-Chancellor

Brock University