**Message from the Graduate Economics Association, Department of Economics**

Dear all,

Exactly one week ago, few of us expected our lives would change so drastically. What seemed like shifting to boxed lunches quickly became evacuating Littauer and working from home for an indefinite period of time. As we all adjust to this new normal, we are adapting the GEA to continue supporting our graduate student community.

Now more than ever, we have to be intentional about reaching out to our peers, as we will not have spontaneous basement interactions or coffee chats. Social distancing is our social responsibility for the moment, but we have to be mindful of its impact on our physical and mental health, taking appropriate measures to stay healthy and sane. Psychology research has an large literature associating social isolation with worse physical and neurological health (Cacioppo et al 2014), and effects at different life stages seem to persist (Yang et al 2016). Effects can be mitigated by enhancing social support and increasing opportunities for social contact (Masi et al 2017).

On the GEA front, we are transitioning to

- **Meditation Sessions on Zoom**
- **Virtual Happy Hours**: We will launch a pilot *this week!* Zoom has a Breakout rooms feature, where we can mimic smaller groups that occur naturally during happy hour. We will encourage everyone to join with an aperitif on Friday afternoon.
- **Peer Support Network**: Going virtual! More information to come from Alice.
- **Econ Social Calendar**: Check it out [here](#)! Some events to look forward to:
  - Paint night class lead by Ambra
  - Movie night with common chatroom
  - Coffee chats for early stage ideas

Some ideas to remain connected during this period:

- **Virtual Office Space**: Set up a Zoom conference on your mobile during work hours and work virtually alongside your office mates as you would in Littauer. You can take coffee breaks, share ideas, or simply be quietly working. It will help you keep accountable.

- **Revive the phone call**: While most of us are used to texting, now is a good time to pick up the phone and call your friends and family. Everyone is at home and available.

- **Plan activities with your friends simultaneously**: Coordinate your workout times with your friends and share your experience. Maybe take an online yoga or Zumba class at the same time. Go on a run (6 feet apart) and share your times.
• **Virtual Meals:** Try to interact with at least one person every day. If you are living by yourself, plan a Skype lunch or dinner. If you live with roommates, coordinate with another roommate group and eat together.

Finally, be patient and mindful with yourself. Your productivity levels are probably different in this new environment, and it may take some adjustment to find the right routine. Keep iterating if something doesn’t work. Maybe it involves dressing up as if you were coming into Littauer, eating regular meals instead of grazing, keeping laundry and groceries to non-business hours. The important thing is to not succumb to a Sisyphean cycle of guilt and ineffective work routines.

Warmly,
-Your GEA