Dear 2020 Graduates, Family, and Friends,

As you know, the University has cancelled in-person commencement for the Spring both for the university as a whole and for individual departments, including the Department of Economics ceremony that was scheduled to be held on May 18, 2020. First and foremost, I wanted to tell you how incredibly sorry the faculty and staff of the department are about this. Graduating from college is one of life’s major milestones, and it should be celebrated. Every one of you has achieved something remarkable and important for which you deserve recognition, praise, and an opportunity to share this rite of passage with those closest to you. Moreover, family and friends deserve the chance to watch as you achieve this milestone and to celebrate with you.

I know I speak for all of us when I say that graduation is one of the most special events of the year. The opportunity to talk to students outside of class, to hear about their paths to Cal and their plans for the future, to meet their families and friends, and to join in their celebration is truly special. And nothing better showcases Berkeley’s unique combination of exceptional, multi-faceted excellence and exceptional, multi-faceted diversity.

Final decisions have not yet been made about what to do instead of this year’s in-person graduation, but I wanted to let you know about our current thinking. A survey that the university conducted last month suggested that there is little interest in a virtual graduation ceremony. It is possible that the university might hold a late university-wide in-person commencement over homecoming weekend (Oct. 16–18). If that happens (which is very much up in the air at this point), the Economics Department would hold a reception for our majors where we would love to see as many of you as possible. However, the university has concluded that it would be logistically impossible to organize department commencement ceremonies over that same weekend. Thus, our current (though still tentative) thinking is that we will have a combined 2020 and 2021 graduation—and celebration of return to normalcy—in May 2021 (most likely May 16, 17, or 18). While I am deeply saddened that we will not be having our usual ceremony this May, I want to encourage all of you to tentatively plan to attend a May 2021 event. Any guest tickets that have already been purchased for the May 2020 Economics ceremony will be refunded by Cal Performances in the coming weeks.

The Department Chair traditionally plays the role of Master of Ceremonies during the department’s commencement, and in doing so get to make a few remarks. I had not figured out what I was going to say if we had had a regular commencement this year. But one part of what the chair usually says in that role has always bothered me. The chair traditionally says that Berkeley is the greatest public university in the world. While that is (of course!) true, it violates the rule that one should not weaken statements with unnecessary qualifiers: Berkeley is the greatest university in the world, period.

Stay safe and take care—and Go Bears!

David Romer
Chair, Department of Economics