

Initiative against Islamophobia and Antisemitism (IAIAS)

FINAL REPORT, JUNE 2022



McGill

IAIAS Final Report

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Background and Context (1/3)

On March 21st, 2022, Provost and Vice Principal (Academic) Christopher Manfredi wrote to the community to announce the creation of an initiative to address and prevent Islamophobia and Antisemitism (the IAIAS) on our campuses, to be led by Angela Campbell, Associate Provost (Equity and Academic Policies) and Fabrice Labeau, Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning).

This initiative was created in response to a growing number of reports from students and staff of Muslim and Jewish identity of experiences that have led them to feel marginalized, alienated, and/or discriminated within our University context.

The IAIAS was mandated to create dedicated spaces where Jewish and Muslim members of the campus community would be invited to share their insights, experiences, and advice concerning Antisemitism and Islamophobia at McGill and, drawing on what was heard from these stakeholders, to make recommendations for concrete actions and measures to deepen inclusion for these communities.

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Background and Context (2/3)

This mandate is aligned with various McGill commitments:

- The University's [Mission and Principles](#) states the following as the five principles core to our mission: academic freedom, integrity, responsibility, equity, and inclusiveness.
- McGill commits to “excellence in teaching, learning, and research and to fostering a community founded upon the fundamental dignity and worth of all of its members” as expressed by the [Policy on Harassment and Discrimination](#), which protects campus community members from all prohibited-ground discrimination including discrimination on the basis of religious identity.
- McGill's [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan 2020-2025](#) states that discussions of social equity, and therefore Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives, must include religious minority groups.
- The [2018 Report of the Principal's Task Force on Respect and Inclusion in Campus Life](#) called on the University's leadership and community to undertake ongoing work to ensure that McGill's five driving principles – named above – are sustained in campus dialogue, especially in relation to matters that can be polarizing and divide the community along the lines of ideology or identity.

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Background and Context (3/3)

It is important to acknowledge that the timing of the IAIAS was such that it led some members of our community to feel it was a targeted response to initiatives tied to the Boycott, Divest, and Sanction (BDS) movement on our campus, in particular, the passing of a majority "Yes" vote on a [Student Society of McGill University \(SSMU\) Winter 2022 Referendum on a "Palestine Solidarity Policy"](#).

Indeed, political stances taken by student groups concerning the geopolitical context in the Middle East—and the manner in which BDS activism on our campuses has often been approached—have historically given rise to divisive debate and rhetoric within our community and triggered incidents that our community members have experienced as Antisemitic and Islamophobic.

While we acknowledge the points of intersection between the IAIAS mandate and campus debates over geopolitical circumstances, the IAIAS was formed to address broader concerns of Islamophobia and Antisemitism that have been brought the attention of McGill's administration for several years. These concerns are a major preoccupation for the University and require meaningful attention and redress.

Process / Methodology

Process and Methodology (1/3)

The IAIAS was cognizant of the deeply personal and difficult nature of the topics at hand, and chose our methods of consultation accordingly. These included:

Facilitated consultations

- Over the course of a two-month period, **9** focussed consultations were held with **70 participants** from across the University.
- Sessions were held for members of student associations at McGill, academic staff and administrative and support staff, and for students who are not members of formal student associations.
- Separate sessions were held for Jewish and Muslim community members within each of the above-stated groups. While some participants took exception to this separation, this format was chosen in order to provide a space where participants would be more likely to feel at ease speaking openly about their views and lived experiences. We note that several participants also signaled their appreciation for the framing of these sessions, finding them conducive to open sharing of lived experiences in a space of understanding and non-judgment.
- Sessions were led by an external expert facilitator and assisted by two notetakers.
- Calls to participate were sent via several avenues, including MROs to the wider McGill community and to staff and faculty, features in *What'sNew*, and direct emails to student associations and community leaders.

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Process and Methodology (2/3)

Resource email

- A resource email account (iaias@mcgill.ca) was set up to receive feedback from community members, and was included in all communications concerning the IAIAS facilitated sessions.
- 34 submissions were received from students, staff, Faculty, and advocacy groups.

Direct and External consultations

- The IAIAS met with one campus community member who did not wish to share their experiences in a focused consultation and asked for a private meeting, which was accepted.
- The IAIAS met with McGill's Coalition against Bill 21.
- While the IAIAS focussed its efforts on gaining insight into the experiences of our internal community, select consultations were held with relevant external stakeholders, including Hillel Montreal and the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM)

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Process and Methodology (3/3)

Student Census Data Request

- The IAIAS submitted a student census data request to the Office of the Registrar and Executive Director of Enrolment Services to discern the representation of Jewish and Muslim students.

Data received showed that these two communities have a strong presence at McGill:

- 7.8% students self-identify as Jewish
- 11.0% students self-identify as Muslim

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What We Heard: a) General Climate (1/2)

- Muslim and Jewish community members alike feel that there is widespread misunderstanding of their cultures, histories, experiences, and identities—as well as what constitutes discriminatory behaviour against them — throughout the McGill community.
- Jewish community members who took part in consultations also recognized experiences of discrimination that Muslim community members endure, and vice versa. Many participants expressed solidarity and great empathy vis-à-vis the lived experiences of one another; we were especially struck by the depth, compassion, and nuance of student interventions in this regard. Participants further expressed concern about the juxtaposition of Islam and Judaism in the Initiative, potentially presenting the communities in opposition to one another, which is not the case. Important discussions within the focused consultations took place to explain the design of the IAIAS.
- Stakeholders described repeated microaggressions inflicted by peers, colleagues, supervisors and teaching staff. Many had been subject to ostracization based on their identity, while others had been the target of, or witness to, overt expressions of Islamophobic or Antisemitic sentiment.
- Due to this, many Muslim and Jewish community members feel unsafe in their identities at McGill and worry about being targeted in the University context.
- Some Jewish and Muslim members of the McGill community choose or try not to disclose or share their identity with colleagues or peers. They will instead choose or try to “pass” as secular to avoid being the target/object of unwanted, negative attention or acts.
- Visibly religious members of Jewish and Muslim communities who are unable to “pass” feel especially vulnerable.

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What We Heard : a) General Climate (2/2)

- There is a general sense that Islamophobic and Antisemitic sentiment have worsened in recent years. This is attributed to multiple factors, including:
 - BDS activism and contentious campus debate around the conflict in the Middle East;
 - Increased use of social media over the course of the pandemic, which has led to experiences of online harassment, vitriolic social media posting, and doxing; and
 - The adoption of Bill 21 in Quebec, which has engendered deep concerns. Many McGill community members have felt a heightened sense of marginalization because of the passing of this law. There is a desire for increased guidance and support from the University to understand, navigate, and mitigate its adverse impacts.

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What We Heard: b) Academic Freedom and the Exercise of Authority

- All stakeholders recognize the wide ambit of protection given to free speech and academic freedom. Many noted, however, experiences wherein the statements or actions of persons in authority (e.g., faculty members, supervisors, department Chairs/Directors) caused them to feel a heightened sense of marginalization and vulnerability within the McGill community.
- Several students described incidences in which professors assigned texts, made remarks, or took public positions that they believed were anti-Jewish or anti-Muslim.
- Similarly, administrative and academic staff noted the chilling effect of experiences wherein supervisors or colleagues took public stances in campus debates concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including by signing petitions.
- Community members who participated in consultations were especially bewildered by what was described as “intellectual detachment” of some who signed petitions that included far-reaching claims about specific identity groups without actually reading or understanding the content of what was signed. Stakeholders expressed particular disappointment and preoccupation in relation to situations where faculty and academic leaders signed such petitions only to signal subsequently and in private they had not actually read carefully or appreciated the content or implications of document to which they had affixed their name.

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What We Heard: c) Accommodations and Inclusion

Consideration of the religious commitments and needs of Jewish and Muslim community members is essential to increasing their sense of inclusion and belonging within the campus community. This includes:

- Proactive recognition of and accommodations for days of religious observance and holy days. Several community members described experiences wherein their attempts to obtain such accommodations were denied.
- Providing the Muslim community with culturally appropriate, easily accessible, and clearly communicated spaces for prayer on campus.
- Access to Kosher and Halal options on McGill campuses.

An intersectional lens must be brought to bear on our analyses of Antisemitism and Islamophobia – issues of racialization, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability can compound experiences of oppression based on religious identity and this must be recognized.

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What We Heard: d) Reporting and Support

- Muslim and Jewish community members at all levels signaled the importance of creating respectful and inclusive spaces to raise concerns about adverse experiences of Islamophobia and Antisemitism and, more broadly, religious equity and interfaith dialogue and engagement.
- Many noted that they felt there was no clear channel/conduit for communicating these experiences to the administration. Student participants stressed the importance of keeping communication lines open between student groups and the administration.
- Participants in focused consultations expressed in strong terms the importance of naming explicitly and tackling directly odious stereotypes of Jews and Muslims as central to our efforts to address discrimination and harmful perceptions of and conduct toward members of these communities.

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What We Heard: e) Advancing EDI at McGill

- Members of each community expressed appreciation of the fact that situations of social marginalization are not restricted to a particular identity, and that McGill must remain vigilant in its efforts to advance EDI overall, including in relation to religious minority groups.
- Participants also noted that they did not feel that their religious minority status was well recognized in the EDI discourse at McGill.

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What We Heard: f) The Boycott, Divest, and Sanction (BDS) Movement

- Unquestionably, the most fraught question that emerged within the focused consultations was whether expressions in support of BDS amounted to discrimination.
- It is important to underscore what should be an obvious truth and was expressed by many participants: neither the Jewish nor the Muslim communities are monoliths. Additionally, Israeli and Palestinian advocacy does not neatly map on to Jewish and Muslim identity respectively.
- For many members of the Jewish community, some BDS-related activism—while permissible political expression at the outset—descended into anti-Zionist rhetoric and claims that, for them, were tantamount to Antisemitism.
- All participants expressed unequivocal support for the view that every member of the McGill community is free to critique the policies of any nation.
- Some members of the Jewish community will experience as Antisemitism claims that denounce Israelis as a people, that cast Zionism as a discriminatory ideology, and/or that challenge the right of the state of Israel to exist.
- We also heard from other stakeholders (in focused consultations with both Jewish and Muslim community members) that McGill must remain true to its commitment to allow political expression even when it singles out and critiques one nation-state. For these stakeholders, denouncing Israel's policies is not Antisemitic and should be understood and treated as permissible speech.
- There is a deep desire for increased education around the Middle East conflicts, with the aim of achieving more nuanced, fact-based, and less polarizing debate on our campuses.

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Recommended Actions : a) Education (1/4)

Although the mandate of the IAIAS did not extend to addressing geopolitical matters, McGill community members' engagement with matters concerning Israel and Palestine arose repeatedly. The IAIAS would be remiss to leave this point aside and not submit a recommendation that endeavours to create opportunities for the expression of ideas and viewpoints on this matter, which is one of foremost concern to many who participated in the focused consultations.

As such, the IAIAS recommends that McGill commit to taking concrete measures to increase community understanding of the Muslim and Jewish religions, with the aim of dispelling misconceptions and combatting social oppression and discrimination. To this end the University ought to:

- Provide **institutional funding for Muslim Awareness week**
- Fund a **lecture series in Jewish studies and in the Institute of Islamic Studies**, open both to the McGill and wider communities

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Recommended Actions : a) Education (2/4)

- **Observe International Day of Holocaust Remembrance** annually, using this observance as a way to build awareness about the history of the Jewish community.
- Continue to **honour the victims of the 2017 attack at *Le Centre culturel islamique de Québec***, annually on 29 January.
- **Build on existing inclusivity training for faculty and staff** to ensure increased understanding and cultural sensitivity in all communications and interactions.
- Continue support and further develop **interfaith activities within the McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (MORSL)** such as *My Neighbour's Faith*, the *Multifaith Network*, and the *Allyship and Religious Diversity workshop*.

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Recommended Actions : a) Education (3/4)

- **Develop regular messaging about religious inclusion.** Every semester the Provost issues a statement about expectations, rights, and responsibilities in relation to our commitment to a respectful and inclusive campus community. Going forward, this communication ought to explicitly affirm McGill's commitment to inclusion on the basis of faith- and cultural-identity. This messaging must further stress that our diverse identities are not only accepted at McGill, but honoured and celebrated; no one should ever feel that they must hide who they are to feel that they belong on our campuses. What's more, this communication must be clear that acts of discrimination and oppression, which include Islamophobia and Antisemitism, have no place at McGill and will not be tolerated.

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Recommended Actions : a) Education (4/4)

The IAIAS recommends that McGill expand opportunities for scholarly discussion around the conflict in the Middle East. This recommendation is aligned with the [2018 Final Report of the Principal's Task Force on Respect and Inclusion](#), which recommends “Encouraging and supporting the creation of fora to promote and facilitate a broad range of conversations around contentious issues.” To this end the IAIAS recommends that the Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic):

- Initiate discussions with the Institute of Islamic Studies and the Department of Jewish Studies to explore potential **cross-unit initiatives**, including but not limited to a **graduate students’ colloquium**.
- Develop a **Lecture Series on Pluralism** designed and led by a senior McGill academic appointed to oversee this initiative in collaboration with relevant academic units and research centres. This series need not be confined to addressing the politics of the Middle East but instead should focus on opportunities and challenges engendered by pluralism in a range of forms: e.g., social, ideological, cultural, ethnic, and religious.

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Recommended Actions : b) Accommodations and Support (1/4)

The IAIAS recommends that the University commit to expanding institutional supports for Muslim and Jewish community members and to clarify formal channels for reporting incidents of Islamophobia and Antisemitism. Although religious minority status is not a protected ground under employment equity law and policy, religious identity *is* a prohibited ground of discrimination. As such, acts of Islamophobia and Antisemitism are not tolerated, will be investigated pursuant McGill policy, and can be subject to disciplinary measures. Efforts to boost EDI measures focused on religious minority groups are warranted. This ought to include:

- The appointment of **one Muslim Students Liaison and one Jewish Students Liaison** within the McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (MORSL). Liaisons will support students, provide a confidential resource for discussing and address their concerns, and act as a formal channel to bring these concerns to the administration. Liaisons will be mandated to explore possibilities for collaboration with one another that will allow for interfaith activities.
- The institution of regular **meetings between Muslim and Jewish Students Associations and the Administration** (Associate Provost (Equity and Academic Policies) and Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning), as well as the [Office of Mediation](#) and Reporting) to ensure that student concerns are heard and addressed and that reporting channels are understood.

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Recommended Actions : b) Accommodations and Support (2/4)

- The creation of a **Peer Mentoring Program** in collaboration with the Muslim Students' Association and Hillel McGill.
- Conducting periodic (e.g., every 3-5 years) **climate studies** that allows students to signal their experiences through a confidential survey method, which will allow students a confidential channel to share their experiences, including lived experiences of discrimination, so that the University will have a more robust understanding of, and be better equipped to address, these challenges.
- **Annual training for Deans, Department Chairs, and Managers and HR Advisors** on meaningful inclusion for religious minority communities and the duty to accommodate to ensure an inclusive climate for all faculty, staff, and students.

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Recommended Actions : b) Accommodations and Support (3/4)

- Semi-annual **Town Halls for students affected by Bill 21**, co-organized and co-facilitated between the central administration and the Faculties of Education, Law, and Medicine and Health Sciences, designed in consultation with the McGill Coalition against Bill 21.
- With a view to ensuring students have appropriate resources, information, and support, deliver **specialized training and support regarding Bill 21's impacts** to the following teams within Student Services:
 - Local Wellness Advisors and Counselors in the Wellness Hub
 - Advisors and staff in the Career and Placement Office (CaPS)

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Recommended Actions: b) Accommodations and Support (4/4)

The IAIAS recommends that the University commit to increasing its efforts to account for and accommodate the religious commitments and needs of Muslim and Jewish community members. This ought to include:

- Ensuring fair and consistent **accommodations around holy days** by:
 - Increasing and formalizing reminders to teaching staff regarding [McGill's Policy on holy days](#) and associated accommodations.
 - Revamping McGill's [web page on holy days](#) to ensure it is equitable and adequately representative of McGill's student body.
 - Creating a project within the Enrolment and Student Affairs Advisory Committee (ESAAC) to explore appropriate accommodations around Ramadan.
- A commitment to continue working with the Muslim Students' Association to ensure that Quiet Spaces that can be used for spiritual and religious observances meet student needs.
- Provide clearer access to **Halal and Kosher options** in McGill Dining Halls and Food Services locations.

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Acknowledgments and Moving Forward

Appreciation is owed to several key people who were the backbone of support for the Initiative to Address Islamophobia and Antisemitism: Kit Malo (independent consultant) skillfully facilitated all focused consultation sessions, Elyse Cragg (Associate Director of Communications in Student Life & Learning) ensured information about the IAIAS was widely known across campus and supported the drafting of this report, and Shona Moreau (BCL/JD candidate) and Richmond Yeboah (PhD candidate) provided diligent note-taking and analytical insights.

Above all, we are indebted to the students, faculty, staff, and members of the wider Jewish and Muslim communities who took time to meet with us and share their perspectives and insights. Our focused consultations were a site of rich learning and engagement for us, and we are most grateful to everyone who shared their perspectives both during these consultations, through corresponding with us in writing, and/or in individual meetings. The experiences recounted were often sensitive and difficult, and sharing these with us took courage. We hope that our report honours those experiences. We also hope that our recommendations will enhance inclusion and belonging for Muslim and Jewish members of our university community.

We recognize that what we propose here, even if swiftly and comprehensively adopted, will not on its own act as a panacea to eradicate Antisemitism and Islamophobia. Like all EDI-related efforts, addressing these ills will require consistent vigilance, listening, openness to learning and changing course where necessary, and consistent work. This is the commitment that we believe the McGill community can and must take, both in the immediate and longer terms, to address Antisemitism and Islamophobia meaningfully and effectively.