McGill

Question

TO:	Senate
FROM:	Ryan Luther
SUBJECT:	Feedback on coursework
MEETING DATE:	May 20, 2009

PREAMBLE:

According to the most recent results of the National Survey of Student Engagement (presented to Senate on February 11th, 2009), only 27% of first year students and 34% of senior students received prompt oral or written feedback from faculty. McGill scores significantly lower than its peers in the AAU and G13. Over the course of my degree, I have frequently gone into examinations without having received any feedback on the coursework I had submitted over the term. I know from conversations with my peers and from the above survey that I am not alone.

Entering the exam period without an indication of one's grasp of the material not only increases test anxiety, but also prevents students from focusing on their weaknesses and gaining a deeper understanding of the material. In this respect, it is not only the timeliness of the feedback that is important, but the content as well. Feedback is a vital part of learning. Unless we know what we are doing right or wrong, students won't get as much out of our time at McGill as we could.

When we get timely, meaningful feedback, we can identify what we are doing wrong and try to fix it. Instead of flooding a professor's office after the exam, we can seek the appropriate help beforehand. This could mean anything from engaging in an in-depth conversation about course material with a friend to asking questions in or after class.

We know that McGill is an under-funded institution, whose professors have heavy work loads and few Teaching Assistants. However, this need not stand in the way of achieving our mission. We ask the following questions to begin a conversation on feedback and learning at McGill.

QUESTION:

1. What potential solutions might be instituted to ensure that students receive feedback in a timeframe that facilitates deeper learning?

2. What can McGill do to encourage or support professors in providing more detailed feedback to students?

3. How could the University community engage with this topic in the coming year?