



RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ADVISORY PANEL ON BLACK STUDENT LIFE

September 2021 - August 2022



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Acknowledgement of Traditional Territory

McGill University is located on land which long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

Message of the co-chairs

The advisory panel aims to keep the University accountable and serves as a platform for consultation on the lived experiences of Black students at McGill. It was a humbling and deeply rewarding experience to co-chair this panel and help bring forward this important series of recommendations. We were inspired by the way in which participants collaborated to suggest innovative approaches to answer the difficult challenges faced by our Black student population. We believe the cross-reaching recommendations put forth in this report will inspire concrete action and effective implementation efforts across the University and we will do everything in the realm of our positions to support them.

Thank you to all participants for your dedication, leadership, and thoughtfulness.

Karen and Antoine.

Testimonial

What a great idea from the McGill Anti-Black Racism Action Plan team to create a panel with a diverse group of people to address and validate the needs of black students on McGill campuses. It was an opportunity to continue the dialogue about their reality. Factors that help facilitate the creation of a safe and enjoyable campus experience for Black students were brought to the forefront (equity, representation, wellness, mental health, and support among others). The panel reinforces actively working on those issues so that Black students can reach their goals and fulfill their ambitions to become productive citizens of their community and society.

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Background & Context

McGill's [Action Plan to Address Anti-Black Racism](#) (“ABR Action Plan”) includes the following action item among its commitments related to the theme of “Outreach”:

McGill commits to:

Create an **Advisory Panel on Black Student Life**, with a mandate to advise on decision-making with university leadership on key areas affecting Black students at McGill, including community outreach and support. Membership will include Black faculty, students, and staff, as well as representation from the McGill Black Alumni Association and the Black communities of Montreal and Quebec.

While the Action Plan called for the creation of an “Advisory Panel”, Black McGill community members have expressed the view that such a body would be more effective if appointed as an “Advisory and Accountability Panel”.

Responsibilities

The Advisory and Accountability Panel on Black Student Life (“Panel”) had the following responsibility:

- Make recommendations and oversee the implementation of strategies that reflect the experiences, opportunities, needs, and challenges of Black students, with a view to:
 - a) boosting Black student enrolment and representation at McGill, particularly from Montreal and Québec’s Black communities; and
 - b) supporting Black student academic success and wellness at McGill.
- The Panel was required to meet at least three times annually. The panel was allowed to invite to its meetings and/or consult with subject matter experts and resource persons within Faculties and administrative units across McGill, when necessary to aid effective carrying out of its mandate.
- The Panel was also required to prepare and present an annual report submitted to the provost. This annual report should address the Panel’s activities, observations, and recommendations for actions and implementation within specific units of the University, as connected, but not necessarily limited, to the action items set out in the ABR Action Plan.
- The provost will, in the Annual Report to Senate and the Board on the ABR Action Plan, include the Panel’s annual report, and specify how the University will respond to and implement the Panel’s recommendations. The Panel was constituted for the period 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2025.

Activities for the 2021/2022 academic year

The panel met on three different occasions:

- March 15th, 2022: An introductory meeting to explain the objective and the terms of reference to the panel.
- May 19th, 2022: A discussion of the challenges of the Black community, recommendations for boosting Black student enrolment, representation and improving Black student academic success and wellness at McGill. This was followed up with an open-ended survey sent to the panelists.
- August 18th, 2022: A summary of the recommendations from the meetings and the follow up survey were compiled and presented to the panel in this third meeting for further review and validation.

Recommendation #1

Enhance the University Ready Summer Program

General objective

- In an effort to encourage enrollment and enhance the Black student experience, the panel recommends a weeklong program over the summer to support, better prepare and integrate incoming Black students. Similar to other orientation week programs, it will serve to answer frequently asked questions, connect students to resources early on and provide mentorship opportunities to help students navigate the University setting.

Targeted group

- The program would target newly enrolled Black Students of all faculties. Although there are new student orientations at the faculty levels, Black students have unique and specific needs that are often not covered. Participants in programs such as [Pick Your Path](#), [WUSC](#) and [Charles Drew Fellowship](#) would also be targeted.

Proposed solution

- Budgeting for a summer program:
 - The program could benefit from existing internal McGill staff whose responsibilities are already tied to assisting students such as the Black Student Affairs Liaison.
 - Inviting outside consultants who are aware of Black community resources in, and outside McGill would also be supportive.
 - A specific position that would support the administration of this program as it expands and handles the logistics and annual execution.
- The Dean of Students [Mary H Brown](#) Fund or Office of Sustainability SPF program would be interesting sources of funding for this initiative
- The list of participants will be kept for continued mentoring & follow-up during the Fall
- Connections with professors, student associations, & staff will be encouraged.

Updates

- Black students who have successfully completed the aforementioned **Pick Your Path** program and chosen to attend McGill will participate in a pilot version of the University Ready program in the Summer of 2023. (Approximately 7 students)

Recommendation #2

Support CEGEP Black Student Associations

General objective

- To consolidate Black student advocacy in the broader Montreal community, the panel recommends that the University helps with the creation or support of Black Student Associations at the CEGEP level. The ultimate objective being to build a robust network of Black student associations across CEGEPs and universities.

Targeted group/issue

- The program would target Black McGill and CEGEP students all over Montreal.

Proposed solution

- Support the creation and sustainability of Black Student Associations in CEGEPs where they are absent. Explore if McGill could provide advisory and administrative support and student accompaniment from BSN & MASS.
- Strengthen existing Student Association's capacity by bringing leaders together to learn from existing institutional knowledge.
- Host a student-led Black Student Association conventum at McGill and consolidate BSN's Youth Day outreach around said efforts.

Updates

- Outreach efforts were conducted with John Abbott and Dawson Colleges' Black Students Associations in 2022-23.

Recommendation #3

Strengthening Black Student Enrollment Processes

General objective

- To improve the student enrollment process of the Black community, the panel recommends more oversight and specific Black recruiter positions to follow prospective Black students' progress from recruitment to application, acceptance and enrollment.

Targeted group

- Prospective Black students with a focus on local Montrealers.

Proposed solution

- Creating a Black recruitment officer position who will target prospective Black students and advocate for the implementation of equity and ABR recommendations during student recruitment processes. Ensuring that equity and anti-Black racism concerns are a priority in Admissions and Enrolment
- Organizing Black student targeted recruitment events. A lot of Black students face internalized and systemic barriers that suggest McGill is not a place for them. Interactions between Black students from colleges and universities would allow them to see themselves thriving at McGill.
- Providing financial support to Black Student applicants (example: application fee waiver, scholarships)
- Develop Black student application pathways (similar to the Medical School program) for other faculties and programs.
- A robust communication campaign between alumni and current students, could be useful for enrolment and representation. Including Youth Day and School visits during strategic enrollment periods and open houses.
- Improved communications and relationship building with teachers from elementary, high school, and CEGEP.

Updates

- The acceptance website for newly enrolled McGill students will feature a dedicated resource section for Black Students as of Summer 2023.

Recommendation #4

Montreal/McGill Black Community Outreach

General objective

- To reconnect the McGill Black community with the Montreal Black Community, the panel recommends that further outreach efforts and communication channels are set up to ensure they benefit from opportunities outlined in the ABR Plan.

Targeted group

- Montreal Black community groups and regional associations. The impact on Black student life comes from strengthening the connections to local Black community associations to help Black students develop a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation.

Proposed solution

- Expansion of the Black community internship program and volunteer fair.
- Host a Montreal Black community organization summit.
- Maintaining active communication channels with the Montreal Black community.
 - Through the listserv/newsletter
 - Through representation on the AABSL panel

Updates

- Partnerships with [DESTA Black Youth Network](#), [ACDPN](#), [Jamaica Association](#), [Audace au Feminin](#) and [WIBCA](#) were established in 2022-23

Recommendation #5

Improve access to Black mental health resources

General objective

- Ensuring that Black students receive adapted & sustainable mental health support.

Targeted group

- All McGill Black students. A particular attention to the workload of the BIPOC/Black LWA is also required.

Proposed solution

- Enhancing Black LWA capacity and accessibility.
- Employ additional Black LWAs.
 - There should be recruitment flexibility by not requiring an actual physical body (presence) and opportunities for part time Black LWA.
 - The position should be made an attractive want with a competitive compensation.
 - The mental health of the person in that role should be properly taken care of by providing a pool of mental health needs and support.
 - Explore the possibility for external funding from donors for enhanced Black mental health support. If there are certification requirements, McGill could also consider training its own Black mental health professionals.
 - Group therapy sessions could also improve accessibility to the services of the Black LWA. Encourage with a contest or an open platform, Black students to share what helps them in school and what would help them, so that the most elements that come back can be encouraged more or worked on.
 - Punctual healing spaces with well-established protocols for reporting issues that would be confidential and safe)
 - Off-campus accessibility to mental health resources for Black students should be considered when internal resources are scarce.

Updates

- A LWA to support Black student position was created and supplemented by a clinician position to support the same community. Furthermore, the BIPOC LWA is set to return from academic leave shortly. Promotional efforts to highlight these changes and connect practitioners with the Black student community took place in Winter 2023.

Recommendation #6

Financial Support for Black Students

General objective

- To enhance and consolidate scholarship and financial support programs that target the Black student population, the panel recommends that donor/alumni relations be further developed. Successful programs in need of financial support and areas where students could benefit from funding should be properly highlighted as well.

Targeted group

- All McGill Black students
- Black student with specific needs such as first generation, student athletes and Grads.
- University advancement, Black Alumni and potential donors

Proposed solution

- Promotion of Black student funding programs (Info-sessions & application workshops)
- University Advancement focus on ABR priorities University wide and Faculty level
- Highlighting award recipients and their achievements through communications

Updates

- The Awards & Scholarships section of the ABR website will be updated with a comprehensive list of funding opportunities and programs.

Recommendation #7

Sustain and Expand Connections with HBCUs

General description

- Fostering space for connections amongst students that adhere to Black Studies approaches to research and advocacy.

Targeted group

- Graduate students
- Prospective students/researchers

Proposed solution

- Black Studies Research Initiatives (Black studies approach HBCUs that have their own program that can be recognized by McGill to earn credits)
- Expansion of HBCU recruitment/exchange, develop programs to allow for student exchanges with these schools, and schools in the Caribbean and Africa)
- Develop a more robust Black Alumni networking
- Program a yearly HBCU annual trip to Howard for McGill students

Updates

- An in-person visit to Howard University was held in March 2023 between the Schools of Social Work. The team met with the provost, who expressed a profound interest in deepening collaborations between the two Universities. Activities have been identified for the Fall 2023 and Winter 2024 with the two Schools of Social Work.

Recommendation #8

Create & Maintain Safe Classroom & Campus Environments

General description

- In an effort to generate and sustain a safe learning environment for Black students, the panel recommends expanding the reach, effectiveness & accountability of inclusive classroom training. The question of physical security on campus in regard to interactions in residences and with campus security should also be addressed.

Targeted group/issue

- Professors, administrators, and students

Proposed solution

- Enhancing training for regional field studies programs & community internships such as the Africa & Barbados Field Studies Programs and Hot Cities Tour.
- Recruiting additional Black faculty members.
- Clarifying reporting and mediation mechanisms to students who are victims of classroom discrimination and providing a robust follow-up protocol.
- Providing students with more forums to identify and discuss micro-aggressions
- Enhancing equity training for instructors and administrative staff through OPP.
- Comprehensive assessment of the campus climate and subsequent training of campus security officials and service personnel.

Updates

- A pilot Positionality workshop for internship has been created in collaboration with OPP and a pilot Research Equity workshop has been implemented in the Faculty of Arts.

Recommendation #9

Accessibility of Black Student Resources

General description

- To ensure accessibility, the panel recommends efforts to provide efficient access to Black student resources and programming to all black students specifically the most isolated student populations

Targeted group

- Black Graduate students
- Black Macdonald Campus students
- Black Continuing studies students

Proposed solution

- Creating more communication channels with Mac Campus student services staff, student representatives and Black graduate/continuing student associations
- Creation of a communication position focused on Black student outreach
- Strengthening ties between Black student associations and graduate students
- Promotion of Black student spaces and resources via a centralized listserve
- Creation, updating and maintenance of a university wide black student database

Updates

- Outreach efforts were made with the BIPOC Grad Student Network and MCSS

Recommendation #10

Academic Support for African Studies program

General description

- To address to concerns brought forth by students in the African Studies program and association, the panel recommends a comprehensive analysis of the current status of the program

Targeted group

- Students enrolled in African Studies
- African Studies Student Association (ASSA)
- Program administrators and academic leads

Proposed solution

- Strengthening the offering of core classes and ensuring continuation of the program
- Prioritizing class access to African Studies students for certain core classes
- Reviewing the African Studies website to update course offering and availability
- Rethinking the Caribbean Studies course offering and availability

Updates

- Professors Khalid Medani and Daniel Douek as well as ASSA membership have shared their input.