

Sponsorship and Supervision of Undergraduate Project Courses in Bioresource Engineering

Confidentiality, Intellectual Property and other considerations

This brief document addresses issues that may arise during sponsorship and supervision of capstone design projects that relate to confidentiality, publication, safety, liability, and the assignment of intellectual property.

Confidentiality

In some cases, a confidential document or information is provided by the sponsoring company or project supervisor in the course of a project. In this case, it should be clearly indicated that the information is confidential. It is important to note that, while students may be exposed to confidential information and thus be required to sign a non-disclosure agreement, the project itself is largely public and students must be able to submit public interim reports, a public final report, a public presentation, and a public poster. Their grade will be based on what is presented in that material, and thus they should be able to freely present their work.

Publication

One of the functions of the university is to disseminate information and make it available for the purpose of scholarship. For undergraduate project courses, usually the only publications that result are a student report which is reviewed by the course instructors and project supervisor(s), and presentations either during a poster session or in a lecture format. If a further publication may result, it should be reviewed and discussed among the students, supervisor(s) and sponsoring company (if any).

Safety and Liability

The main purpose of the project courses is to teach our students how to solve the kinds of technical problems that they may encounter in the practice of engineering. The primary objective of the course is educational, rather than the delivery of a finished product suitable for commercial, industrial, or private use. As a result, the reliability and safety of any prototype that is developed during the course cannot be guaranteed.

Since students are not yet professional engineers, they generally cannot provide the professional judgement that would be expected from a member of a provincial engineering licensing body. Industrial sponsors wishing to use information, material or devices generated during the course of the project should first ensure that they are fit for the intended use, and have them checked for safety prior to any use.

Intellectual Property

Patentable intellectual property does not often arise from undergraduate project courses. In general, the ownership and rights to any intellectual property (patentable or not) that directly results from a project will depend on the contribution of all parties involved, including the supervisor, students, and the industrial sponsor (if any). The specific rules that govern intellectual property developed by McGill University academic staff and students are given in the following two documents.

- 1) Policy on Inventions and Software (https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/policy_on_inventions_and_software.pdf)
- 2) Policy on Copyright (https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/policy_on_copyright.pdf)