

From: [Marc Richard](#)
Cc: [Marc Richard](#)
Subject: Senate Meeting Report, 2013-02-19
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Senate Meeting Report, 2013-02-19

Colleagues,

The following is a summary of the Senate meeting which took place on Tuesday, February 19, 2013.

Senate adopted the minutes of the last Senate meeting (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/final_senate_minutes_january_23_2013.pdf), the report of the Steering Committee (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/report_of_the_senate_steering_committee_7.pdf) and the agenda (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/agenda_-_february_19_2013_0.pdf).

In her remarks from the Chair, Principal Munroe-Blum outlined some of the points covered in the email she sent today to the McGill community regarding the reduction of about \$40 million to McGill's base budget being made by the Quebec government in the period between now and April 2014. She noted that the government is making other cuts which will impact McGill, such as cuts to the Quebec granting councils and to various stand-alone programs. It is not known what the exact outcome of these cuts will be, but their effect on our resources and operations will be serious. Regarding next week's Summit on Higher Education, the Principal informed Senate that no specific proposals have yet been put forward by the government. The Administration is modeling a range of possibilities for dealing with the cuts but it has not yet taken any firm decisions.

Under the agenda point for formal questions, Senator Dinel asked a question pertaining to assessment policies and procedures (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/question_re_assessment_procedures.pdf). In response, Deputy Provost Mendelson stated that the University's regulations, policies and procedures are meant to be taken seriously and that instructors must follow them. Instructors are made aware of these policies, and of changes made to them, during the orientation sessions held for new faculty members and via emails (which contain links to the relevant documents) which are sent to instructors at the start of each semester. Professor Mendelson added that students are also supposed to be aware of these policies, but commented that the Administration has not been as proactive as it could be at informing students on this subject. Ways of doing better in this regard will be explored. If students have concerns about an instructor's compliance with these policies, and if they do not feel comfortable about raising these concerns directly with the instructor, they can discuss the matter in confidence with the appropriate chair or dean, or with the Ombudsperson for Students.

The next question, posed by Senator Redel, pertained to MyCourses2 (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/question_re_mycourses2.pdf). Regarding the matter of feedback, Provost Masi responded that broad consultation of faculty and students had taken place prior to the selection of the new learning management system (LMS), with feedback being solicited from students in four different ways. A further survey of students was conducted after the deployment of MyCourses2 in the fall of 2012. Regarding the use of alternative systems by some instructors, the Provost noted that 80% of instructors are active users in the sense of having made use of some of the features of MyCourses2. No single LMS will meet the needs of all instructors. Regarding consideration of a single policy that ensures consistent use of a single LMS, Provost Masi stated that the Administration encourages the use of a single system but is also aware that some instructors are exploring emerging tools. The Administration will look into whether these alternate systems can be interfaced with the central one.

The third question, from Senator Dinel, concerned course evaluations (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/question_re_course_evaluations.pdf). Deputy Provost Mendelson responded that units have been invited to extend the evaluation period; some have done so. He quoted the Policy on Official End-of-Course Evaluations, which states that it is up to individual academic units to decide whether they wish to extend the evaluation period beyond the policy's stipulation that it normally lasts approximately 3 weeks and ends the day before the start of the examination period. Changing the policy itself would require deliberation and approval by both the Academic Policy Committee and Senate.

Senator Galaty posed the final question, which pertained to the status of the review of Faculty and Library Councils at McGill which the Provost initiated in 2012 (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/question_re_faculty_and_library_councils.pdf). Provost Masi responded that he had established a working group on this subject in February 2012, with a membership consisting of Secretary-General Stephen Strople, Associate Provost Lydia Whyte and Professor John Galaty. The Provost indicated that the press of events last year appears to have prevented the working group from completing its work, and that he is therefore re-issuing the mandate of the committee and requesting that it bring a report to Senate by the fall of 2013.

Senate next moved to a PowerPoint presentation on budget planning by Provost Masi (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d12-42_budget_planning_report_2.pdf). This was followed by a lengthy discussion period. Senator Lu commented that we are obviously underfunded and that our core mission is already compromised. Departments and faculties cannot take the hit that would result from across-the-board cuts. She noted that the growth of the University has been uneven, with administrative and support staff numbers growing faster than faculties and libraries; this argues against the imposition of across-the-board cuts. She suggested the use of fewer consultants, whose services represent a multi-million dollar expense. Senator Dinel asked when the University community would see specific ideas on where some of the cuts might happen. Senator Mooney spoke about the need to protect research and teaching. Senator Bouchard asked if McGill, as an entity, could move from its expensive downtown location to a cheaper site on the South Shore. Provost Masi stated that the Administration's wish is to protect the quality of McGill's fundamental academic mission, but that the quality of life surrounding that core mission will be affected. The decisions on the budget cuts will have to be made in the next two to three weeks, after the Summit on Higher Education has concluded.

Senator Gutman asked if McGill's unions will be consulted, if the cuts will be downloaded onto the faculties, and if some student services will be regarded as essential. Provost Masi responded that any targeted cuts will be targeted less at the faculty level than at the administrative level, but he also pointed out that McGill operates under various reporting requirements. Labour consultations are already under way. He noted that some student services have off-grid funding.

Senator Bell commented that research and teaching should be protected, but remarked that from a public image point of view this could result in damage that is invisible. Senator Galaty described the planning environment which currently exists in Quebec as being politically and economically unstable. He suggested adding sunset clauses to the planned cuts, in view of the possibility that the government might change, so that long-term damage could be avoided. Principal Munroe-Blum stated that it would be prudent not to think of an elected government as temporary, and added that we must also prove to the Auditor General that what we are doing is sustainable.

Dean Aitken assumed the Chair, since the Principal had to leave the meeting at this time owing to University business. Senator Lu wondered if McGill should aim to be at the bottom end of the administrative salary scales relative to other universities. Another Senator asked if other Quebec universities are making cuts too and whether they are prepared to advocate for higher fees. Provost Masi responded that the Principal has been working hard to bring Quebec universities together around common issues, but added that they have different priorities: some are research universities while others are primarily undergraduate universities; some are located in large urban centres while others

are not; some are charter universities while others are part of the provincially-mandated Université du Québec network.

Senator Gutman asked if McGill could dip into its endowment funds. Senator Richard commented that the Quebec government's unwillingness to do what is necessary to provide Quebec universities with the resources they need can be interpreted as meaning that the government is prepared to live with a provincial university system which is not excellent. He asked if continuing to pursue excellence in this context would amount to letting the government off the hook, i.e. letting it have its cake and eat it too. Senator Bouchard asked if our mission still makes sense in Quebec and whether the government's cuts allow us to fulfill that mission. The Provost responded that if we stop seeking excellence we will no longer be McGill. Regarding the endowment funds, the Provost noted that most of these funds are earmarked, that research funds can't be used to cover operating costs, and that the funds designated for the repair and upkeep of our infrastructure are already inadequate in view of the age of many of the buildings on campus.

The discussion concluded with the introduction by Senator Mooney of a motion stating that Senate considers the government-imposed cuts to be injurious to McGill's academic mission and that Senate calls upon the government to reverse them. The motion was adopted.

As the next two items of business, Senate approved the 444th report of the Academic Policy Committee (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d12-43_444th_apc_report_to_senate_final_0.pdf) and the report of the Nominating Committee (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d12-44_nominating_report.pdf).

The following agenda item was a presentation by Dean Costopoulos on the subject of the Office of the Dean of Students (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d12-45_office_of_the_dean_of_students.pdf). The presentation covered the Office's mandate and responsibilities, including the committees with which it works and the recognition initiatives and fellowships with which it is involved.

The final item of business was the presentation by Ms. Cynthia Price of the Report from the Board of Governors to Senate (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d12-46_report_from_bog_to_senate_feb__2013_.pdf). Following this presentation, Senator Richard asked if Senate could have some indication of the time frame within which the Board will be announcing the results of the process to select a new Principal. The Chair referred the question to Secretary-General Strople, who responded that the information will be announced when it is possible to announce it.

The next Senate meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 20, 2013. If you have any questions, please get in touch with us.

Regards,
Your librarian Senate reps,
Daniel Boyer
Maya Kucij
Marc Richard