

From: [Marc Richard](#)
Cc: [Marc Richard](#)
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Senate Meeting Report, 2013-03-20

Colleagues,

The following is a summary of the Senate meeting which took place on Wednesday, March 20, 2013.

The meeting began in confidential session to deal with the report of the Honorary Degrees and Convocations Committee. After moving into open session, Senate adopted the minutes of the last Senate meeting (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/minutes_february_19_2013.pdf), the report of the Steering Committee (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/report_of_the_steering_committee_0.pdf) and the agenda (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/agenda_-_march_20_2013.pdf).

Principal Munroe-Blum opened her remarks from the Chair by indicating how delighted she was at the choice of Dr. Suzanne Fortier as the next Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University. She then turned to the recent Summit on Higher Education, at which the Quebec government announced several high-level directions. The government provided few specifics, except on the subject of the indexation of tuition fees. With regard to the cuts being made by the government to university budgets, the predicted penalty to universities which do not make sufficient cuts in the first year has been rescinded, and universities have been given more time to deal with their deficits and their debts. We are still left with a serious situation, and the Administration is working hard to plan how this situation will be managed. A menu of options is being discussed with all the employee groups at McGill, and a message on this subject will be going out to the McGill community in about a week.

In the period for formal questions, Senator Bachelet asked a question regarding student mental health (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/question_regarding_mental_health_0.pdf). Deputy Provost Mendelson prefaced his answer by noting that McGill's mental health services has been seeing an increase in student demand (including emergency cases) and that this reflects a trend which exists across North America. Wait times are a concern. Our students can expect to be seen within two weeks for triage, but emergency cases are accommodated immediately and no students are turned away. Professor Mendelson outlined plans for improvement over the medium and long term, and described some of the initiatives which have already been implemented in that regard. These services are a priority.

The next question, from Senator Lu, concerned McGill's decision to incorporate massive open online courses (MOOCs) into its academic activities (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/question_regarding_moocs_0.pdf). Provost Masi responded that innovative pedagogies have important implications for McGill's success. The concept of joining a MOOC was discussed at Senate in broad outline, though not in specific detail, as part of the Provost's presentations to Senate on ASAP 2012 and of the open discussion on McGill's Innovative Learning Environments (MILE) which was conducted in January. Provost Masi recognized that Senate only endorsed ASAP 2012 at the level of broad principles; he is committed to bringing to Senate matters which require governance approval. The Provost respects the general oversight function which is defined for Senate by the Statutes, but he noted that Senate does not have responsibility for approving specific contracts of the edX type. Discussions with edX were still ongoing at the time of the January open discussion in Senate, and the Provost was not at liberty to reveal them at that time. Provost Masi noted that McGill already participates in a number of consortia (such as the U15 and U21 groups), none of which came to Senate for approval or endorsement. Nothing in the decision to join edX should be interpreted as bypassing Senate. The Provost stated that he has always brought to Senate those matters -- and more -- which the Statutes require him to do. He added that any new credited courses and programs which are offered through MOOCs will come to Senate through the usual channels.

In the follow-up to the Provost's answer, Senator Lu wondered why the the general discussion on MOOCs in January had not been framed in terms of the subject of McGill joining edX. Senator Mooney likewise referred to the broad terms of the January discussion, adding that it was not respectful of Senate to have Senators discuss a subject which has not been properly framed. Senator Nystrom called attention to the fact that, when Senate endorsed ASAP 2012 at a general level, the Provost had indicated that this endorsement did not constitute a blanket pre-approval of matters which the Administration would normally bring to Senate. The Provost responded that the approval of edX did not fall within Senate's purview. He pointed out that nobody who takes a McGill course through edX is going to be a McGill student, and that this initiative is being funded through philanthropy. EdX is a space which McGill should occupy, and it is a very restricted consortium which McGill is joining under very favourable circumstances. The Provost also mentioned that an article in *Le Devoir* had noted McGill's decision to participate in edX and had commented favourably on it.

Senator Lu remarked that the issue under debate was not edX membership per se, but rather one of process; she regarded the decision to join edX as an academic one which should have been brought before Senate. Senator Bell commented that the edX matter has both academic and non-academic components; he considers that the delivery of particular courses falls under Senate's authority, and he expressed confidence that the Provost will bring that aspect of the issue to Senate in due course. Deputy Provost Mendelson added that the authority to approve courses resides almost entirely with faculties and departments, and that such approvals generally go to Senate for information only.

The next question, posed by Senator Srinidhi, pertained to various details of McGill's partnership with edX (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/question_regarding_edx_0.pdf). Provost Masi responded that the edX platform will generate significant data on how students learn in an online environment. This information will help McGill assess the concept of delivering McGill courses via MOOCs in the future. This concept will require careful thought. Courses suitable for adaptation to the MOOC format will have to be identified, questions about standards and policies will need to be asked, and issues

of intellectual property will have to be considered. Provost Masi looks forward to working with Senate and students to advance these endeavours. Senator Lu asked whether MOOC-based courses will come to Senate for approval. The Provost responded that courses which already exist do not need to come back to Senate just to have a change made in their delivery platform, but that programs do need to come back to Senate. Senator Lu urged that, whenever there is doubt about whether something needs to come before Senate or not, the choice made should be to bring it to Senate.

The final question, from Senator Mooney, was on the subject of a review of Senate composition and qualifications (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/question_regarding_a_review_of_senate_composition_and_qualifications.pdf). The question was answered by Secretary-General Stropke, who noted that historically academic staff constitute a majority of the Senate membership. Changes to the composition of Senate require an amendment to the Statutes; such an amendment can be made by the Board of Governors, on the recommendation of Senate. The last major revisions to Senate's composition occurred in 2003 and 2004. A review at the present time could be beneficial in view of a number of factors, for example the growth in the number of tenure-track staff. The method of initiating such a review would be to ask the Senate Nominating Committee to draft the proposed terms of reference of a committee to be struck for that purpose. The Secretary-General indicated that the subject could be put on the agenda of the Nominating Committee's next meeting.

Senate next held an open discussion on the subject of professorial/student interactions (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d12-48_student_faculty_interaction_senate_2013--03-20_v.2..pdf). Part one of the discussion revolved around two questions pertaining to undergraduate students: How can we maintain or enhance gains related to research interactions, while improving other instructor-student interactions? and How can the University improve student access to instructors given expanding enrollment and class sizes? Part two of the discussion revolved around three questions pertaining to graduate students and postdocs: Where do responsibilities lie for students' / postdocs' progress? Where do responsibilities lie for maintaining effective, professional relationships? and What are the best ways for supervisors and supervisees to gain the skills and behaviors for an effective relationship?

For the next agenda item, Associate Provost White presented for discussion and feedback a set of proposed revisions to the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d12-49_revision_to_the_code_of_student_conduct_and_disciplinary_procedures.pdf). These revisions will be submitted to Senate for approval next month. At today's meeting, a number of comments were made about the document. Senator Richard wondered whether it was advisable, in articles 7b and 7c, for a prohibition to hinge on someone's intentions rather than on their actions. Senator Mooney expressed concerns about article 45 (which allows an advisor but not a lawyer) and article 72 (which states that civil and criminal rules of evidence do not apply). He also commented that it was not clear what types of situations article 21b was intended to cover, and asked whether the penalty increase in article 76 had a deterrent aim or a punitive one. Senator Lu remarked that article 5 was problematic because it could be used to discipline a student who was involved in a demonstration. Regarding this same article, Senator Zeidel asked if the problem being addressed was obstruction or non-peaceful obstruction. He also stated that he was worried about article 7a; in his view, people should be allowed to enter McGill spaces peacefully as members of the University community.

Provost Masi presented for information the 445th report of the Academic Policy Committee (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d12-50_445th_apc_report.pdf). Senate then approved the report of the Nominating Committee (Senate web page link not functioning), which included the nomination of Daniel Boyer as Vice-Chair of the Committee on Staff Grievances and Disciplinary Procedures, and Sharon Rankin as a member of the Advisory Council on the Charter of Student Rights.

The next item, presented to Senate for approval by Provost Masi, was the Statement of Principles Concerning Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Peaceful Assembly (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d12-51_statement_of_principles_concerning_freedom.pdf). In the debate on this item, Senator Redel questioned the need to have both a statement of principles and a set of operating procedures (scheduled for discussion as the next point on the agenda). Senator Nystrom expressed the view that Senate should get to vote on the operating procedures rather than just discussing them. Senator Lu stated that she was perplexed by the initiative of preparing a statement of principles, commenting that she did not see the need for it in our society and that it does not address the issue of how to resolve conflicts between various rights and principles.

Provost Masi referred to the Manfredi report and to the consultations which followed from it. The need for a document of this kind, which follows best practices, comes from the events of a year ago. It was split into two documents as a result of the consultations which were held on the subject. Dean Todd spoke about the need to strike a balance as a community; the present document gives us a place to start, and it will inform the judgments that people will make. Senator Zeidel noted that the document does not differentiate between peaceful and non-peaceful demonstrations. Dean Grant did not see why Senate would vote against freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly.

Senator Lu proposed an amendment which would have modified and lengthened the last part of the document. After a period of debate, Senator Ismail proposed tabling the document. Both proposals were defeated, and the main motion to adopt the document was passed.

Senate next turned to the Operating Procedures Regarding Demonstrations, Protests and Occupations on McGill University Campuses (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d12-52_operating_procedures_regarding_demonstrations_protests_and_occupations_on_mcgill_university_campuses.pdf), which were presented for information by Vice-Principal Di Grappa. Senator Dinell asked if whether, in a situation in which a demonstration has been deemed non-peaceful, all the measures described in the document would be carried out. Vice-Principal Di Grappa responded that this would depend on the specifics of the situation at that time. On the subject of compliance with instructions from Security personnel, Senator Mooney raised the possibility that Security might give instructions which contravene student rights. He asked whether the Civil Code should not be considered sufficient, and also asked why something should be considered unacceptable

because it occurred in a classroom.

Senator Nystrom asked why this item was not being brought to Senate for approval. Vice-Principal Di Grappa responded that the consultation process had resulted in the original document being split into two documents, and that operating procedures do not normally go to either Senate or the Board for approval. Senator Zeidel stated that if an event is deemed non-peaceful, Security needs to express why it is not peaceful; Senator Redel concurred, saying that this is necessary to show that this action is not arbitrary. Senator Lu expressed her concern about the monitoring provision, and noted that the document contains no protocols and responsibilities which are applicable to staff members. Senator Dinel commented that the document is supposed to cover how the University responds, not what demonstrators do.

As the next agenda item, Professor Hundemer presented for information the Report of the Advisory Council on the Charter of Student Rights (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d12-54_report_of_the_senate_advisory_council_on_the_charter_of_student_rights_0.pdf). At Provost Masi's suggestion, Senate agreed to defer until its next meeting the ASAP 2012 Implementation Update which had been planned as today's final item of business.

The next Senate meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 17, 2013. If you have any questions, please get in touch with us.

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