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Senate Meeting Report, 2013-10-16

Colleagues,

The following is a summary of the Senate meeting which took place on Wednesday, October 16, 2013.

The meeting opened with Dean Aitken presenting memorial tributes for Professors Stanley Frost and Robert Culley. Senate then adopted the minutes of the last Senate meeting (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/final_sept_18_2013_senate_minutes_0.pdf), the report of the Steering Committee (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/report_of_the_senate_steering_committee_10.pdf) and the agenda (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/final_agenda_-_october_16_2013.pdf).

In her remarks from the Chair, Principal Fortier indicated that she and Vice-Principals Marcil, Di Grappa and Goldstein had attended the September 24 meeting of Quebec university leaders with Minister Duchesne. The government has confirmed that it will proceed with its planned reinvestments in the university sector. At the next Senate meeting, the Administration will present the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) document which it submitted as an element of its participation in the *chantiers de travail* on higher education. Principal Fortier noted that CREPUQ will be replaced by a new organization which will focus on collaboration and common services, and which will not have an advocacy role. She also drew attention to two events taking place today, both of which will have implications for universities: Quebec's release of its *Politique nationale de la recherche et de l'innovation*, and the reading of the Speech from the Throne in Ottawa.

The Principal concluded her remarks by sharing the thoughts she has developed during her first month on the job regarding what makes McGill unique as an institution. These include the quality of teaching and research at McGill, the University's focus on student life and learning, the level of student leadership and engagement, the students and staff attracted by the University, the advantageous way in which McGill is situated in the world, and McGill's diversity.

Under the agenda point for formal questions, Senator Hebert posed a question on the funding of university education (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/senate_question_regarding_funding_of_university_education_revised.pdf). In view of the complexity of the answer and of the tables of data required to support it, Provost Masi delivered his response in the form of a PowerPoint presentation (not yet posted) which he will make available to Senate.

The next agenda item was an open discussion on the following theme: "Making Senate meetings more meaningful: Enhancing discussion and engagement" (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d13-17_open_discussion_october_2013.pdf). Regarding the structure of the agenda and the prioritization of Senate business, Senator Richard noted that, with the exception of procedural items which need to be positioned at either the beginning or the end of meetings, the matters which come before Senate can be divided into three basic categories: items for decision, items for discussion and items for information. He suggested that decision items be positioned first, discussion items second and information items third, and he added that it would also be useful to consider whether, in each of these three categories, short items should come ahead of long ones. Senator Saroyan noted that Senate represents a large investment of time and argued that individuals would be more meaningfully engaged if they were part of the Administration's decision-making process. She would like to see the Administration bring to Senate the issues which preoccupy it and the decisions that it needs to take, in order to seek Senate's input.

Senator Mooney expressed the view that many of the items submitted to Senate have an outcome which has already been determined, that Senate doesn't debate matters of substance often enough, that it tends to vote unanimously, and that the documents it considers are too non-controversial, arguing that all of these factors diminish Senate's effectiveness. He suggested placing a ceiling on the total number of PowerPoint slides which could be shown in Senate in any given year. Senator Dinel commented that student Senators tend to be more vocal and more engaged than other Senators, and that the current model of Senate does not entice debate. She remarked that McGill has no public forum for the debate of administrative and non-academic topics; she believes that Senate would be the ideal institution for the debate of any issue which concerns the University as a whole, possibly within a designated window of time at each meeting.

Senator White suggested rethinking the manner in which annual reports get brought to Senate. She wondered if there might be a better way of dealing with these reports, for instance by providing an opportunity to ask questions about reports which have already been distributed. Deputy Provost Dyens commented that many of the concerns raised during the present discussion are similar to issues which occur in the classroom and on which there exists a considerable body of scholarship; he felt that the teaching and learning approaches which have been developed to deal with these classroom issues could be used in the context of Senate.

Senator Larson remarked that Senators are not always provided in advance with the PowerPoint slides that are presented in Senate, and that PowerPoint presentations sometimes allude to documents which have not been distributed. She also wondered if Senate is the most appropriate mechanism for the Administration to deliver informational items to the McGill community. Senator Di Giulian concurred that Senators need to see all PowerPoints in advance, in order to digest them and to formulate questions. Senator Lu expressed the view that Senate should have a greater role in decision-making rather than just being a body

that is consulted. As an example, she stated that in the previous academic year Senate had only had the opportunity for a general discussion about MOOCs prior to the establishment of McGill's partnership with the EdX consortium. She felt that an enhanced participatory role for Senate would lead to better and more informed decisions and would confer greater legitimacy on decisions.

Senator Dudek noted that much of Senate's work is done by committees of Senate. He also remarked that lengthy, frequent debates of substantive issues would be interesting but unwieldy, and that such debates might require increasing the number of Senate meetings. Senator Zorychta underscored the value of Senate's role in providing input and in serving as a vehicle for the dissemination of information, but felt that the reports presented to Senate might be condensed.

Referring to earlier comments stating that the items which come before Senate are predetermined, Senator Bouchard expressed the view that this situation actually reflects a good committee structure in which much of the heavy lifting is done by Senate committees. He would, however, prefer to have items from committees come to Senate twice: the recommendations would be debated by Senate at the draft stage, then sent back to the committees for revisions before being submitted to Senate for approval. Senator Blais concurred with the notion of having Senate see items from committees twice, but cautioned against bringing committee work to Senate; he would not want to prejudice the work being done by the committees themselves.

Senator Shea raised the issue of Senate accessibility, saying that it can be difficult for students to know to which Senate committee they should bring issues. Senator Shaughnessy noted that the way in which Senate agendas are packed often results in situations in which decision items are handled late in the day, at a time when Senators have already started to leave the meeting; having more Senate meetings could be one way of dealing with this difficulty. Senator Bell wondered if Senate was necessary at all since it could no longer fulfill its original function; he felt that Senate was uncertain about the purpose of its meetings and that it needed to reflect on this question. Senator Butler believed that it would be worthwhile to consider how Senate can frame the issues that its committees consider, especially at the initial stage.

Principal Fortier thanked Senate its good suggestions for making Senate's time more productive and efficient, and for the good questions which had been raised on the articulation of the work of the Senate committees. She noted that McGill has a strong and impressive base of existing policies which Senate has developed over the years, and that McGill is thus not in the same position as universities which do not have in place such an extensive policy foundation. The Principal added, however, that we live in a rapidly evolving world which generates tough issues, and that we must make sure that our policies continue to evolve. As is indicated in the memorandum for this agenda item, the next step will be to establish a working group to prepare a report on mechanisms and actions identified during the discussion for consideration and implementation by the Steering Committee.

As the discussion concluded, Senator Pেকেles remarked that the points which had been raised occupied two strata: one consisting of specific pragmatic points which could be implemented fairly soon, and another consisting of more fundamental or existential points which will require a longer timeline and which, to some extent, tie in with the work of the committee which is currently reviewing the composition of Senate. He felt that an incremental approach would therefore be the best option. He also suggested that the planned working group be kept small and that it be chaired by someone other than a senior administrator, with leadership on this issue coming from the floor of Senate; Senator Cooke concurred with this suggestion.

The next items of business were the annual report on Research Performance and Innovation (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d13-10_memo_-_rir_annual_report_on_research_funding_performance_and_innovation_with_appendix.pdf), presented by V.-P. Goldstein; the annual report of the Committee on Student Services (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d13-11_memo_-_css_annual_report_to_senate_2012-13_senate_cover_memo_with_appendix.pdf), presented by Deputy Provost Dyens; and the annual report of the Joint Board-Senate Committee on Equity (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d13-12_memo_-_senate_cover_sheet_jsbce_2012-13_with_appendix.pdf), presented by Associate Provost White.

Senate approved the appointment of two Harassment Assessors under the Policy on Harassment, (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d13-13_memo_-_approval_of_assessors_2013.pdf) and received for information the 449th Report of the Academic Policy Committee (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d13-14_449th_apc_report_2013-10-16.pdf), which contained no items for approval.

Senate approved the Report of the Nominating Committee (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d13-15_report_of_the_nominating_committee.pdf), which included the appointment of two student members to the Senate Committee on Libraries. Senate was informed of the topic of the annual joint meeting of the Board of Governors and Senate (http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/sites/mcgill.ca.senate/files/d13-09_notice_joint_bog-senate.pdf), which will take place on November 12, 2013. This year's topic is Mental Health at the University.

As its final order of business, Senate moved into closed session to consider the Report of the Honorary Degrees and Convocations Committee.

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

Regards,
Your librarian Senate reps,
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Maya Kucij
Marc Richard