

Senate Meeting Report, 2014-12-03

Colleagues,

The following is a summary of the Senate meeting which took place on Wednesday, December 3, 2014.

The meeting began with Dean Manfredi presenting a memorial tribute for Professor Emeritus David Fate Norton. Senate adopted the minutes of the last Senate meeting (https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/final_-_senate_minutes_november_19_2014.pdf), the report of the Steering Committee (https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/report_of_the_senate_steering_committee_20.pdf) and the agenda (https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/agenda_-_senate_-_december_3_2014.pdf).

In her remarks from the Chair, Principal Fortier announced the appointment of Dean Manfredi as the University's next Provost; his mandate will begin on July 1, 2015. Principal Fortier congratulated Professor Manfredi on his appointment, and thanked and recognized Provost Masi for his contributions during his two terms of office. The Principal noted that a number of Advisory Committees for the selection or for the possible reappointment of several Deans (Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, Management, Science, and the Trenholme Dean of Libraries) are currently at work.

On the subject of government relations, Principal Fortier noted that we are not living through an easy period as Quebec tries to balance its budget. The Administration continues to advocate for greater flexibility in adding to McGill's revenue base. The Principal noted the Robillard Commission's recommendation that international student fees be deregulated for all programs at all levels; under this model, the government would no longer provide any grants to universities for international students, but universities would be allowed to keep what they charge these students.

Under the agenda point for formal questions, Senators Greenspon, Rourke, Ibrahim and Stewart-Kanigan posed a question regarding McGill's strategy for building an interdisciplinary learning community (https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/question_regarding_mcgills_strategy_for_building_an_interdisciplinary_learning_community.pdf). The response was provided by Provost Masi (https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/response_to_the_senate_question_regarding_mcgills_strategy_for_building_an_interdisciplinary_learning_community.pdf).

V.-P. Di Grappa presented the annual report on the financial state of the University (https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/d14-23_annual_report_on_financial_state_with_appendices.pdf). Senator Robaire, commenting on the graph detailing the number of professors, remarked that the numbers had climbed instead of leveling off as predicted. He asked whether there is a plan for these numbers to stabilize. Provost Masi responded that the number of professors has climbed because the number of students has climbed, given that McGill tries to maintain target ratios between its students and its tenure-track professors (approximately 15 to one for undergraduates and 4.5 or 5 to one for graduate students). These ratios are a proxy for quality, and the Administration does not want them to get out of balance.

Senator Henderson asked whether we might be hurt by the fact that we had achieved a surplus in a year during which we are being asked to make budget cuts. V.P. Di Grappa responded in the negative, saying that the message sent by a surplus is that we are financially prudent and responsible. Provost Masi added that surpluses can result from developments that occur late in the fiscal year and which are outside the Administration's control -- for example, final enrolment figures being higher than anticipated, or the government deciding that it owes us a certain amount of money and giving it to us in the fourth quarter (at

which point all it does is improve the bottom line of our end-of-year results). It would be difficult for the government to criticize McGill for having a surplus that the government itself helped to create by giving us extra money late in the fiscal year.

The next agenda item was a presentation by Provost Masi on budget planning for 2015-2016 (https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/d14-24_budget_planning_with_appendix_revised.pdf). Referring to the slide which describes the planning difficulties which are caused by the fact that government provides funding figures to universities in three stages (first *orientations*, then *règles budgétaires*, then *calculs définitifs*), with the *orientations* typically coming too late for inclusion in the McGill budget book and with the subsequent figures often being different from the *orientations*, Senator Richard asked whether it would be useful for the government to allow Quebec universities to start their fiscal year six months later than is currently the case. Provost Masi responded that a preferable solution would be for the government to give universities reliable figures early and to stick to them, even if this means cutting more from their budgets the following year.

Senator Greenspon asked Provost Masi to elaborate on the possible increases to the *frais institutionnels obligatoires* (FIOs) mentioned in his presentation. The Provost answered that such increases can only be made if they are approved in a referendum, and that the funds can only be used for the programs for which they are targeted. On the subject of deferred maintenance costs, Senator Robaire commented that the buildings at the Royal Victoria Hospital have great needs in this area; he expressed concerns about the possible impact of this problem on the project to acquire the hospital for McGill. Principal Fortier addressed this concern by noting that the Administration is proceeding with this project with great caution and due diligence; there are conditions at every step of the way to make it clear to the government that the matter is being handled in a financially responsible way, and that major funding from the government is required. The first step will be to complete a feasibility study which will tell us how much it would cost for McGill to use the Royal Vic site.

Associate Provost White presented the 460th report of the Academic Policy Committee ([https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/d14-25 - 460th_report_of_apc_to_senate_with_appendices_0.pdf](https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/d14-25_-_460th_report_of_apc_to_senate_with_appendices_0.pdf)). Senate approved the proposed revisions to the Regulations on Cyclical Academic Unit Reviews contained therein, as well as the proposed name change for the McGill Centre for the Study of Host Resistance; regarding the latter item, it was suggested that CVs no longer be included in the supporting documents for recommendations of this type. The proposed Policy on Late Withdrawals, which would allow students experiencing difficult personal circumstances to withdraw from an entire semester without a "W" appearing on their official transcript, generated lengthy debate. Several student Senators argued that the policy should be amended to make it possible for students in such situations to withdraw from some but not all of their courses, so that they would not lose an entire semester's work. A number of Senators spoke against this suggested change; they argued that it might compromise the integrity of the transcript, and that it would create the difficult problem of how to decide fairly which courses would be dropped.

Professor White moved that the Policy proposal be withdrawn from consideration; Senate approved this withdrawal. Senator Benrimoh asked for a reconsideration of this decision. Such reconsideration is a multi-step process, with a notice of motion to that effect being given at the current meeting and with the actual vote on a possible reconsideration being taken at the subsequent meeting. Senator Benrimoh gave the required notice of motion, then moved under article XIII of the Senate Standing Rules and Procedures that the rules of Senate be suspended so that the vote to reconsider could be taken immediately. This motion did not pass, since the votes in favour of it failed to achieve the required three-quarters majority. The vote on whether to reconsider Senate's decision will therefore take place at the January meeting.

Senate next received for information the annual report of the Senate Committee on Libraries (https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/d14-26_committee_on_libraries_annual_report_2013-2014.pdf). Professor White indicated that the committee chair, Associate Provost McClure, was away on University business and that Dean Cook would respond to any questions pertaining to the report. Senator Lu inquired about the off-site condensed storage system being considered for the Library and its potential impact on McGill researchers; she asked about the parameters of the consultation process for this idea and wondered whether the decision to implement such a storage system had already been made. Dean Cook responded that the feasibility study is ongoing and that the Library wishes to gather as much information and as many opinions as possible. A number of options will be generated, and one will be selected to be fleshed out at a higher level. Senator Robaire asked whether there are any plans to scan books that are moved to off-site storage. Dean Cook thanked Senator Robaire for his suggestion and said that she would think about it.

Secretary-General Strople presented for information the report of the Advisory Council on the Charter of Students' Rights (https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/d14-27_report_of_the_advisory_council_on_the_charter_of_students_rights_memo.pdf).

As the final agenda item, Senate moved into confidential session to discuss the report of the Honorary Degrees and Convocations Committee.

The next Senate meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 21, 2015. If you have any questions, please get in touch with us.

Regards,
Your librarian Senate reps,

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