

Senate Meeting Report, 2015-12-02

Colleagues,

The following is a summary of the Senate meeting which took place on Wednesday, December 2, 2015.

The meeting began with Senator Ponech presenting a memorial tribute for Professor Emeritus David Williams. Senate adopted the minutes of the last Senate meeting (not yet posted), the report of the Steering Committee ([http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/1\\_report\\_of\\_the\\_senate\\_steering\\_committee\\_1.pdf](http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/1_report_of_the_senate_steering_committee_1.pdf)) and the agenda ([http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/0\\_agenda\\_-\\_senate\\_dec.\\_2\\_2015.pdf](http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/0_agenda_-_senate_dec._2_2015.pdf)).

In her comments from the Chair, Principal Fortier reported on Innovation Week, on the annual general meeting of the Royal Society of Canada, and on a Universities Canada workshop on digital futures in universities. She also described a plan developed by the Administration and the Board of Governors to take advantage of the currently low interest rates to address some of McGill's deferred maintenance problems. The plan, which the Quebec government has approved, involves bonds issues totaling \$400M, with the loan period extending over 40 years.

In response to a question from Senator Benrimoh about the bond issue, V.-P. Di Grappa indicated that the bond issue would be made in four phases, beginning in January. The bond issues would, in principle, be of \$100M each, but the initial issue might be for a larger amount than the others. The current low interest rates would be locked in. The Administration has submitted a list of projects to the government, and has already received approval for half of them. McGill will have the flexibility to change its priorities if there are changes in the condition of its buildings. The actual approval for work on particular projects will be subject to the normal governance processes; just because a project is on the list does not mean that the work will go ahead.

Under the agenda point for formal questions, Senators Mills, Toccalino, Winegardner and Chatel-Launay posed a question on management and/or ownership of companies by McGill University professors, which was answered by Dean Nalbantoglu and V.-P. Goldstein ([http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/senate\\_question\\_and\\_response\\_revised\\_1.pdf](http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/senate_question_and_response_revised_1.pdf))

Principal Fortier stepped out of the Chair for the next agenda item, an Open Discussion on the subject of Research Funding and Support ([http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/4\\_d15-22\\_open\\_discussion\\_revised.pdf](http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/4_d15-22_open_discussion_revised.pdf)).

Senator Hebert expressed discouragement at the response of the U15 to problems related to funding; although not silent on the subject, the U15 has not been striving towards a solution. Senator Hebert feels that McGill should be leading the discussion on this issue. Principal Fortier commented that, to her knowledge, the U15 group has been very active in promoting funding (for example, in relation to the granting councils and to the indirect costs of research), but she added that tone and style are factors that have to be considered. The U15 believes that there is more to be gained from a constructive and positive tone, and from meetings with ministers and members of Parliament (which are rarely reported), than from public campaigns which reflect a more adversarial approach. That being said, however, the U15 does ask itself whether the funding system has deteriorated to the point where a change to a more strident tone is needed. So far, the U15's judgment call is that the answer is no.

Senator Bernard asked whether McGill was prepared to take a position on the current leadership at CIHR and on the recent reforms made to its funding scheme. Principal Fortier responded that the problems arising from the new funding scheme have been documented and that there has been a good meeting with

the President of CIHR. She indicated that the new funding scheme is a pilot; it has problems, but steps are being taken to address and remedy the issues that were noted in the first round of grants. The changes made were well-intentioned, but problems arose in their implementation and these need to be fixed. The Principal believes that we need to give CIHR a chance to fix the problems before we take a more drastic position or start campaigning against the current leadership of CIHR. Senator Bernard disputed the Principal's characterization of the new funding scheme as a pilot project, arguing that pilot projects in the laboratory do not affect the rest of the lab's work; in CIHR's case, the reforms have had system-wide deleterious consequences.

Several interventions by Senators addressed the issue of targeted research. It was noted that investigator-driven / curiosity-driven research is not necessarily basic research and is not necessarily the opposite of applied research. It was also noted that describing research in terms of whether or not it is directed towards specific applications could be understood to mean that the opposite of useful research is useless research. Principal Fortier feels that there needs to be a balance between targeted research and investigator-driven research.

Senator Galaty commented that the trend towards small numbers of large grants and away from large numbers of small ones, combined with the growing number of researchers, has created a funding crisis in which people are being crowded out. Senator Robaire agreed that we cannot keep increasing the number of grant applicants without increasing the funding base, and he added that the government needs to recognize this. Senator Mucci raised concerns about the "star system" which allocates large amounts of money to a small number of researchers. Principal Fortier responded that, whether we like it or not, we do not live in a vacuum and we are in an international competition for talent. She recognizes that grants are a stressful element for faculty members.

Senator Robaire remarked that McGill should consider a mandatory mentoring system for new faculty members in those departments or faculties where no such system presently exists. Senator Bernard concurred that we need to help pre-tenure faculty navigate the rough waters of the grant process, and he also suggested that we diversify graduate education to prepare students for careers other than in research.

Senator Robaire suggested that the Administration put together a committee to develop a formula to allocate the funding which McGill receives -- inadequate though it may be -- for the indirect costs of research. Following Provost Manfredi's response that such a formula already exists, Senator Robaire argued that the formula should be revised because Deans are free to do as they wish with this money and do not necessarily recognize departmental needs. Provost Manfredi noted that the Tri-Council overhead funding is restricted, and that its use must be reported back annually.

Principal Fortier thanked Senators for their comments during the discussion.

The next item of business was the 468th report of the Academic Policy Committee ([http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/5\\_d15-23\\_468th\\_apc\\_report.pdf](http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/5_d15-23_468th_apc_report.pdf)), which was presented by Provost Manfredi. The report contained two motions for approval, the first of which dealt with the creation of the Institute for Human Development and Wellbeing. Regarding this item, Senator Richard noted that the proposed Institute's website correctly and clearly states its current status; he expressed his appreciation for the fact that the concerns expressed in Senate in September about the proper characterization of proposed institutes and centres during the governance approval process had been heard and understood. Regarding the second item, the proposal to transform the Faculty of Religious Studies into a School within the Faculty of Arts, Senator Richard remarked that the documentation indicated that the proposal had been approved unanimously at a Faculty of Arts Council meeting but did not indicate by what margin the Faculty of Religious Studies had voted to approve it. Provost Manfredi answered that it had been approved by a large majority. Both motions in the APC report were approved by Senate.

Senate approved the report of the Senate Nominating Committee ([http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/6\\_d15-09\\_report\\_of\\_the\\_nominating\\_committee.pdf](http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/6_d15-09_report_of_the_nominating_committee.pdf)), which was presented by Provost Manfredi. One element of the report was a set of revisions to the Composition section of the Academic Policy Committee's Terms of Reference, including a change from "Director of Libraries or delegate" to "Director of Libraries or Trenholme Dean of Libraries or delegate". Senate also approved the appointments of Mr. Eamon Duffy (Libraries) and Mr. Romesh Vadivel (McGill Service Point) for a three-year term as assessors under the Policy on Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Prohibited by Law; this item ([http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/7\\_d15-25\\_harassment\\_assessors.pdf](http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/7_d15-25_harassment_assessors.pdf)) was presented by Associate Provost Campbell. Associate Provost McClure then presented the annual report of the Senate Committee on Libraries ([http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/8\\_d15-26\\_libraries\\_annual\\_report.pdf](http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/8_d15-26_libraries_annual_report.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 13, 2016. If you have any questions, please get in touch with us.

Regards,  
Your librarian Senate reps,

Genevieve Gore  
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Natalie Waters