McGill

Office of the Provost and Executive Vice-President, Academic

Bureau du provost et vice-recteur principal aux études

Christopher Manfredi PhD
Provost and Executive Vice-President, Academic
Professor of Political Science

Provost et vice-recteur principal aux études
Professeur de sciences politiques

11 September 2025

Prof. Steve Jordan
Department of Integrated Studies in Education
President, MAUT
[by email: steven.jordan@mcgill.ca]

Dear Steve,

I have read with interest the MAUT Ad Hoc Committee Report on Salaries and Benefits, along with the subsequent summary findings document that was separately distributed and posted on MAUT's web-site. As Provost and Chair of the Committee on Academic Staff Compensation, a parity committee composed of both MAUT and the administration that addresses compensation matters and annual academic salary policy, I am acutely aware of the important role compensation plays in attracting, retaining, and rewarding academic talent.

I appreciate the efforts of the colleagues who contributed to this important work on behalf of MAUT. However, I am concerned by some of the commentary found in the report and the summary findings document. While the full report offers a relatively balanced perspective on salaries and benefits at McGill, the summary findings document presents a narrower view and, in my opinion, does not fairly or accurately reflect the broader content of the full report. Several points warrant clarification, elaboration and, in some instances, correction. This document aims to address those issues. The views expressed in this document remain solely my responsibility.

General Context

As a globally recognized institution, McGill successfully competes with other world-class universities for top academic talent and continues to attract and retain top academic talent from around the world. As indicated in the University Staffing Report presented to Senate in April 2025 (https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/d24-74_updated_university_staffing_report.pdf), McGill recruited an average of 55 new tenure-stream faculty members annually between 2020 and 2024 while averaging only 25 resignations per year, representing approximately 1.5% of its tenure-stream faculty members. Most departures were due to retirement.

James Administration Building
845 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3A 0G4

Pavillon de l'administration James
845, rue Sherbrooke Ouest
Montréal (Québec) Canada H3A 0G4

T: 514 398-4177
F: 514 398-4768
christopher.manfredi@mcgill.ca

As a publicly funded university, McGill operates within a specific and constrained funding context. The Government of Québec effectively determines approximately 80% of the university's revenue through its control over grant allocations and tuition policies. According to the *Maclean's* ranking of Canadian medical/doctoral universities (https://macleans.ca/education/university-rankings/canadas-best-medical-doctoral-universities-for-2025/) McGill ranks 8th in operating budget per weighted full-time equivalent student. While this is higher than other Québec universities included in the ranking, it remains below key Canadian peers such as Toronto (4th), UBC (1st), and Alberta (5th). Other U15 institutions, including Dalhousie (3rd), Manitoba (6th), and Saskatchewan (2nd), also rank ahead of McGill on this metric.

McGill has responded to its funding disadvantage by increasing investments in academic salary policy at a rate that exceeds the growth of its operating revenue. Over the past decade, investment in academic salary policy has increased by 38.95% compared to 35.8% increase in operating revenue. In the last five years alone, McGill has invested a total of $51.9 million in academic salary policy for tenure-stream professors and librarians, an average of approximately $10.4 million per year.

Salary Progression

Both the Ad Hoc Committee Report and the summary findings document express concern regarding salary progression. As a general comment, the Ad Hoc Committee Report's use of Statistics Canada salary data to measure the progression of inflation-adjusted median salaries does not account for changes in the composition of the underlying academic populations. At McGill, for example, the proportion of full-time ranked CAS academics included in the data has doubled over the period in question. If we instead track the 2016 cohort over time, we find that their inflation-adjusted salaries have, in fact, increased on average.

It is also important to emphasize that, within McGill's academic salary structure, progression is highly individualized. While rank minima are established, starting salaries are largely influenced by market conditions. Similarly, salary progression is determined by individual performance through the annual merit process, as well as by the pace at which faculty members advance from associate to full professor. The transition from assistant to associate professor in the tenure stream is governed by university regulations; however, variations can occur due to authorized leaves or, more recently, the one-year deferral option offered to pre-tenure faculty members during the pandemic and its immediate aftermath. Currently, McGill does not impose a salary cap at any academic rank. This contributes to the fact that the 90th percentile of salaries at McGill is 16.7% higher than at Université de Montréal, where salary caps are set by the collective agreement. Furthermore, McGill has robust anomaly and retention mechanisms in place to adjust salaries when justified or necessary, ensuring responsiveness to individual circumstances and market conditions.

An informed evaluation of salary progression should not isolate the portion of the annual salary increase attributed solely to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). A more accurate approach is to consider the total percentage increase relative to base salary, regardless of whether increases stems from cost-of-living adjustments, performance-based merit, retention efforts or anomaly adjustments.

As an example, an assistant professor:

- appointed in 2015 at the prevailing average starting salary of $92,000
- who consistently received Category 2 merit according to actual salary policy in place each year (80% of academic staff receive Category 1 or 2 merit), and
- achieved tenure and promotion to associate professor in 2021

would have reached a salary of $141,182 in 2025 (assuming no anomaly or retention adjustments or additional promotion to Full Professor). This represents a total salary increase of salary of 47.3% versus a 27.1% increase in the CPI during the period (https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000501).

In fact, the actual salary progression of the cohort of assistant professors appointed in 2015 exceeds the projection presented in this example. That year, 45 assistant professors began their McGill careers. Of that group, 36 remain at McGill: 32 as Associate Professors and 4 as Full Professors. Their mean starting salary was $88,191, and their current mean salary is $150,545 (median=$150,079), representing a cumulative increase of 70.7%. Over the past decade, their average annual merit category ranking was 1.47, and 27 members of this cohort received either anomaly or retention increases. These outcomes clearly demonstrate that the performance of junior colleagues has been recognized, valued, and rewarded through McGill's tenure-stream compensation practices.

Total Compensation

As you know, beyond salaries, a wide range of monetary and non-monetary factors contribute to the overall working conditions of our professoriate. Compensation is multifaceted and should be considered as a whole rather than in isolated components. McGill's compensation practices and policies are competitive overall, though as with any employers, some individual components may be above market, at, or below market benchmarks.

As noted earlier, McGill stands apart from its Québec peers in that our professorial salary structure does not impose a maximum. This allows salaries to continue to increase throughout a professor's career at McGill, in alignment with individual performance. As a result, when McGill implements a merit increase, such as the 3.5% of salary mass applied this past June, the full amount is directly invested in our professors' salaries. In contrast, institutions with salary scale maximums do not allocate such increases to faculty who have reached the top of their salary scale. Because these amounts remain unspent, the overall cost, and therefore the total investment in the professoriate's salaries, is comparatively lower for such institutions.

An example of benefits where McGill leads the market are leaves:

- **Sabbatic leave** paid at 100% for **all** leaves throughout one's career
    - Although this is mentioned in the *ad hoc* committee report, it is absent from the summary findings document
- **Short term disability leave** paid at 100% for up to 6 months duration

As highlighted in your summary findings document, pension plans are complex and should not be evaluated based on a single parameter, such as contribution rates. A meaningful comparison requires consideration of multiple factors, including plan types. For instance, under McGill's defined contribution plan, the assets accumulated are fully owned by the employee and portable from the outset. In contrast, defined benefit plans typically impose significant penalties for employees who leave the plan before retirement.

Teaching Workload

One notable omission from both the Report and the summary findings document is an analysis of teaching workloads for tenure-stream faculty members. While student-faculty ratios are discussed (addressed separately below), they do not provide a complete picture. Teaching workload, as measured by the number of teaching activities per faculty member, decreased in all but one category from AY2015-16 to AY2023-24. Specifically, the total number of student credit hours per tenure-stream faculty member decreased from 261.7 in AY15-16 to 247.6 in AY23-24 (5.4% decrease). For undergraduate lectures and seminars, student credit hours per tenure stream faculty member decreased from 224.2 to 211.7 during the same period (5.5% decrease). In contrast, graduate lectures and seminars saw a modest increase from 21.5 to 22.1 (2.8% increase).

A similar trend is apparent in the number of course sections taught per tenure-stream faculty member, which decreased from 2.66 to 2.56 (3.8% decrease). For undergraduate course sections, the decrease was from 1.85 to 1.77 (4.3% decrease), while graduate course sections saw a modest decrease from 0.81 to 0.78 (3.7% decrease). These figures further illustrate a gradual reduction in teaching workload over the past decade.

Student-Faculty Ratios

Although student-faculty ratios are not directly related to salaries or benefits, they feature prominently in the summary findings document of the Ad Hoc Committee Report posted on MAUT's website. However, data from the 2025 University Staffing Report and the *Maclean's* university rankings, suggest that that the summary findings document does not provide a complete picture.

First, McGill's overall student-faculty ratios are lower than that of its peer institutions. According to the most recent *Maclean's* university rankings, McGill ranks 2nd in Canada for student-faculty ratio, ahead of UBC (3rd), Laval (8th), Montréal (9th), and Toronto (13th). This reflects McGill's strong commitment to maintaining a supportive academic environment and manageable teaching loads.

Second, the ratio of graduate students to tenure-stream faculty member at McGill has remained relatively constant over the past five years, ranging from 5.9 in 2020 to 6.0 in 2024, with two brief increases to 6.1 in both 2021 and 2022. Similarly, the ratio of undergraduate students to tenure-stream faculty member has shown minimal variation during the same period, at 15.8 (2020), 15.6 (2021), 16.0 (2022), 15.9 (2023), and 16.7 (2024). These figures suggest that student-faculty ratios have remained consistent,

reinforcing the importance of considering broader context when interpreting workload and resource allocation.

Third, there has been a 19.6% increase in the number of ranked Contract Academic Staff (CAS), largely attributable to strategic decisions by Faculties to expand their complement of professionalized teaching staff. These are not "precarious" positions, but rather full-time, multi-year, renewable and rewarding academic positions for colleagues whose primary passion lies in teaching. Ranked CAS who complete six consecutive years of service are awarded indefinite-term contracts. When CAS are included alongside tenure-stream academic faculty members, the student-faculty ratio presents a very different picture: 11.8 (2020), 11.5 (2021), 11.5 (2022), 11.3 (2023), and 11.7 (2024). Consequently, the undergrad to TT ratio cited in the summary report *("Undergrads to TT at a 20+ year high"*) would be more accurately described as the ratio of undergraduate to all ranked academics (TT and CAS), in which case the figure is not at a 20-year high, but rather closer to a 20-year low.

Similarly, the "Admin to TT" ratio mentioned in the summary report ("*Strikingly, the Admin to TT ratio has increased by more than 30% over the past 10 years*") does not consider the fact that administrative staff also support CAS academics, a population that has grown significantly over the past 10 years. If we reframe the ratio as "Admin to all ranked academics (TT and CAS)" we no longer see a dramatic increase in the ratio, but rather a small decrease.

As Provost, I assure you that McGill University is committed to providing the best possible working conditions for its faculty members— and indeed to all its employees—within the constraints of its funding model. As always, I remain committed to engaging with MAUT in a collegial and constructive manner to review compensation matters on an ongoing basis to improve them wherever feasible.

Sincerely,

Christopher Manfredi
Provost and Executive Vice-President (Academic)