



## Preliminary Analysis of Written Answers to the MAUT Intimate Relations Survey

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**Survey Question:** Do you feel that the University should prohibit all intimate relationships between teaching staff and students?

Responses: 374

'Yes' votes (total: 105 or **28.07%**; comments: 46; comment/vote ratio : 43.81%)

'No' (total 159 or **43.51%**; comments: 96; ratio: 60.38%)

'Depends' (total 110 or **29.41%**; comments 83; ratio: 75.5%)

### Comments from 'Depends' Voters

Not surprisingly, those who answered 'Depends' to the survey question were more inclined to add a written explanation/qualification than the other respondents. The single largest group of the 83 written answers from the 'Depends' respondents (hereafter DRs), 43 answers in total, actually supported the current guidelines in one way or another. These DRs felt that student-staff intimate relations (hereafter SSIR) should not be banned outright but that reporting potential conflicts of interest, and recusal from any teacher-student relations should be mandatory. The next largest group among DR answers, 24 in total, felt that relations should be banned between all students and staff in the same unit but not between students and staff in different units. Since none of these answers suggests otherwise, a conservative estimate would be that they all consider the current guidelines inadequate for dealing with within-unit SSIR. Other answers were less frequent. Sixteen felt that SSIR should be banned if/where there is also a teacher-student relation and/or major power imbalance;<sup>1</sup> another thirteen DRs felt that a ban should apply to undergraduate students only; eight thought that exceptions should be made for cases like pre-existing relationships; six DRs felt banning SSIR would not be possible and/or would drive them underground; four felt it was not the university's job to regulate romantic relations; and 6 answers were not clearly classifiable.<sup>2</sup>

### Comments from 'Yes' Voters

The largest group of written answers by the 'Yes' respondents (hereafter YRs), 16 answers out of 46, more or less clearly supported an outright ban without qualification. The next largest group of YR comments, 14 in total, felt that SSIR should be prohibited as long as a teacher-student relation or power imbalance obtained. Note that this does not necessarily contradict the current guidelines since one might consider that the disclosure, recusal and the conflict management plan required by those guidelines effectively eliminate the teacher-student relation and/or mitigates the power imbalance. The less frequent answers were: prohibition with exceptions for legitimate cases such as pre-existing

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<sup>1</sup> These answers partly overlap with the largest group of responses which we interpreted as effectively supporting the current guidelines as many seem to imply that intimate relations between students and teachers who have no teacher-student relation (anymore) should not be prohibited.

<sup>2</sup> Note that the total number of coded answers exceeds the number of responses as many respondents provided multiple, sometimes even possibly contradictory answers in their written comments.

relationships (8); prohibit same-unit relations (7); disclosure of a conflict of interest is insufficient to remove the power imbalance (3); SSIR should be prohibited with any student studying anywhere at McGill (3); support for the current guidelines (2); only SSIR with undergraduates should be prohibited (1); not classifiable (1).

### **Comments from 'No' Voters**

Not surprisingly, a plurality of 'No' respondents (hereafter NRs), 40 in total, made a comment in support of the current guidelines. Twenty-eight NRs felt that a ban on SSIR would be in violation of adult individuals' rights and/or none of the university's business. Twenty-five NRs believe that a ban would be unworkable and/or would merely end up driving SSIR underground. Sixteen NRs feel that SSIR should be prohibited as long as there is a teacher-student relation. Eleven NRs felt that exceptions need to be made for legitimate cases such as pre-existing relationships. The less frequent answers were: prohibit same-unit relations (5); no need for a prohibition as some/many such relations work out well (4); only SSIR with undergraduate students should be prohibited (1); intimate relations to ensure good grades should be prohibited (1); or not classifiable (1).

### **Analysis**

The overall response rate to the survey was between 33 and 38 % of our membership (depending on whether one includes our retired members in the denominator). This is a quite respectable response rate for an online survey.

### **Support for a complete ban on SSIR**

Of those respondents who wrote a comment, a total of 22, or 5.88% of all respondents, supported a complete and unqualified prohibition of SSIR.<sup>3</sup> But 59 of the 105 Yes voters, or 15.78% of all respondents, did not choose to write a comment. One *might* assume that all, or the majority of them, also support an unqualified ban as they chose not to qualify their vote. Under that fairly stringent assumption, the upper bound of the proportion of MAUT members who may be in favour of an unqualified ban would be just over 20% with a lower bound of about 6%.

### **Outright opposition to a ban on SSIR**

Conversely, while it is reasonable to assume that all those answering 'No' to the survey question are opposed to a complete ban, 10 of their written answers favoured a ban on *some types* of SSIR but not others. That leaves 86 of the written answers by NRs expressing opposition to any ban whatsoever. We can add to these 23 of the DRs' answers that either stated explicit support for the current guidelines or made it clear they opposed any ban. As noted, a number of YRs implicitly seemed to support the current guidelines by saying that SSIR should be prohibited where there is a teacher-student relation or imbalance of power. But since these respondents explicitly voted 'Yes' to the survey question we cannot interpret these answers as implying opposition to *any* ban. On the other hand, two of the YRs gave explicit support to the current guidelines and thus should be added to those opposed to any ban. In total, then, 111 of those who submitted comments, or 49.33% of all written comments, declared themselves to be opposed to any ban whatsoever. If we assume, mirroring what we did for the YRs who did not write a comment, that the NRs who did not write a comment all oppose any ban whatsoever then the upper bound of opposition to all prohibitions of SSIR would be 111+63=174 or 77.33% of all respondents to the survey.

### **Explicit Support for the current conflict of interest guidelines**

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<sup>3</sup> These include the 16 who said they supported an unqualified ban as well as the three who felt that disclosure of a conflict of interest was insufficient and the three respondents who said that any SSIR with a student studying anywhere at McGill should be prohibited.

Twenty-five of the DRs', 39 of the NRs' and 2 of the YRs' comments explicitly endorsed the current conflict of interest guidelines. Another 15 of the NRs implicitly did so by voting against the ban but pointing out that SSIR should be banned as long as there is a teacher-student relation. Thus, a total of 81 comments, or 36% of those who wrote a comment explicitly endorsed the current guidelines. This does not mean, of course, that all others do *not* support the current guidelines. In fact, it is quite probable that a considerable portion of 26 NRs who felt that banning SSIR would not be manageable or would violate adults' rights also favours the current guidelines. Similarly, some of the 12 DRs who simply stated that SSIR should be prohibited as long as there is a teacher-student relation, or who doubted that a prohibition would be workable or legal may also support the current guidelines. Hence, 36% certainly represents the lower bound of overall support for them.

### **Support for Partial Bans**

There were some respondents in all three groups who supported a prohibition for certain types of SSIR but not others. A total of 32 of the written comments, or 14.22%, most of them (22) submitted by DRs, felt that SSIR should be prohibited for teachers and students in the same unit or department, irrespective of whether or not there was a direct teacher-student relation. Another 22 respondents felt that if there were to be a prohibition on SSIR—which 8 of them opposed however—then certain exceptions ought to be made, especially for couples who had been together before they came to McGill as either professors or students. Finally, 14 respondents felt that SSIR involving undergraduate students should be prohibited but not other SSIR.

### **Non-respondents**

Sixty-seven percent of MAUT's total membership, retirees included, did *not* respond to the survey. One hesitates to speculate about these non-respondents' views on SSIR. But they clearly did not feel strongly enough about it to answer the survey. Some of them may well support a complete and unqualified ban on SSIR but it is not unreasonable to assume that the proportion of them that do is likely less than the proportion of supporters for a complete ban among those who *did* respond to the survey. To say more about this group of our members would be mere speculation.

### **Main points**

**A minority of respondents to the survey, somewhere between 6 and 20% supports a complete ban on SSIR at McGill without qualification. A majority, anywhere from 50 to 77% opposes such a ban.** A considerable proportion of respondents, certainly well in excess of the 36% clearly saying so, supports the current guidelines. Given the largish majority among respondents opposing an outright ban and the likely views of non-respondents it is quite probable that a majority of MAUT members supports the current guidelines. A minority of respondents, around 20% of those submitting a comment, favoured prohibitions on SSIR with certain groups of students but not others. Most of these feel SSIR within the same unit or department should be prohibited.