

Summary Report on the McGill Citizens' Council Survey on the Principal's Plans June 2015

The McGill Citizens' Council was formed in early 2013 following the tumultuous campus events of November 2011 and on the basis of a recommendation in the March 2012 MAUT Report on Governance, Protest and Security. The Citizens' Council is an informal voluntary grouping of all major campus constituencies (AMURE, AMUSE, AGSEM, MCLIU, MAUT, MUNACA, MUNASA, PGSS, SEIU, SSMU) represented at the level of member association executive officers. The goals of the Citizens' Council are to foster open communication across all sectors and to consider collectively major issues that affect the entire campus community. The presentation in March 2014 by Principal Suzanne Fortier of the Principal's Plans/Priorities that will guide her efforts over the next several years provided an important opportunity for the Citizens' Council to address a broad issue of universal relevance. The plans affect the campus as a whole and all of its main activities. During Nov 10 - Dec 5 2014, the Citizen's Council conducted a survey of its member constituencies to understand how the community viewed these major initiatives and discussed the survey results with Principal Fortier at a meeting on Jan 6, 2015. This summary reports the highlights of the survey itself and the discussions at the Jan 6 2015 meeting. For further details, please see the more extensive reports on the [survey outcomes](#) and on the [Jan 6 2015 meeting](#).

The Survey

The main questions of the survey were:

1. What do you feel are the most promising aspects of the Principal's Plans (and why)?
2. Are there aspects of the Plans that you feel may have the potential to present difficulties and/or challenges?
3. Do you feel there are important omissions in the Principal's Plans?
4. Looking beyond your own sub-community, do you have any comments to make about the Principal's Plans and their possible impacts on other elements of the broader university community?

During the survey period 63 people responded. The majority of respondents self-identified as academic staff (~60%) and non-academic staff (~30%); ~10% were students (graduate and undergraduate). The limited student participation likely reflects technical issues that can be addressed in future surveys. Most respondents answered all four questions, so the survey output was approximately 250 individual responses/comments.

Many respondents felt the Plans were developed and presented in good faith and contained good ideas. However there was also a clearly expressed wariness reflecting an erosion of trust over recent years. Another aspect of wariness reflects a perception that there has been a significant degradation of infrastructure and working conditions at McGill both recently, and over a longer term. Some felt that with basic infrastructure and facilities in such dire need of updating, the Plans seemed over-ambitious in that the focus should be on "saving the furniture, not redecorating". Many thought the plans too vague

to be very clear, especially without considering how initiatives would be funded. Many felt it a strength that the Plans directly addressed issues of Space, but there were also concerns that development of the RVH site could divert resources from the primary mission. Many were positive about aspects of the Plans relating to administrative efficiency and "Learning Organization" but there were also concerns that there will be further staff reductions and that people will be asked to do even more with even less. In addition, there was concern that a change in work culture could be a top-down transformation that would not be based on consultation with staff who are actually doing the work.

The Jan 6 2015 meeting with Principal Fortier

On Dec 23 2014 an extensive summary of the survey responses was sent to Principal Fortier and a meeting was held on Jan 6 2015 at the Faculty Club hosted by MAUT to discuss the survey results. Present were Principal Fortier and VP Administration and Finance Di Grappa and 11 people from Citizen's Council, including members of the Executives of AMURE, MAUT, MCLIU, MUNACA, MUNASA, SEIU, and SSMU.

The discussion first addressed the survey comments that in the current very tight financial environment the Principal's Plans were unrealistically ambitious, particularly without identifying funding sources. In response Principal Fortier said that in her view we should not choose objectives based on available funding, but decide where we want to go and then do our best to obtain the necessary funding. Limitations of funding might determine how fast we can proceed towards our chosen goals, but they should not determine what those goals are. As she sees it, obtaining the funding to carry out the projects is her job and she and the administrative team are engaged in a major effort directed towards improving McGill's funding from the provincial government. This was followed by an in-depth discussion of provincial government funding issues.

The topic of increasing workload and issues relating to workforce planning and redeployment was raised. The admin/support staff voluntary retirement program in late 2013 led to significant reorganization and redeployment of those who remained. Many staff have felt that the changes went forward without proper consultation, especially with those who do the actual work. VP DiGrappa responded by saying that it is very difficult to know at the outset exactly what the end result of any process of major change will be. It is important for the community to feel engaged in a "shared journey" and this has not always happened as it should. One process issue he noted is that things tend to block at the middle management level. All agreed that more effort is needed for direct consultation with those who do the work on the ground.

Principal Fortier noted that participation in consultation mechanisms is often quite low, because of lack of time or sometimes even cynicism about the process, and she looks to the leadership of the staff and student groups to respond and to bring forward the concerns of their constituencies. Concerning the question of cynicism, it was pointed out that some of the responses to the Citizens' Council survey indicated suspicion of the administration and even hostility. This is, in part, the lingering echo of the divisive labour dispute and campus unrest of 2011 and is an "inherited" factor Principal Fortier should be aware of. It is important to build trust especially where it has been damaged and McGill University communications should always be given an acid test – is the statement one that builds trust, or creates mistrust?

There was also a concern that given the continued climate of budget cuts, the “learning organization/agile workplace” aspects of the Principals’ Plans could signify further reductions in staff. The Principal said that her motivation in the “learning organization/agile workplace” priority arose from repeated comments from admin/support staff that some of the work they had to do was not well-conceived and was in some cases unnecessary or foolish. So this aspect of the Plans was not primarily a matter of saving money or cutting staff but rather a sense of “let us use our time in a more productive way”. It is very demoralizing if one is not allowed to do his/her job well.

The topic of student learning environment was raised and there was considerable discussion of MOOCs. There were concerns that academic staff would need resources to deal with major transitions in teaching methodology and also that the small class experience would be marginalized. The Principal felt that MOOCs and face to face classes are complementary and that a range of diverse approaches could make for a richer learning experience. She also felt that small classes could be a very important interface between teaching and research. The question of McGill's commitment to the humanities was also raised and the Principal indicated that enrollments in Arts remains very strong at McGill and there is no intention of a reduced commitment to Arts.

The meeting closed with expressions of interest in continued dialogue. There remain several important aspects of the Plans that were not discussed, for example Space, and these issues should be considered in future meetings.

Citizens' Council Member Associations	Contact Person for additional information	
AMURE	Sean Cory, President	sean.cory@aerum-amure.ca
AMUSE	Antonietta Ballerini, Treasurer	treasury.amuse@gmail.com
MAUT	Ken Hastings, VP Finance	ken.hastings@mcgill.ca
MCLIU	Raad Jassim, President	president@mcliu.ca
MUNACA	David Kalant, VP Finance	vpfinance@munaca.com
MUNASA	Ron Critchley, President	ronald.critchley@mcgill.ca
PGSS	DanielleToccalino, Secretary-General	sec-gen.pgss@mail.mcgill.ca
SSMU	Kareem Ibrahim, President	president@ssmu.mcgill.ca
SEIU	Robert Huot, President	robert.huot@mcgill.ca