

President's Report: 2021-22

MAUT offices, and our university, are situated on unceded indigenous territory, including that of the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinabeg peoples

Major activities of 2021-2022

During the past year as President (and accompanied by the President-Elect and Past-President) I have participated in over 25 meetings with the Provost and other members of the senior administration and three meetings with the Principal. I have also led the MAUT team at the Committee on Academic Staff Compensation (CASC) and chaired the monthly MAUT Executive and MAUT Council meetings, in addition to two Special Council meetings and one especially called General Meeting. I have communicated with MAUT members on a daily basis and have done my best to represent their concerns to the administration. Major topics are listed below.

Pandemic response and return to campus

As with the previous year, the period May 2021-April 2022 has been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic. However last year most attention was focused on the transition to on-line and remote activities and the development of mitigation strategies. In contrast our concerns during the past year have been directed to the eventual return to in-person activities and the impact that this would have on our members. MAUT objectives have been to ensure, as much as possible, that our members are able to work under safe conditions. To that end we campaigned at the end of the summer for the university to adopt a vaccine mandate and to provide much more information about infection rates and classroom ventilation. While we were unsuccessful in achieving the vaccine mandate, the efforts of MAUT and other associations on campus led to the creation of the Ad Hoc Senate Committee on Covid Academic Planning and Policies, the expansion of ventilation measurements, the implementation of a vaccine passport to access the libraries and the expansion of the covid dashboard. We also successfully pressed for a delay in the return to in-person teaching in January and for the provision that most (although not all) academic staff would be able to conduct up to 20% of their teaching on-line during the Winter semester. We also advocated for better accommodation for academic staff who were reluctant to return to in-person teaching for a variety of very valid reasons. We have also done our best to react when members told us about challenges that they faced due to knock-on effects from university actions. Examples of this include the realisation that when we transitioned to on-line exams it became the instructor's responsibility to provide the additional time required for students with disabilities, whereas for in-person exams it is the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) that handles this. This additional workload was exacerbated by the OSD providing instructors with lists of students to be accommodated at the last minute. We raised the issue with the administration and were able to achieve additional TA support to program the accommodations into MyCourses and also a commitment that OSD would provide lists in a timely fashion.

Navigating the past year has been a challenge for MAUT, as it has been for many organizations. I recognise that not all of our members have been satisfied with the approach that we took, and some have been vocal in calling us to take a more strident or confrontational tone with the administration. Some members resigned, which I regret. Collegial governance has been stressed, and while I respect the right of the administration to manage the university's response to the pandemic, if there had been more open discussion in the early days, and more obvious willingness to listen to local expertise, it might have made matters less contentious. Nevertheless, when I look around at the landscape of other universities in

Quebec, it is not obvious that conditions for academic staff at McGill have been significantly different (in terms of accommodations, freedom to teach on-line etc) than elsewhere in the province. There are obviously many lessons learned from Covid, but I believe that for MAUT and for McGill more generally one lesson should be that collegial governance needs to be maintained even in the face of an emergency, particularly if that emergency is of long duration.

With the province apparently on track to lift all remaining restrictions despite the fact that the pandemic has clearly not yet finished with us, we will remain vigilant, in particular for the return to class in September.

Law Professors' certification bid

In early November MAUT became aware that colleagues in the Faculty of Law had obtained sufficient signatures to file for certification as a union (Association of McGill Professors of Law - Association McGillienne de professeur.e.s de droit, AMPL-AMPD). AMPL requested a statement from MAUT which would allow them to seek funding from CAUT and FQPPU in their bid. As a result, MAUT called a special meeting of MAUT Council which was also attended by many MAUT members. After prolonged debate, a motion was passed which stated that while MAUT had not yet decided on its position re. AMPL, it would not oppose AMPL seeking assistance from CAUT or FQPPU. The AMPL certification bid is still before the Quebec labour tribunal and it may be many months or longer before it is finally decided. While I respect the right of any group of workers to seek to unionise, I feel that the association model continues to serve academic staff at McGill. Our average salaries are higher than in any of the unionized Quebec universities and from what I see our working conditions and involvement in university governance are at least comparable and in many aspects better. Once again, we must always maintain constant vigilance to push back against erosions of collegiality (which we do) but I fear that the unionization of academic staff will accelerate rather than impede the transition to a fully managerial university.

Working conditions for librarian academic staff

Librarian academic staff often occupy a precarious position in the university, and MAUT has been lending its voice to support them. Of particular concern over the past year has been the transition of some of our librarian members into a shared workspace under the New Model of Work (NMW) program. We have heard from our members about the shortcomings of this approach, and its unsuitability for their work. In particular, given their important role in meeting with and guiding students, the loss of office space (even if it was previously shared) makes this activity much more challenging. Meetings must now be planned in advance and spontaneous consultations are curtailed. This is in addition to the challenges of trying to work in a distracting environment. The NMW program also has the expectation that participants will be working at home at least some of the time. Not all of our members want to work at home, or have suitable home office spaces to do so. We are concerned that a similar model will be inflicted on other librarian members of MAUT following current and future library renovations and have been advocating for administration to listen properly to their needs and concerns.

Committee on Academic Staff Compensation

MAUT is currently involved in discussions with the administration over the next three-year salary policy, and with rising inflation we are advocating for a better deal than was obtained last time. We also pay close attention to where McGill salaries rank in the U15 group of Canadian universities, and most recently have been paying particular attention to the median salaries rather than simply focusing on the mean salaries.

Through this lens it is apparent that Assistant and Associate professors at McGill are relatively worse off and we are seeking ways to redress this. MAUT was also pleased to report that at the end of the 2021 calendar year, the administration increased the across-the-board (ATB) increase from the previously planned 1% to 1.35%, representing an additional \$1M to academic staff at McGill. We also advocated for the university to work to make the balances of the Professional Development Fund more visible to members.

Administrative overload

This is a perennial topic which has aggravated our members in various ways for many years. In 2017 MAUT formed an *Ad Hoc* committee on Administrative Overload. This was motivated by the many complaints MAUT had received in regard to a perceived decrease in the availability of clerical/administrative support at the university and a commensurate increase in the number of routine administrative tasks that our members were called on to undertake. The committee conducted a survey of academic staff on the administrative burden that they experience at McGill. From this we compiled a list of the most annoying and time-consuming administrative tasks. Since then MAUT has been seeking to create a regular forum with the administration where these concerns could be addressed. While the initial focus was on the creation of a university committee, or a working group, this year we signed an agreement with the Provost whereby instead we would have regular meetings with the Provost and senior administrators throughout the year where we would choose the topics to be addressed. During the past year we focused on computer purchases, and were successful in having the administration remove the requirement that computers purchased with research funds could only be sourced through Le James. Now we need to move forward to attack other problems, such as the expenses process, the inability to use PCards for travel, and Workday (which has caused a further erosion in the time that administrators have available to support the academic mission of our members).

Opt-out membership

For the past two years, MAUT has been moving towards the implementation of a plan that was already approved at Council whereby new academic staff at McGill would automatically become members of MAUT and would then be able to opt out if they wish. The pandemic and Workday have collectively put us behind our original schedule, but we are hopeful that the change can be implemented in time for academic staff who start this summer.

Other issues

Many other issues have also come up over the past year, and much of these are still ongoing. We have been discussing revisions to the Disciplinary and Grievance Regulations for Academic Staff with the administration for three years now, and I believe that we close to a finally agreed version. MAUT is closely involved with the revision of other university policies that will affect our members, including the Policy on Assessment of Student Learning, Student Evaluations of Teaching and the Service Portfolio. We have advocated on behalf of colleagues at Macdonald Campus where long-awaited renovations have been disruptive, lobbied the administration to increase daycare space at McGill, investigated changes to minimum graduate student stipends in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, considered equity in family care at McGill (where there is much work to be done), to name just a few.

Acknowledgement and thanks

I would like to thank all of the members of the MAUT Executive Group over the past year. Most particularly our amazing and tireless Past-President Janine Mauzeroll who led MAUT in the previous year through very challenging times and who is always such a role model for compassion, calm common sense and determination, but also our President-Elect Renee Sieber who I am sure will be a passionate defender of the interests of our members and all of our Vice Presidents (VP-Communications Lena Simine, VP-External Simon Rousseau, VP-Finance Nate Quitoriano and VP-Internal Timothy Kennedy) who have devoted many hours in service to MAUT. I would also like to thank all of the members of the MAUT Council for the past year for their engagement with some very difficult issues. Finally, and most importantly, I want to thank and acknowledge the efforts of our two fantastic MAUT staff members, Jo-Anne Watier and Joseph Varga for everything they do and for the support that they have given both to me and our members.



Andrew Kirk

MAUT President 2021-2022