

FOCUS ON STUDENTS: Final Report, Appendix B
Mandate of FOCUS ON STUDENTS: Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at McGill
December 2006

CONTEXT

The Mission of McGill University is the advancement of learning through teaching, scholarship and service to society: by offering to outstanding undergraduate and graduate students the best education available; by carrying out scholarly activities judged to be excellent when measured against the highest international standards; and by providing service to society in those ways for which we are well-suited by virtue of our academic strengths.

At the core of McGill's mission is the provision of an education of excellent quality to our students. Superior levels of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, and student-faculty interaction are fundamental to the quality of a student's education. As a research-intensive university, McGill aims to provide students with an academic experience that benefits directly from the research programs and agendas of Faculty members. Formal and informal feedback indicates that we are well-positioned to achieve this part of our mission.

Our admissions standards are demanding: we are intent on attracting the best students. Our standards of accessibility should also be demanding: we should aim to ensure that all qualified students will be able to participate in student life at McGill and fulfill their program requirements irrespective of their financial means, something we cannot currently do. The achievement of this goal will require a better understanding of the resource gap that must be filled and of the concrete efforts required to bridge that gap. Further, we aim to be competitive with our peer public universities in Canada and the United States, with respect to scholarship offerings and the support we offer to graduate students. What will this entail?

The quality of a university education depends in significant part on a student's experience with peers and within the classroom; it also depends on the quality of academic and other services delivered to students. A supportive campus environment is essential for students to thrive. The atmosphere on our campuses should be open and tolerant, respecting academic freedoms and building strong accountability, both on the part of individuals and of the community. Students need access to effective advising and institutional supports in order to achieve their greatest potential. 'Life happens' while at university, so services are required to promote healthy lifestyles and well being and to assist students in times of stress and personal crisis, as well as in times of opportunity.

We must provide student services that further enhance both the academic experiences of our students and their opportunities for learning and personal growth outside the classroom. We wish to set the stage for a stimulating, enjoyable and fulfilling learning experience with services and administrative processes that are effective, efficient and, most importantly, student-oriented. We will set our goals and standards high in this regard, and assess our progress toward concrete objectives, while operating within our means.

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The Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning is an opportunity for the McGill community to stand back and reflect on the impact of University resources, services and administrative structures on the quality and comparability of academic and other services and support delivered to our students. The Task Force is not intended as a substitute for the work of University officials and members of governing bodies who deal with particular dimensions of student support and student services. Certain aspects of the student experience fall within the mandate of committees and task forces now at work, including the Task Force on Residence Life and Dining at McGill; members of the Task Force on Student Life and Learning will take the reports of these committees into account in their deliberations.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Task Force on Student Life and Learning at McGill will seek views broadly in the McGill community on the most effective ways to resource and structure University administrative support and services so as to deliver services that further enhance student life and learning. It will consider how we can most effectively frame our standards and goals for the delivery of services to our students in a secular setting. It will seek input from students, individually and through their representative organizations. In carrying out the mandate, members of the Task Force will pay close attention to the different perspectives of full-time and part-time students, undergraduate and graduate students, students in professional faculties, Quebec students, Canadians from outside Quebec and international students, as well as the experiences of students who are members of minority groups. The Task Force will aim to report its findings and make recommendations in the fall term of 2006.

The Task Force will consider and make recommendations on:

- ❖ The aspirations of McGill with respect to student life and student learning
- ❖ How best to structure services so as to foster the optimal personal well-being and active engagement of our students, not only within the McGill community, but in the broader community as well
- ❖ The range, structure and delivery of services and support currently provided to students at McGill University and at our peer institutions, including consideration of the 2004 National Survey of Student Engagement.
- ❖ The optimal administrative requirements, including structures and guidelines, for planning and achieving the most effective and efficient delivery of student services at McGill. These must be realistic with respect to constraints imposed by our best estimates of our resources over the next five to ten years, but must also be ambitious.

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WORKING GROUPS

In light of the nature of our campuses, the international orientation of McGill University and the very rapid transition to electronic interaction within our community, the following themes will be addressed by working groups made up of members of the Task Force. It is expected that members of the working groups will consider how best to deal with their mandate, and the topics that might be covered by each group will inevitably overlap to some extent. A list of topics that might be considered for a working group follows the statement of the themes.

- ❖ Where and how can McGill be more supportive of the academic life of our students, including transitions into and out of the University?
- ❖ What range of other services linked to student life and learning does and should the University offer students to ensure their personal well-being, as well as to assist in times of personal crisis, should these occur? What levels of financial assistance are we currently offering, what is the level of student need, how can we best bridge the gap?
- ❖ How can the University administration best foster sensitivity to cultural and personal differences in the delivery of academic and other administrative supports to our students, while respecting our primary academic purposes? How can we best provide an internationally informed experience for McGill students, both in terms of experience abroad and in the content of campus-based programs?
- ❖ How can we enhance relations between students from Quebec and students from outside Quebec and enrich the Quebec experience for students coming to McGill from outside the province?
- ❖ What is the optimal role of e-interaction between students and the University? How effective are the various ways in which students deal with the administration electronically? What additional services and information could most effectively be provided via the web? What is the impact of electronic aids to teaching on student life and learning?

Topics for Working Group A: The Place of Students in the McGill Community

- ✓ How should the administration best support the transition into the McGill community? What are the purposes of, and best vehicles for, student orientation? How should the administration and student groups best work together to provide an effective and positive orientation for students and their families?
- ✓ How might we better offer and structure academic advising across the University and in faculties and programs so as to most effectively meet the needs of our students?
- ✓ How can the University administration minimize students' experience of 'bureaucracy and red tape'?
- ✓ How, from an administrative perspective, do we best facilitate student participation in interdisciplinary and, especially, inter-faculty course offerings?

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- ✓ How can we best maintain relationships with our students as they make the transition from student life and become our Alumni and Alumnae? What supports do we offer in the transition to graduate studies or the working world? How can we structure services so as to further enhance our ability to meet our students' needs?

Working Group B: Administrative Supports: Personal Well-being, Counseling and Special Support in Times of Personal Crisis; Residences; Financial Assistance

- ✓ What services do we provide in support of student life and learning and how do they compare with those offered by our peer institutions? Where and how can we do better within context of our academic mission and the limits of our resources?
- ✓ How do we best compete, in the context of our peer universities and our resources, in residence programs and the residence experience?
- ✓ What levels of financial assistance do we currently provide for our undergraduate students and for students in professional faculties? What are our best estimates of the unmet need among these students?
- ✓ How is financial assistance provided to undergraduate students and students in professional faculties (i.e., through work-study, scholarships, loans and bursaries)? What is the appropriate level and combination of sources of assistance for these students?
- ✓ What support do we currently provide for graduate students? What resources would be required in order to offer prospective graduate students a competitive funding framework?
- ✓ What combination of tuition waivers, teaching assistantships, research assistantships and scholarship funding can best achieve this goal in different disciplines?

Working Group C: Diversity among our Students and the Internationalization of Education

- ✓ How can we best provide effective and supportive student services for students who come from a diversity of ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds while respecting the non-denominational character of the University and fostering understanding and openness? How can the University administration best foster sensitivity to cultural and personal differences of all kinds?
- ✓ What targeted recruitment activities and outreach to minority groups do we currently undertake? How can we enhance these activities, given competing demands and reasonable expectations regarding the resources available?
- ✓ What particular challenges and opportunities do international students face?
- ✓ Are there obstacles to broad participation in study abroad and exchange experiences? How do we optimize administrative processes for students who wish to take advantage of these opportunities? How can we further enhance advice and support for them?

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Working Group D: McGill University and the Quebec Experience

- ✓ How does, and how should, the University build on its unique place as an internationally-oriented English-language institution in a French-speaking province to broaden the experience of all students who choose to study at McGill? How can we best support students from outside Quebec in seeking a broader Quebec experience, both those from other provinces in Canada and international students?
- ✓ How do we better foster the interaction between Quebec students and students from outside Quebec?
- ✓ What are the different experiences of McGill, Montreal and Quebec among our students?
- ✓ What are our current practices in reaching out to Quebecers and to particular communities within the province? What is our capacity to deliver student services in French? How can and should we position that capacity going forward?

Working Group E: The E-experience

- ✓ Is the information provided on University and Faculty web sites accessible, accurate and up-to-date? Which specific pages work well, and which could be made more user-friendly and effective? What additional information can most effectively be conveyed to students through the web sites?
- ✓ What has been the student experience with registration using Minerva? Should additional administrative services related to programs, e.g., degree audit, be offered over the web?
- ✓ Is the policy of using e-mail for official communications with students working well? Could it be made more effective?
- ✓ Are current systems providing access to libraries, electronic collections and the full range of information resources for study and research appropriately supported? How could the support for users of these systems be improved?
- ✓ What impact have Web CT and the availability of video or audio tapes of lectures and classes had on student learning?
- ✓ Are there additional services that could optimally be offered over the web? Which interactions should remain face-to-face?

RANGE OF UNIVERSITY SERVICES THAT MAY HAVE AN IMPACT ON STUDENT LIFE AND LEARNING

A. ACADEMIC SERVICES

- ❖ Recruitment and visitor orientation: ability to get general information about programs, admissions standards, ability to get answers to particular questions concerning the admissions process, financial assistance and related items on the web, by phone and/or in person
- ❖ Admissions process: ability to get information about the timing of decisions on the web and through personal contact (e-mail or telephone)

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- ❖ Registration: availability of advising, user-friendliness of electronic registration on Minerva, availability of technical help during the registration process
- ❖ Academic advising, mentoring and tutoring: Who is currently providing these? What are the issues? What would be the optimal administrative structures in each case?
- ❖ Access to libraries and the full range of information resources for study and research
- ❖ Access to exchange programs

B. OTHER SERVICES

- ❖ Personal well-being: residences, health care, health and recreation services, crisis counseling
- ❖ Sports and fitness facilities, activities and supports
- ❖ Future career and professional development counseling
- ❖ Transitions: to first year, through orientation to graduation from the University, through support for placement on graduation, to Alumni/Alumnae status

CONSULTATION AND INPUT

- ❖ An invitation to submit memoranda will be extended to the McGill community, broadly defined.
- ❖ The invitation will be posted on the University web site.
- ❖ The Task Force and/or working groups will invite selected oral representations from members of the community, including Alumni and Alumnae, on the basis of the work undertaken and of matters raised through the submissions received.
- ❖ Members of the working groups will consult available information on the issues within their mandate, including practices at McGill's peer institutions.

TIMING

- ❖ Establishment of Task Force January/February 2005

WINTER TERM 2005

- ❖ Creation of Task Force and formation of working groups
- ❖ Establishment of web sites for working groups
- ❖ Compilation of information available within the University and elsewhere to support the work of the Task Force and working groups

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Summer 2005 – Early to Mid-Fall

- ❖ Review of experience at McGill and elsewhere
- ❖ Analysis of best practices

Fall 2005 – Winter 2006

- ❖ Consultation with members of McGill community through meetings
- ❖ Reports of individual working groups for Summer 2006

SUMMER 2006

- ❖ Formulation of draft conclusions and recommendations

FALL 2006

- ❖ Consultation on draft recommendations
- ❖ Final report