

FOCUS ON STUDENTS: Final Report, Appendix G
Summary of Recommendations of the Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at McGill
December 2006

1. ACADEMIC ADVISING AND MENTORING AT MCGILL

McGill should ensure that quality academic advising and mentoring are available and accessible for all students, geared to the stage of the student's academic career,. Particular attention should be paid to advising students on interdisciplinary and inter-Faculty programs.

Members of the Principal's Task Force are conscious that the provision of advising and mentoring will have to be tailored to different Faculties and units, as well as to the stage of a student's career. They strongly recommend that Deans consider the appropriateness of providing advising on policies and procedures around programs and courses to students through full-time professional advisors. Among the perceived advantages of this model are the opportunity to develop expertise in the requirements of a range of programs, and much greater availability to meet with students during regular business hours. Academic staff would, on this model, have increased opportunities and availability to take on mentoring roles vis-à-vis students, focused on shared academic interest, learning and careers, and would be expected to do so.

There cannot be a hard-and-fast line drawn between advising and mentoring that will be appropriate in every case, but the idea is that the burden of expectations in relation to each role be in line with the above description. It is important to note that, while this recommendation focuses on academic advising, it is not meant to preclude enhancements to advising on careers and employment during a student's program or on graduation.

Members of the Task Force suggest that the following steps be considered as means to achieve quality advising for all students.

- 1.1 An advising mission statement should be adopted, which both reflects the value of academic advising to the community, and explains the purpose of advising in facilitating student life and learning.
- 1.2 All members of the academic staff of the University should be encouraged to contribute to the enhancement of the life and learning of students outside the classroom, consistent with McGill's academic goals and mission. Through mentorship roles, as well as in other ways, members of the professoriate should have the opportunity to contribute to the creation of a welcoming learning community at McGill.
- 1.3 For undergraduates, quality advising would mean ensuring that every student has an Academic Adviser, who can provide support in accessing the community's resources. This will entail that each department have access to one or more full- or part-time Academic Advisers.
- 1.4 Whether or not they hold academic appointments, Advisers should be integrated into the academic functions of the department (or Faculty), including, for example, by serving on the Curriculum Committee and attending departmental meetings.
- 1.5 Consistent with our institutional mission, values and goals, institutional standards should be adopted, setting out the number of students each full-time, dedicated Adviser should be asked to advise and guide. In doing so, the University should take stock of academic advising currently available to students in different academic units, and should consider, for example, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) standard.

FOCUS ON STUDENTS: Final Report, Appendix G
Summary of Recommendations of the Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at McGill
December 2006

- 1.6 In consultation with Student Affairs Offices, the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) should ensure that protocols are developed for records of advice given to students by Academic Advisers, as well as access to those records.
- 1.7 Deans and departmental chairs should be encouraged to develop structured opportunities within their unit, such as the First Year Interest Groups, which would enable professors and students to discover academic interests in common, and promote opportunities for mentoring by members of the academic staff.
- 1.8 The University should review the effectiveness of standards and mechanisms of accountability for supervisors and graduate students, and consider where implementation might be enhanced.
- 1.9 The priority attached to providing quality advising to students should be reflected in the allocation of resources, including personnel, space, equipment and the development of systems, and in professional development.

2. RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS: FUNDING AND SPACE

The second recommendation of the Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at McGill relates to the enhancement of funding for graduate students, financial assistance for undergraduate and professional students, and improvements to work and social space available to all students. It is understood that, in order to implement this recommendation, significant resources, whether new or reallocated, will be needed.

RESOURCES: FUNDING AND SPACE FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

McGill succeeds in attracting excellent graduate students. However, there are persuasive indications that current funding is inadequate, and that we are losing many outstanding candidates as a consequence of our inability to guarantee adequate funding at the time that decisions on offers of admission must be made. Yield rates for many graduate programs are consistently lower than optimal. The recommendation for enhanced funding set out below is consistent with goals set out in the University White Paper of improving completion rates and time to completion for graduate students.

McGill University should develop a base level of funding for graduate research students in all departments that is competitive with that offered by our peers, both Canadian and international. The University should provide adequate and safe laboratory and office work space on campus for all graduate students. The attraction of funds for graduate student support should be made a priority, and awards should be made available to students in an efficient and expeditious manner.

Members of the Principal's Task Force understand that the implementation of the recommendation on funding for graduate students would entail the following:

- 2.1 Funding packages would be offered at the time that students are deciding on offers of admission.
- 2.2 Combinations of bursaries, fellowships, research and teaching assistantships would be considered to make up funding packages.

FOCUS ON STUDENTS: Final Report, Appendix G
Summary of Recommendations of the Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at McGill
December 2006

- 2.3 Faculty members would be encouraged and supported in applying for all external funding that might enhance McGill's ability to meet graduate student enrolment targets with financial support.
- 2.4 The University would increase resources available to fund graduate students over time. As additional funds became available, funding priorities would be established, taking into consideration the research component of the program and individual earning potential on graduation.
- 2.5 Levels of funding for graduate students might vary across disciplines, as necessary to ensure that McGill's offers are competitive with those made by peers.
- 2.6 Prospective graduate students would be advised in recruitment materials that they are expected to apply for all appropriate external support for which they are eligible.
- 2.7 Target enrolments would be established through a consultative process, taking into account resources available to support students, including funding and laboratory and work space available in each department or Faculty.

RESOURCES: FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR UNDERGRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

The University should take measures to secure the resources necessary to offer sufficient assistance to undergraduate and professional students over the course of their program so that no candidate offered admission to McGill need turn down that offer for lack of financial assistance. Financial assistance for which students are eligible should be made available to students in an efficient and expeditious manner.

The University has taken steps to ensure that candidates for admission to undergraduate and professional programs are encouraged to apply for need-based financial assistance at McGill as of the date of admission, and to ensure that they receive a response on eligibility, and on the amount of assistance for which they are eligible, prior to the deadline for making a decision on an offer of admission.

FOCUS ON STUDENTS: Final Report, Appendix G
Summary of Recommendations of the Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at McGill
December 2006

Members of the Principal's Task Force recommend that the following steps be taken to enhance the University's ability to provide financial assistance to all qualified candidates:

- 2.8 Self-assessments collected by the University from students who apply for financial assistance should be aggregated and analysed to assist in determining the amount of the unmet financial need of our undergraduate and professional students.
- 2.9 The University should consider how resource requirements for much-improved need-based financial assistance can be met while enhancing our ability to offer an appropriate number of merit-based scholarships to exceptional applicants.

RESOURCES: STUDY AND SOCIAL SPACE FOR ALL STUDENTS

Anecdotal information on the cost of, and difficulties associated with booking, university space for activities indicates that structural issues need to be addressed.

- 2.10 The Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) and the Vice-Principal (Administration and Finance) should engage in broad-based consultations, through a round table or other appropriate mechanism, to streamline procedures and decision processes for the reservation of university space by student organizations wherever possible.
- 2.11 The University should review the principles underpinning the fee structures associated with the use of University facilities, including those applying outside of normal working hours, to determine whether they strike an appropriate balance between McGill's role as a student-centred, research-intensive University, and the financial imperatives associated with the University's resource situation.
- 2.12 In assessing the adequacy of work space for students, the University should take into account the special role the University Libraries can play in supporting individual and group working space, as well as informal social space.
- 2.13 The University should take measures to ensure that access to virtual space is easier for all students, by:
 - encouraging the development of a central policy framework that would ensure convenient access across campus regardless of Faculty;
 - looking into the possibility of providing additional convivial and multi-purpose space in locations across campus to accommodate computers for public use; and
 - with the support of the Office of CIO, developing and publishing a map on the University web site showing all points of computer access on McGill campuses.

FOCUS ON STUDENTS: Final Report, Appendix G
Summary of Recommendations of the Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at McGill
December 2006

3. BUILDING A LEARNING COMMUNITY

In creating a learning community, McGill should enhance the opportunities for the McGill experience to provide students with a window on the world. In doing so, the University should take advantage of its unique assets as a leading academic institution with a diverse student body, whose primary language of instruction is English, located in a cosmopolitan and multicultural city, in a French-speaking province.

In order to enhance the McGill experience, members of the Principal's Task Force recommend that the Office of the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) take the lead in the following initiatives:

- 3.1 Articulating, as appropriate, and in consultation with students and the Social Equity and Discrimination Officer, institutional expectations of students as members of a learning community that celebrates diversity.
- 3.2 Exploring possibilities for the development of academic orientations to the University tailored to students entering at different points in the program.
- 3.3 Encouraging departments to examine course offerings, with a view to assessing the capacity to offer students access to more small or medium size classes at all stages of their program.
- 3.4 In consultation with members of the Interhall Residence Council and the Director of Residences, considering the role that residences might play in bringing McGill students from different regions of Québec, Canada and the world together.
- 3.5 In conjunction with the Chief Information Officer, developing and implementing policies and operations designed to enhance communication, both to students and within the University, including:
 - optimizing the use of electronic sources of information;
 - centralizing points of access to systems across campus;
 - enabling customization of information conveyed automatically to students;
 - enabling an integrated online calendar of events.
- 3.6 Articulating, in consultation with Faculties, standards and goals for the administration of services for international students at McGill, including students enrolled in our programs and those on campus as exchange students.
- 3.7 In consultation with the McGill's International Students' Network and the Office for International Students, exploring mechanisms to support student activities that bring together International and Canadian students.
- 3.8 Exploring with units the possibility and appropriateness of providing program options, at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, to students allowing them to enhance their second language skills and learn about Québec culture.
- 3.9 Exploring with departments and the Dean of Continuing Education opportunities for making additional non-credit and three-credit courses available to provide options for the enhancement of second-language skills.
- 3.10 Exploring with sister universities in Montreal the possibility of joint programs that would enable McGill students to take advantage of opportunities to fulfil some program requirements at a French-language institution.

FOCUS ON STUDENTS: Final Report, Appendix G
Summary of Recommendations of the Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at McGill
December 2006

- 3.11 Exploring the University's ability to provide services to candidates and students in French as well as in English, and to communicate the availability of these services effectively to French-speaking candidates and students.
- 3.12 Exploring the support available for staff members wishing to enhance second-language skills, and the options for improving this support it where appropriate.