

**FOCUS ON STUDENTS:  
Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at  
McGill**

**Final Report**

**December 2006**

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**PART I: INTRODUCTION**

**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, along with the conduct of outstanding research, is the provision of an education of excellent quality to our students in our undergraduate, graduate and professional programs. 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.

Although financial resources have been constrained for the last fifteen years, McGill is fortunate to enjoy other resources needed to achieve its mission. The University attracts outstanding students, as well as talented and dedicated faculty, administrative and support staff. The McGill campuses are located in a bilingual metropolis that serves as a magnet for intelligent and creative people. The University's challenge is one of optimization: how should it best structure and position itself to provide a stimulating and supportive learning environment? Only by both continuously improving the quality of the education it provides, and fostering excellence in research, can McGill remain one of the world's best learning environments.

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 relations with faculty and staff, and of the 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. We aim to celebrate the diversity of our student body, and make the most of our unique position as a highly internationalized university at the crossroads of the English and French cultures in Québec and in Canada.

Members of the Principal's Task Force wish to set the stage for a stimulating, enjoyable and fulfilling learning experience for our students, with services and administrative processes that are effective, efficient and, most importantly, student-oriented. This experience begins, and services must be available, the moment a prospective student thinks of applying to McGill, and will extend over a lifetime. 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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## **MANDATE**

“FOCUS ON STUDENTS: Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at McGill” was launched by the Principal during the winter term of 2005, to take place during 2005 and 2006 period. Following consultation with the four umbrella student organizations (the Students' Society of McGill University, the Post-Graduate Students' Society, the Macdonald Campus Students' Society and the McGill Association of Continuing Education Students) and with members of the administration, twenty-four individuals from the McGill community, who had broad experience of, and/or a demonstrated interest in, issues affecting student life and learning were invited to participate in the Principal's Task Force. Half of the appointed participants were students, and half faculty members or members of the administrative and support staff of the University. Each member also served on one of five working groups, two of which are chaired by students, two by faculty members, and one by a member of the administrative staff.

The Principal's Task Force was given a broad mandate to review issues affecting student life and learning at McGill, and has aimed to make a small number of substantial recommendations that will be given priority for implementation, and will have an impact across the University.

Briefly stated, the Principal's Task Force has focused on:

- ❖ The place of students in the McGill community: where and how can McGill be more supportive of the academic life of our students, including transitions into and out of the University?
- ❖ A review of the supports to personal well-being and of special supports and counselling in times of personal crisis. A review of financial assistance currently offered, the level of student need, and how we can best bridge the gap.
- ❖ Diversity among our students and the internationalization of education: 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 programs based on our campuses.
- ❖ McGill University and the Québec experience: how can we enhance relations between students from Québec and students from outside Québec, and enrich the Québec experience for students coming to McGill from outside the province?
- ❖ The e-experience: 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?

The full text of the mandate, as initially circulated to the McGill community, is appended to this report (Appendix B).

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## **PROCESS**

From the outset, the Principal's Task Force has sought the views of people and organizations across the McGill community. A call for submissions was issued at the end of the 2004-05 academic year, a copy of which is appended to this report (Appendix C).

A number of other activities and initiatives relevant to the work of Task Force have informed the deliberations of members. The Annual Joint Meeting of the McGill Senate and Board of Governors, held on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005, was devoted to discussion of questions that had arisen during Task Force deliberations. On February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2006, members met with Deans to solicit input on three themes: advising, the student-centred university, and building an academic community.

A portion of the open forum held by the McGill Association of University Teachers on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2006, consisted on a presentation of the work of the Principal's Task Force by Dr. Joan Wolforth, Director of the Office for Students with Disabilities. Principal Heather Munroe-Blum and Morton Mendelson, then Associate Provost (Academic Programs and Services), were on hand to answer questions from forum participants.

The First Year Office organized a symposium in November 2005 as an opportunity for exposure to the perspectives of first year students. At the invitation of the Students' Society of McGill University, individual members of the Task Force (as well as members of the senior administration) toured the January edition of 'Activities Night', the semi-annual event at which student clubs and activities make information on their organizations available to prospective members. Early in the winter term of 2006, the Principal and a small group of members of the Task Force visited Douglas Residence, meeting with members of the Residence Council, having dinner in the hall, and touring the buildings.

Over the course of the last seventeen months, a number of members of the senior administration have been invited to meetings of the Principal's Task Force to address aspects of its mandate: Professor Rod Macdonald, former Dean of Law, and author of the 1993 report "Toward a Service-Oriented Culture and a User-Friendly Environment for Students"; Provost Anthony Masi; Vice-Principal (Administration and Finance) Morty Yalovsky; two former Deans of Students, Professor Rosalie Jukier and Professor Bruce Shore; Ms Flo Tracey, Director of Residences; Ms Janyne Hodder, Vice-Principal (Inter-Institutional Relations), in her capacity as former Principal of Bishop's University. In addition, members of the Task Force met with Lina Di Genova, Planning Analyst, Office of Planning and Institutional Analysis, regarding her work on surveys of McGill students.

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## **CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS AND CONSULTATIONS**

By October 2005, the Task Force had received more than 150 submissions, most from students and from members of the administrative and support staff who work with students, with the balance from alumni, Deans, senior administrators and faculty members. Additional submissions have been received since that time, all of which have been distributed to members of the Task Force. Twenty-two individuals were invited to present briefs at sessions held on November 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. Those invited included student organizations, individual students, alumni, and members of the University administration who work closely with students.

During the November 2005 meetings with authors of submissions, a number of points were made about students' perceptions of their place at McGill University. A summary list of these points is provided below; a full account of the concerns expressed is appended to this report (Appendix D).

- ❖ While McGill students recognise the overall quality of the education they receive at this University, it is clear that many do not feel that they are fully-fledged members of the McGill community.
- ❖ Funding for graduate students is neither adequate nor competitive with that offered at peer institutions.
- ❖ The lack of adequate financial support for students with significant financial need may adversely impact the goal of attracting a diverse student body, and result in qualified students refusing offers of admission to McGill.
- ❖ Students expressed frustration at their inability to find the information they need, and might reasonably expect to have, on everything from program and course options, to administrative supports, to activities going on in the University.
- ❖ Space constraints are an impediment to a fulfilling experience for students generally. These include a lack of adequate work space, informal meeting space, and the excessive difficulty and cost of accessing University premises for student activities.
- ❖ Opportunities for students to broaden their horizons, arising from the diversity of the McGill student body, with its significant international student component, could be better fostered.
- ❖ Many of our students who chose McGill in part because of its location in Québec do not succeed in bridging 'divides' between students from Québec and those from outside the province, or between English-speaking and French-speaking students.

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**PROGRESS REPORT AND FEEDBACK**

In May of 2006, the Principal's Task Force communicated a Progress Report to Senate, the Board of Governors and the broader community. The Progress Report outlined three broad recommendations, which are included in this Report. It was made available on the McGill University web site, and all members of the McGill community were asked for feedback.

**ROUND TABLES**

In parallel with the work of the Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning, the then Associate Provost (Academic Programs and Services) organized three round tables on issues related to the work of the Task Force over the course of the 2005-06 academic year. These round tables brought together students and members of the administrative and support staff from different units involved in each of the areas of academic advising, financial assistance, and international education, with a view to understanding the mechanisms used to deliver services to students, and how they might be improved. The reports of the round tables were delivered to the Principal's Task Force, and recommendations on advising and financial assistance have been annexed to this report as appendices E and F. They may be of assistance in understanding the context in which the Task Force made its recommendations, as well as directions taken.

**PART TWO: RE-IMAGINING THE PLACE OF STUDENTS IN THE RESEARCH-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITY**

Some broad themes very quickly became salient to members of the Principal's Task Force, including a perception among students that collegial relationships within the community do not extend to them, and that University procedures have become hampered by excessive bureaucracy and red tape.

The University is a learning community: a place where knowledge is advanced and disseminated, for the benefit of humanity and the betterment of individual members of the community. As fully-fledged members of this learning community, students should be challenged not only to achieve their potential but to excel. They should learn in conditions that encourage them to remain curious, to value diversity in opinions and perspectives, to think critically and communicate effectively. Through their participation in the McGill community, students should have opportunities to develop personally and socially, and to become thoughtful and contributing members of society.

Accountability in the University context should apply to all: just as students are accountable to their professors and to members of the administrative and support staff, so too are faculty and other staff members accountable to students, as members, present and future, of the McGill community.

Members of the Principal's Task Force determined early on that the adoption of an aspirational statement on what it means for McGill to think of itself as student-centred, as well as research-intensive, would constitute a necessary step in re-imagining the place of students, and ensuring that they are treated as fully-fledged members of a learning community. All three aspects of the University mission – research, teaching and community service – are integrally related to, and have significant impacts on, student life and learning. Solving problems of bureaucracy and red tape will require both the instillation of a culture that rewards service to students, as well as other members of the University community, and the participation of those charged with delivering services in the formulation of solutions to particular problems.

**THE STUDENT-CENTRED, RESEARCH-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITY**

The aspirational statement below addresses what it means for McGill, Canada's most research-intensive University, to consider itself 'student-centred'. This description of the student-centred, research-intensive University was developed on the premise that students choose McGill on the basis of our academic mission. Our students are outstanding, and have the potential to achieve excellence. The University community must provide them with the academic opportunities and challenges that will enable them to excel, but must also offer other supports to learning and to challenges that may interfere with student success, so that they can take advantage of academic opportunities and meet academic challenges – and, indeed, thrive. Students, on their part, must accept their responsibilities, as members of the learning community, for taking advantage of opportunities and support offered.

One step in providing adequate supports is to work toward ensuring that all decision-making in the University is informed by principles and goals considered appropriate to a student-centred, research-intensive University:

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*McGill is an outstanding research-intensive University that strives to offer its students the best education possible, in a vibrant environment for learning and campus life that supports students' academic progress and personal development. All members of the McGill community are committed to ensuring that students' concerns and interests pervade all aspects of University life.*

*Students are valued members of a cooperative academic community, and a primary concern of the University. They are treated as individuals, whose diverse backgrounds, goals, aspirations, needs, talents, and successes are welcomed and celebrated. Students are given the means and opportunities to freely probe, examine, debate issues and ideas, and actively pursue their educational goals. As members of a research-intensive university, students learn about, and are encouraged to participate in, research and scholarship in their field.*

*From the first contact of prospective students with the University, interactions among students, faculty, and administrative and support staff are based on mutual trust and respect. McGill strives to make the information needed by students easily accessible to them. The rights and responsibilities of students are clearly articulated and supported.*

*University decisions are made with due consideration given to their impact on students. Students participate in University governance and influence goals set by academic units, faculties, and the administration. Moreover, students are encouraged to participate in ongoing dialogue, where their voices are heard and where their concerns are addressed.*

*The University provides students with a wide variety of academic and support services, striving to make them easy to access, and it fosters students' interest in organizing their own activities. Students' best interests are a principal focus of academic, administrative, and support staff.*

*The University helps students obtain the financial support they need to pursue their education, by providing internal programs that are as generous as possible, and by supporting students in their efforts to find employment and external support.*

*The University helps students develop the means to succeed, to inquire after truth, and to contribute to society over their lifetimes.*

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### **DEPUTY PROVOST (STUDENT LIFE AND LEARNING)**

On July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Professor Morton J. Mendelson was appointed Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning), in line with a recommendation made in the Progress Report of the Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at McGill.

The Office of the Deputy Provost should provide an institutional 'home' within the University's senior administration for ensuring the advancement of McGill as a student-centred, research-intensive University. Through his participation in the most senior levels of University administration, the Deputy Provost should champion the idea of McGill as a convivial and positive environment for student learning, encouraging ownership across the University of the goals this will involve. He should provide overarching direction and oversight needed to effectively integrate the building of a learning community into the achievement of the University's academic and research priorities. This integration of goals, considerations and directions that promote student-centredness with the University's missions of research, teaching and service to the community, is at the core our understanding of what constitutes a student-centred, research-intensive university.

The Principal's Task Force recommends that the following goals be included in the mandate of the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning):

- a. Articulating McGill's values, standards and goals with respect to student life and learning and overseeing their integration, as appropriate, into University policies, operations and procedures.
- b. Working with Deans and chairs to find means to integrate faculty members into efforts to create an academic community that is experienced as inclusive by all members.
- c. Considering the most effective configuration of positions and responsibilities for the Dean of Students, and the direction of Student Services.
- d. Supporting the Dean of Students in working closely with student organizations to ensure the highest quality of student life on our campuses, consistent with our academic missions and our identity as a research-intensive university.
- e. Supporting the establishment of mechanisms at all levels of decision-making to ensure that considerations of student-centredness are taken into account in processes of academic policy development and in administrative decision-making.
- f. Ensuring that institutional ownership is assumed for the student advising initiatives, and for those relating to the building of a learning community, proposed in this report.
- g. Exploring institutional mechanisms that might better support students in undertaking extra-curricular activities that contribute to the life and learning of their peers, particularly in relation to processes for the approval of access to University space and for establishing the fees charged for the use of that space.

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- h. Encouraging and supporting the establishment, in consultation with other senior administrators in the University, including Faculty administrators, of consistent policies, institutional standards and operations for services to students wherever appropriate.
- i. Ensuring that institutional ownership is assumed for initiatives relating to international education, including the articulation of standards and goals for the administration of exchange and study-abroad programs.

### **DEPUTY PROVOST (STUDENT LIFE AND LEARNING): DISCUSSION**

The creation of the position of Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) addresses several recurrent themes that emerged throughout the deliberations of the Principal's Task Force. Among the issues that the Deputy Provost will champion is the development of a greater sense of belonging for McGill students. Faculty members may be included in these efforts in a range of ways, including mentoring of students and the creation of opportunities for the discovery and exploration of academic interests shared among professors and students at all levels.

In striving to be a student-centred, as well as a research-intensive, university, McGill has made a sustained commitment to providing high quality services that meet the needs of our diverse student population. Ultimate responsibility for University policy governing the provision of a broad range of services to students should rest with the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning), with policies elaborated in consultation with students and members of the community involved in the delivery of services to them.

Given the size of the student body at McGill, Student Services encompass a very broad array of professional service-providers, and a considerable budget. The Principal's Task Force therefore suggests that a position be created, appropriately described so as to attract individuals with the expertise necessary to ensure the effective management of services, and reporting to the Deputy Provost. The roles played by the Athletics Department and by University Residences in supporting student life and learning should be taken into account in defining the responsibilities associated with this position.

### **UNDER-FUNDING, BUREAUCRACY AND RED TAPE**

References to bureaucracy and red tape provided a backdrop to discussions of a number of issues raised by students, ranging from admission to an exchange or study-abroad program to access to University premises for student activities. The University is accountable for minimising unnecessary obstacles to students in academic and administrative matters, for making relevant information available in a timely fashion, and for providing the guidance students need through the academic cycle. Students are accountable for taking reasonable steps to inform themselves, to seek advice where they need it, and to follow the advice they are given, as appropriate.

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Several factors contribute to obstacles for students that are summed up in complaints of excessive bureaucracy and red tape. To some degree, they stem from the context of under-funding in which the University has operated for more than 15 years. The unfortunate consequence of this context is that administrative decisions have sometimes been made to save money, without sufficiently accounting for a negative impact on students and on other members of the McGill Community. The obstacles encountered by students are also due in part to unevenness in the service orientation of members of the University staff in their dealings with students. Finally, members of the Principal's Task Force recognize that these obstacles are exacerbated by the abundance and complexity of University regulation.

The University should continue to address issues of under-funding, as well as all elements of University administration that contribute to user-unfriendliness. Central to this undertaking is the realisation that service to students is an essential component of activities carried out in offices across the University and that all members of the University Community contribute to the creation of a learning community that welcomes students.

The University should work to enhance communications to students and to expand responsibility for communicating relevant information in a timely fashion, and should use electronic and other innovative supports, including the MyMcGill web portal, to target information to appropriate points in the cycle of the student's academic program.

Determining mechanisms and institutional standards appropriate for the implementation of the broad recommendations of the Principal's Task Force in different academic and administrative units across the University should include input from students and the individuals who work with them daily in these various contexts.

An important component of overcoming bureaucracy and red tape for McGill students is the idea of a single point of contact for students attempting to solve problems. In some cases, this will mean combining services and making them available in one physical location; in others, services can be effectively delivered to students by making the single point of contact virtual rather than actual. The underlying idea is to plan service delivery with coordination and collaboration uppermost, and to create conditions in which incentives for competition among different units are minimised. Members of the Principal's Task Force note that this notion of single point of contact reflects the position expressed by the Student Customer Services Committee in its 1993 report "Toward a Service-Oriented Culture and a User-Friendly Environment for Students". The position may be summed up by saying that the essential point is not combining services in a single physical location, but developing an attitude of service to students on the part of all members of the University community.

### **PART THREE: RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members of the Principal's Task Force propose four broad recommendations: in addition to the position of Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning), these are in the areas of academic advising and mentoring, resources for students, and the building of a learning community.

#### **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.

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- 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.
- 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.

**ADVISING AND MENTORING: DISCUSSION**

***Goals***

The University should ensure that students have easy access to the resources it offers in order for them to become better learners and better leaders. A system of consistent, high quality advising should facilitate this access: qualified, helpful, knowledgeable and accountable advisers are recommended for all undergraduates across the University. In addition, members of the academic staff of the University should be expected to contribute to the enhancement of student life and learning not only through their teaching and research, but also by acting as mentors for students.

Over the course of their academic career at McGill, students require access to a range of resources. Too frequently, these resources, including people, time, money, space and knowledge, are difficult for students to access. High quality advising may not generate more resources; indeed, the provision of high quality advising across the University will require that additional resources be devoted to this purpose. Members of the Principal's Task Force nevertheless regard this investment as crucial. Since one goal of advising will be to support students in getting access to the resources they need, such an investment should help to ensure that all types of resources are more easily available to them, and used more effectively by them.

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### ***Standards and Accountability***

Departmental student-to-adviser ratios reported to the Principal's Task Force in submissions and consultations indicate that they currently range from 600 to 1100 students per Adviser. Lower ratios would provide continuity, and allow Advisers the time to establish a real connection with individual students throughout the course of their academic careers at McGill. The standard of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), that an Adviser be responsible to guide no more than 400 students, should be considered for implementation at McGill.

While Task Force members believe that there is, in many cases, a great deal of merit in the appointment of full-time Academic Advisers who are not members of the tenured or tenure-stream academic staff of the University, they also support the idea that academic staff who wish to take on the role of Academic Adviser on a part-time basis should be encouraged to do so. Academic staff should be provided the time and training to do the job appropriately, and should be held accountable to the same standards, as Advisers who are not academic staff.

The existence of records creates the basis for reciprocal accountability between Advisers and students. Each Adviser should keep a record of discussions and advice provided to students in accordance with protocols and standards set for the University. Students should be expected to take responsibility for the advice that is given to them, while Advisers should be accountable for the course of action they suggest.

### ***Advising, Mentoring and Counselling***

While Advisers cannot be all things to all students, members of the Principal's Task Force envisage professional Advisers playing a crucial role in facilitating undergraduate student life and learning as 'point persons', assisting students in gaining access to resources and supports beyond academic advising that they may need while they are at McGill.

The Task Force expects that the continuing relationship between Adviser and student will, in many cases, tend to make the Adviser a student's first stop in seeking assistance. All Advisers should be aware of other services offered to support students, including health services and counselling, and career counselling, and should refer students to them as appropriate. Advisers would thus be uniquely placed to assist in overcoming problems of bureaucracy and red tape encountered by students at McGill.

Through their teaching and research, members of the academic staff of the University are uniquely positioned to contribute to the enhancement of student life and learning, both in the classroom or laboratory and through mentorship roles. Members of the academic staff will be expected to take on mentoring roles with students, usually, but not exclusively, focused on shared academic interests. The University can enhance the experience of students by supporting opportunities for mentorship to develop, and by communicating successful initiatives to other academic units.

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***Students and Academic Advisers: Reciprocal Responsibilities***

Standards of accountability should be predicated on the expectation that, from the very start of their time at McGill, students will take reasonable steps to inform themselves about the requirements and options of their academic program.

Some individuals may acquire the skills and understanding necessary to function as Academic Advisers at the undergraduate level without an undergraduate degree. However, members of the Principal's Task Force strongly believe that a Bachelor's degree is a very significant factor in enabling Academic Advisers to fully understand student concerns, and to provide them with the guidance they need.

Advisers should be provided opportunities to meet with counterparts in other academic units on a regular basis, to share information about resources and best practices. In addition, they should become aware of services and resources available beyond those offered in their unit, so as to assist students in overcoming problems of bureaucracy and red tape.

Deans and departmental chairs should encourage Academic Advisers to participate in all aspects of Faculty life where their expertise and experience with students can add value. These will include, but not be limited to, sitting on Curriculum Committees and taking a role in student information sessions.

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## **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 of the White Paper Call to Action on 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.
- 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.

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**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.

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.

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- 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.

**FUNDING AND SPACE FOR STUDENTS: DISCUSSION**

One of the points made in a number of submissions to the Principal's Task Force was the need to review the availability of space for use for students both for academic purposes and activities, and for other purposes.

In order to best achieve the goals in the White Paper Call to Action of ensuring that graduate students have the support they need to complete their programs in a timely fashion, the University must take steps to provide all graduate students with adequate and safe laboratory and office space on campus. If graduate students do not have appropriate space available on campus, they will tend to work elsewhere. This may result in a lesser degree of integration into the community, and may also have a negative impact on completion rates and time to completion.

Informal meeting space available for students' use should be distributed across the campus, including some quiet space, and space within easy access of snacks and beverages.

Members of the Associate Provost's round table on financial support raised a number of issues around the provision of financial support that warrant further attention. These include service to students; coordination across offices; the long and complicated process for receiving funds; lack of relevant information; lack of resources for both direct aid to students and for personnel and systems to bring the aid more effectively to them.

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**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.

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- 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 where appropriate.

**BUILDING A LEARNING COMMUNITY: DISCUSSION**

The achievement of the learning community McGill aspires to be requires an institutional commitment, as well as a commitment from members, to creating an inclusive and welcoming community, one that supports the development of strong collegial bonds and mutual respect and accountability among its members: students, professors, academic and administrative staff members, alumni and friends. This learning community is one that is welcoming and easy to manoeuvre, where bureaucracy and red tape are minimised. It is one that celebrates diversity and is welcoming to its students.

Building a learning community entails unique challenges for McGill, challenges that arise out of the rich diversity of its student body. This diversity extends to different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, different sexual orientations and gender expressions, and students with disabilities. In addition, the University also welcomes French- as well as English-speaking students from Montreal, Quebec, Canada and abroad, and is split between campuses located in downtown Montreal and the Macdonald campus on the West Island. Without an institutional commitment to creating an inclusive and welcoming community, the tendency may be toward fragmentation, as different groups and individuals essentially go their own ways. Opportunities to make the benefits of diversity an integral part of students' learning experience are then lost.

Submissions from students, as well as information gleaned during consultations, point to the need to enhance the experience of a substantial number of students who choose McGill because of the Quebec or French-language promise, but who discover a 'walled city', and don't break through to the broader community. To this end, the Principal's Task Force has made recommendations aiming to enhance access to second-language courses for interested students and staff members and exposure to other Quebec institutions, as well as exploring mechanisms for creating points of contact between members of different communities.

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**PART FOUR, CONCLUSION: THE MCGILL EXPERIENCE**

Years spent at a university transform each one of us, and are often among the most memorable of a lifetime. Students discover passions on which careers are built. They develop friendships and social networks, and acquire skills and knowledge that shape their lives and futures. University years are a time of intellectual and personal discovery and growth.

The role of a great university is not limited to providing the very best education in the classroom. A great university also offers a range of experiences and environments in and out of the classroom that enable students to reach their full potential, by taking full advantage of their time at the university.

McGill has more to offer students than a world-class academic experience based on classroom teaching. Students need opportunities to participate in research discoveries and to explore ideas, the world and other cultures through academic and other experiences. High quality academic and career counseling services, support and student services, McGill's location in a dynamic and multicultural city, its unique international character, its research activities and focus on excellence, its public character and commitment to enhancing accessibility for qualified students are among the many distinctive characteristics which can further enhance the McGill experience.

The Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at McGill was established to respond a range of issues related to student life and learning outside the classroom. The recommendations of the Task Force are designed to have an impact across the University, and across many aspects of student life; they aim to enrich and enhance the experience that our students have while at McGill. One of the goals of the Task Force is to signal to the entire McGill community the need for a change of institutional culture that is essential if the University is to achieve its aspiration to student-centred as well as research-intensive. It recommends that issues which have not been specifically dealt with in this report be addressed in the spirit of the student-centred approach expressed here.

There is a great deal of experience and expertise on how to enhance student life, and among members of the University community, that could not be made directly available to the Task Force. This experience and expertise should inform the University administrative response, as well as the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force in different academic and administrative units, and particular programs and processes. This experience and expertise should contribute to the development of mechanisms that are feasible and effective to meet the legitimate expectation of McGill students that they will be treated with respect, and as fully-fledged members of a welcoming learning community that celebrates academic excellence, service to the community and the benefits of diversity in its membership. In this regard, each member of the community has a contribution to make, beginning with examining interactions and operations in which he or she is involved, to identify ways in which University culture and attitudes can be improved.

The Task Force encourages an institutional culture that includes a strong commitment to accountability on the part of all members of the McGill community. Specific measures to encourage individual initiative and greater accountability are expected in University's administrative response to the Final Report of the Task Force.

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The work of the Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning, and its report, will be completed by the end of 2006. The University Administration has undertaken to prepare a response that will be delivered in two stages: a preliminary response will be submitted to the community in the winter term of 2007, with a final, more detailed response delivered early in the fall term of 2007.

The final administrative response will address, among other things, processes and timelines for implementation of the recommendations of the Principal's Task Force, the costs of implementation, and mechanisms for evaluating the University's progress in implementing these recommendations. In preparing this response, there will be consultation, as necessary and appropriate, with students, Deans, and members of the University staff. The recommendations of each of the individual working groups that made up the Task Force will be conveyed to the relevant University administrators, so that they may be considered in developing administrative responses to the recommendations contained in this report.

The goal is clear: to provide students with the support and opportunities they need to achieve their full potential while at McGill and to ensure that all members of the community share in this goal. McGill is only as great as what it can offer to students, to society and to the advancement of knowledge; and in that respect, the life and learning that each of our students experiences while with the University is a measure of its success.