

Working Group on New Models of Academic Program Delivery

Final Report and Recommendations¹

Submitted to the Provost and Executive Vice-President (Academic)

Executive Summary

The higher education sector is ever-evolving but recent disruptions (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic) and emerging trends in teaching and learning presented a particular opportunity to assess the future of academic program design and delivery at McGill. To this end, the Working Group on New Models of Academic Program Delivery (the “Working Group”) was established in 2021 to provide recommendations to the Provost and Executive Vice-President (Academic) for the future of academic program design and delivery at the University. The Working Group consulted widely, assessed the status of the University’s teaching and learning contexts, and evaluated opportunities for academic program development. The community provided critical insights that helped guide the Working Group’s recommendations to ensure that program-level decisions respect local Faculty contexts, and that particular attention is paid to concerns about wellbeing and workloads. The Working Group’s thirteen recommendations fall into three thematic areas: online teaching and support, program development and innovation, and long-term goals (including support of non-traditional students and experiential learning programs).

1) Online teaching and support: University-wide definitions of teaching modalities are necessary (e.g., online, blended, hybrid), as are clear approval pathways for the modification of courses to incorporate online delivery for some scheduled hours. It is recommended that such approvals, to be managed at a Unit/Faculty level, are necessary when 15% or more of scheduled activities occur online. Instructors can alter modes of delivery without a need for approvals below this threshold (notwithstanding situations in which learning objectives cannot be achieved online, or perhaps for accreditation requirements). Faculty guidelines are needed to establish local approval pathways, with careful attention to viewing modes of course delivery through a programmatic lens. The Working Group recommends that the University develop a committee to better codify a system for defining credits and contact hours. Teaching and Learning Services may also need to adapt and support instructors in new or different ways if an expanded repertoire of teaching modalities is adopted. There may also be a need to better support educational technologies, which includes both software and hardware needs in classrooms.

2) Program development and innovation: Clear University-wide definitions are needed for different program types and related activities (e.g., blended program, online program, micro-credentials). More efficient, clear, and supported approaches to new program development are also necessary, which in turn will support increased innovation. Regarding capacity in the summer, new program types and some non-credit offerings could be expanded and will require a working group to create a vision and strategy. The Summer also presents an opportunity to rethink the default framing of new non-Thesis Masters

¹ Several minor corrections were made to the final report in April 2024, but substantively the report is unchanged from the version submitted to the Provost and Executive Vice-President (Academic) in July 2023

programs, as well as existing ones, and to ensure that these are planned for 12-month completion times whenever possible.

3) *Long-term goals:* In the long term, the University can better support credentialed academic activities for non-traditional students, and work to provide a stronger University-wide framework for experiential learning. Such experiences are important regardless of students' programs, and in turn help define the future McGill Experience. Finally, academic planning can build on the Working Group's efforts, notably as we embark on exciting third-century projects.

Mandate and Scope of Work

In response to a mandate from the Provost and Executive Vice-President (Academic), the Working Group on New Models of Academic Program Delivery was created in Fall 2021 to recommend “a strategy and direction for the evolution of academic program delivery at McGill that would serve as a basis for growth and change over the next decade or more.” Chaired by the Associate Provost, Teaching and Academic Programs (now Teaching and Academic Planning) and composed of ten academic and administrative staff members and two students, the Working Group was tasked with considering “broad pedagogical trends and evolving best practices with respect to... student assessment strategies, remote and blended learning, applied and experiential learning opportunities, and opportunities for multi-disciplinary and collaborative program delivery,” as well as “alternatives to the conventional academic calendar, opportunities for maximizing University resources, including human and infrastructural, opportunities for revenue generation, and the impact on and opportunities for students, teaching staff, and administrative staff.” The full mandate and terms of reference for the Working Group together with the full list of members is included here in Appendix A.

While the remit of the Working Group was broad, it is important to note parallel concerns and initiatives that ultimately fell outside this mandate (some of which began or evolved after the Working Group was constituted) namely:

- **Academic Accommodations for Students** – the Dean of Students has initiated a separate Working Group to develop a revised strategy around accommodations, driven in part by experiences with the pandemic.
- **Accessibility** – an Accessibility Strategy Working Group has been created under the Associate Provost (Equity and Academic Policies), with support from the Equity team.
- **Assessment** – a new [Policy on Assessment of Student Learning](#) was approved in spring 2022, to take effect Fall 2024. The current University Student Assessment Policy remains in effect until then.
- **New Models of Work** – under the joint stewardship of the Vice-President (Administration and Finance) and the Provost and Executive Vice-President (Academic), the [New Models of Work Project](#), which included a pilot phase and ongoing work related to, among other things, exploring best practices for hybrid work arrangements.

In pursuing its objectives, the Working Group was animated by the following guiding principles:

- **Scholarly excellence** – ensuring ongoing excellence in academic program design and delivery that promotes innovation and evidence-informed pedagogical approaches, while respecting academic freedom and the support and dissemination of ground-breaking research.
- **Student success** – maintaining a focus on student success that balances academic achievement (measured through effective, inclusive assessment strategies) with professional/career preparedness and wellness.
- **Sustainability** – promoting institutional agility that ensures ongoing, responsive change and improvement supported by clear institutional governance and policies; promoting financial stability, expansion and the effective use of resources.

- **Accessibility** – ensuring that educational and scholarly activities embody principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion, as well as promoting access to and active participation in education programs.
- **Engagement** – committing to broad participation of the University community in planning and implementation; ensuring continued collaboration with local and global university communities to meet society’s rapidly evolving needs.
- **Informed by best practices** – the work must be guided, wherever possible, by best practices, data, and relevant literature.

The Working Group originally organized its efforts around three principal themes: 1) trends in teaching and learning; 2) rethinking the academic calendar; and 3) innovation in academic programs. Over the course of a year of focused activity, and in consequence to input and feedback from University community members, this focus was further refined to 1) effective use of virtual platforms, blended and online course design and delivery, use of educational technologies and other tools, and innovation in pedagogical strategies to enhance teaching and the learning experience; 2) optimization of space, expertise, student time, and credit and non-credit offerings during the summer; and 3) opportunities in the longer term for enhanced experiential learning that is integral to degree programs and pursuit of new programs (both in terms of format and field of instruction) to speak to learner needs and expectation and address potential new learner populations.

Engagement with the University Community

In addition to the core members of the Working Group, about twenty² academic colleagues were identified by Deans from across the University to serve as Faculty Liaisons. Participation of the Liaisons was essential in helping to ensure that all Faculties were represented and that the Working Group consulted effectively with each. A list of Faculty Liaisons is included as Appendix B.

Alongside regular, biweekly meetings of the Working Group itself, Working Group members hosted two rounds of extended consultation and feedback sessions with a wide range of University stakeholders, including faculty members, academic support staff, graduate and undergraduate student leaders, and student advisors. The Working Group also sought input from Senate and other strategic university supporters. A list of consultation and feedback sessions is presented in Appendix C.

A dedicated website (mcgill.ca/newmad) published the Working Group’s mandate and membership, upcoming opportunities for engagement, updates on work to date, and a bibliography of relevant literature and resources to which the community was invited to, and did, contribute. This bibliography is included here as Appendix D. The site also solicited direct input from community members via an email account (newmad@mcgill.ca).

The Working Group’s first round of consultations consisted of sessions held during the Winter and Summer 2022 terms. Consultations were held with members of individual Faculties (usually led by, or jointly led with, Faculty Liaisons) and programs, as well as in sessions that included representation from across the University. For example, the Working Group met directly with Deans and other members of the Senior Administration, and the McGill Association of University Teachers (MAUT), and hosted

² This is approximate only since membership changed during the Working Group’s mandate, due to, for example, individuals taking sabbatical, or new faculty members joining as liaisons.

sessions of the Academic Leadership Forum (ALF) for Chairs and Directors, and Faculty Matters – a series of gatherings open to all faculty.

A second round of consultation sessions was held during the Fall 2022 term and into the Winter 2023 term, which included additional central units such as the leadership team in Enrolment Services, Student Services (all Directors and other members of their leadership), the McGill Office of Sustainability, the Enrolment and Student Affairs Advisory Committee, and Teaching and Learning Services, among others. Draft recommendations were presented to Senior Administration, including Deans, and culminated in a presentation and feedback session at Senate in January 2023. Copies of the documentation that was presented to Senate can be found in Appendix E. Definitions of teaching modalities and related notification and approval pathways, and program types, were presented (for approval) to McGill's Subcommittee on Courses and Teaching Programs (SCTP), the Academic Policy Committee (APC), and Senate in April of 2023, and approved for a one-year period.

Throughout this process, the Faculty Liaisons gathered additional insight and feedback from their colleagues and students at the Faculty level through surveys, meetings, town halls, and presentations at Faculty Councils.

The consultation of such a varied range of stakeholders produced an equally varied range of feedback with responses that were sometimes specific to particular contexts and stakeholder groups. Understandably, such feedback could be at times contrasting; however, several shared interests and broad areas of concern emerged. They can be summarized as follows:

- **Clarity on terminology and approval pathways:** Clear standards and procedures are needed for online and blended modes of delivery, not only to allow some flexibility for instructors to design and deliver courses using relevant and effective online tools, but also to ensure alignment with student accommodations, alternative methods of assessment, and the development of new programs/courses or modification of existing ones;
- **Classroom needs:** Educational technologies must continue to be supported, and the technology available in some classrooms requires attention, upgrades, and resources;
- **Recognition of Faculty contexts:** Programs and courses should be designed and taught based on the specific disciplines and expertise that resides within each Faculty, each Faculty's specific student needs, recognized best practices in teaching and learning, and requirements set by accrediting organizations; however, flexibility needs to be maintained to allow instructors to decide how best to fulfill these needs and requirements based on their own experience and expertise;
- **Efficiency and support in program approvals:** The design, implementation, administration, promotion, etc. of new programs, courses, and modes of delivery must be supported with adequate resources and must be efficient and transparent.
- **Wellbeing and workloads:** The wellbeing of the University community and attention to workloads must be core considerations of any future planning. Doing anything more must be balanced with doing less somewhere else, or other reallocations of efforts.

Wellbeing and workloads

The first four of the abovementioned themes are addressed substantively in the recommendations of the Working Group, below. The fifth was duly taken on board and informed the immediate and long-

term recommendations of the Working Group. For instructors, the sudden transition to remote teaching in 2020 and 2021 demanded an array of adjustments to the content, mode of delivery, and assessment structure of their courses. For some, this was a relatively positive experience, and these colleagues have expressed an interest in continuing to employ some of the content generated and the tools adopted for remote delivery of their courses. For other instructors, the remote context was intensely problematic, and they have explicitly stated the need to return to the classroom and go back to the way they taught courses before the pandemic. These diverse views were related both to the instructors' own experiences and to their perceptions of students' experiences during the remote semesters. Instructors generally agreed that the adjustments and changes required for remote delivery during the pandemic had an impact on their workload and wellbeing. The Working Group sensed a widespread and understandable hesitancy from instructors regarding potential changes to course delivery, but at the same time, there was an interest in continuing to use some online tools for teaching.

It was likewise clear to the Working Group that students at all levels are increasingly concerned with issues related to workload and wellbeing. The demands for academic advising and student services are growing alongside a rising awareness of the importance of wellbeing and its connection to student academic workloads. In some instances, this awareness results in increased demands for specific arrangements and accommodations that are in line with individual student needs and preferences. In others, the relevance of issues related to wellbeing and workload translates to requests for more flexibility and the interest among some students in making their own choices when it comes to modes of delivery, types of assessments, etc. As a concrete example, some students have expressed interests in learning on their own time, online, instead of having to attend lectures in person.

Faculty contexts

Some commentary about recognizing Faculty contexts is necessary. A key issue to consider when it comes to developing new programming and new models of academic program delivery relates to the many differences (as well as similarities) that can be found across the University. The diversity both across and within Faculties is remarkable and constitutes one of the main strengths of academic programming offered at McGill. Consequently, it is paramount to ensure that Faculties maintain local control over decisions to adopt and tailor the proposals for change that the Working Group is recommending, which are intentionally broad and non-restrictive.

Most of the recommendations that the Working Group puts forth have the explicit goal of facilitating change and innovation from within Faculties. This goal aligns with the need for local autonomy, as well as with the concerns about workloads and wellbeing mentioned above. The Working Group sees a potential for some central views on specific items (e.g., definitions that are required University-wide), but the overall objective is to facilitate and harness many of the great initiatives and innovations that are already taking place in programs across McGill, as well as to encourage cooperation and the exchange of ideas across Faculties. In short, Faculty autonomy should not be synonymous with isolation. There is potential for developing common frameworks and for collaborating to find and refine common goals that are applicable across the University. Exploring these opportunities requires the University to encourage interaction across Faculties and to create and promote frameworks that allow for people from different Faculties to come together.

In the Working Group's consultations, it became clear that local decision-making is important for several reasons. First, the diversity of experiences in dealing with remote teaching and the heterogeneity in the

preferences expressed by instructors revealed that there are many decisions and frameworks that need to be tailored to the needs of specific Faculties, and in some cases, of the specific programs within them. Second, there were several instances in which the importance of Faculty decision-making was explicitly stated by community members during consultations. Therefore, the proper and constructive implementation of any recommendations put forth by the Working Group requires buy-in from individual Faculties. And for many Faculties, this buy-in depends on an explicit recognition of the importance of Faculty autonomy and decision-making power.

In sum, the processes of innovation that we encourage and that our recommendations seek to facilitate rely on ideas and initiatives emerging from front-line teaching staff from different areas across the University. The role of the University is to encourage and harness these innovations by removing barriers for change and setting up the frameworks that support these initiatives and promote learning across Faculties and programs.

Recommendations of the Working Group

The Working Group's thirteen recommendations, categorized in three thematic areas, are presented in a Tabular fashion below. Recommendations that include an Asterisk (*) are considered high priority and are to be implemented within one year or sooner. Recommendations with (†) have a responsibility via University governance structures (others are under the authority of the Provost and Executive Vice-President (Academic))

Thematic Area	Recommendation	Responsible Party and Timeline
1. Online teaching and support	1-1*†: Definitions, to be adopted and implemented University-wide, are proposed for the following terms related to modes of delivery: asynchronous, blended learning, distance learning, hybrid learning, in-person learning, online learning, remote delivery, synchronous	Subcommittee on Courses and Teaching Programs (SCTP), which reports to the Academic Policy Committee (APC), for final approval at University Senate. Timelines: Before end of Winter 2023 Academic Term. This was completed prior to Summer 2023 and Definitions were approved for a one-year period.
	1-2†: Creation of a working group mandated with establishing a clear operational definition of "contact hours" to ensure shared understanding and common language for discussion of contact hours across disciplines and programs.	Academic Policy Committee (APC). Timeline: establish working group in the 2023-2024, estimated 1.5 year mandate.
	1-3*†: Faculties establish guidelines and approval process for developing blended courses in which between approximately 15% and 50% of the scheduled activities occur online.	(1) Faculties to establish and publicize internal guidelines, ideally before the start of the Fall 2023 term (2) APC's Subcommittee on Courses and Teaching Programs (SCTP) to be notified when (i) any course's mode

Thematic Area	Recommendation	Responsible Party and Timeline
		of delivery is modified to become blended; (ii) any course’s mode of delivery is modified to become hybrid. Timeline: notification pathway established before the start of the Fall 2023 term. These pathways of approval and notification were approved as part of the APC report to Senate in April 2023, and communications were sent to Faculties in the summer of 2023 as a reminder.
	1-4: Teaching and Learning Services focuses on developing or realigning framework for instructors who are considering blended or online teaching, including resources and guides for decision-making with respect to the use of synchronous or asynchronous approaches for their teaching.	Associate Provost (Teaching and Academic Planning) and the Director of Teaching and Learning Services. Timeline: Fall 2023 and beyond
	1-5: The University assesses what specific additional support and resources may be needed at the University—notably for technological infrastructure, both software and hardware—to support a range of blended learning modalities.	Teaching and Learning Services, in coordination with ITS, and in consultation with Faculties/instructors. Timeline: Fall 2023 and ongoing
2. Program development and innovation	2-1*†: Definitions, to be adopted and implemented University-wide, are proposed for the following terms related to program types: blended program, modular degree, online program, program (academic program), short program, stackable degree, micro-credential, workshop, experiential learning	Subcommittee on Courses and Teaching Programs (SCTP), which reports to the Academic Policy Committee (APC), for final approval at University Senate. Timelines: Before end of Winter 2023 Academic Term. This was completed as part of the APC report to Senate in April 2023 and Faculties were reminded of this via communications sent during the summer of 2023.
	2-2* The University implements a framework to help ensure consistency in new program development at McGill.	Associate Provost (Teaching and Academic Planning): timeline, before the start of the 2023-2024 Academic year
	2-3* Processes for new program development are revised and updated to increase efficiency	Associate Provost (Teaching and Academic Planning): timeline, before the start of the 2023-2024 Academic year

Thematic Area	Recommendation	Responsible Party and Timeline
	2-4* Non-Thesis Masters Programs should be designed as 12-month programs by default. Consider modifying existing Non-Thesis Masters programs in this manner, as appropriate and feasible	Dean of Graduate and Post-doctoral Studies and Associate Provost (Teaching and Academic Planning): timeline:Fall 2023
	2-5: A Working Group is established to support a cohesive vision and strategy for summer-offerings	Enrolment Services. Timeline: establish Working Group in the Fall 2023, with estimated 1-2 year mandate
3. Long-term goals	3-1: A working group evaluates the University's capacity to develop and sustain credentialed academic activities for non-traditional students	Office of the Provost and Executive Vice-President (Academic); Timelines TBD
	3-2: A working group establishes the scope and scale of opportunities to integrate experiential learning meaningfully into academic programs across the University	Office of the Provost and Executive Vice-President (Academic); Timelines TBD
	3-3: An integrated strategy is developed for the use, renewal, and further development of our physical campuses such that we are able to optimize space to support academic activities	Office of the Provost and Executive Vice-President (Academic); Timelines TBD

Thematic Area 1: Effective use of online platforms and “classroom time” and support

The pandemic was the catalyst for considering our needs related to educational technologies (hardware and software) and involved the campus community in discussions about the “how” and “why” of engaging students and promoting more effective and meaningful teaching and learning. As we return to more fully campus-based operations, including mostly in-person teaching, we have a unique opportunity to capitalize on the new skills and approaches that many instructors and students developed and have come to value. What online or other technologically-enhanced tools do we retain and continue to support? To what extent should these tools be used to support required course components?

As we move forward, it is recommended that the University undertake a thoughtful and measured approach to creating a framework for teaching and learning at McGill that creates space to incorporate the best elements of online delivery into our campus-based teaching and ensures clarity and consistency with respect to nomenclature, expectations for (and limits on) use, and pathways for approval. The recommendations presented here pertain specifically to required course components. Optional activities such as tutorials³ or other non-graded work, additional readings, and recommended activities (such as public lectures) are excluded from any University-level intervention or expectation with respect to the mode of delivery.

³ In this context, Tutorials are meant to be distinguished from Conferences, which are generally or often required academic activities.

Teaching Modalities (1-1)

The **following definitions are proposed for adoption and implementation University-wide**. Respecting established channels for academic governance, they will be presented separately for review to the Subcommittee on Courses and Teaching Programs (SCTP), which reports to the Academic Policy Committee (APC) for approval, and thereafter to Senate via the report from APC. This is a high priority recommendation under the authority of University governance committees; it is necessary to implement this immediately given the need to offer instructors and Faculties some flexibility in approaching teaching with different modalities.

This was completed in spring of 2023, at the April meeting of Senate, and these definitions were given a one-year approval. The following Teaching and Learning Knowledge Base contains the final wording:

<https://deptkb.mcgill.ca/display/TLK/McGill+Definitions+of+Modalities+of+Teaching>

- **Asynchronous**: teaching and learning materials/activities prepared in advance that students can access at a time of their choosing, which in some cases, may be within a designated time frame.
- **Blended learning** (or blended course): teaching and learning activities made up of a combination of online and in-person course activities, both of which are necessary for students to achieve the learning outcomes of the course; it results in a reduction in the number of in-person hours scheduled for a course.
- **Distance learning** (or distance education): refers to students learning at a distance from their instructor, which assumes students are physically located off campus. This is often used interchangeably with online learning but may also apply to other situations.
- **Hybrid learning** (or hyflex): teaching activities in which some students are physically present and others attend online at the same time, with all students having the same learning opportunities to participate and engage with the learning activities.
- **In-person learning** (or in-person course): the default modality of course delivery, in which students are expected to physically attend the course activities in person to achieve the learning outcomes.
- **Online learning** (or online course): teaching and learning activities that have been designed so that all learning outcomes can be achieved using online tools; therefore, a student's physical presence on campus is not necessary to achieve the learning outcomes.
- **Remote delivery** (or remote instruction): a situational need to deliver a course online that would normally be delivered in person (as was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic), sometimes requiring the implementation of additional technologies on an *ad-hoc* basis.
- **Synchronous**: refers to scheduled teaching activities that involve active or live teaching and learning, whether online or in person.

Contact hours (1-2)

Any change to a course or program's mode of delivery necessarily raises the important question of the definition and purpose of "contact hours" and "credit value." **The Working Group recommends that the Academic Policy Committee (APC) oversee the creation of a dedicated working group mandated with establishing a clear operational definition of "contact hours" to ensure shared understanding and common language for discussion of contact hours across disciplines and programs. Both synchronous**

and asynchronous contact hours will need to be defined. This Working Group will need to consider the implications of any such definitions for program accreditation or other external requirements, which will need to be identified across Faculties. It will take some time to establish this Working Group and formalize its terms of reference and mandate; therefore it is recommended it be constituted during the 2023-2024 Academic Year. This recommendation falls under the authority of University governance structures.

Individual courses at McGill (and indeed in most post-secondary institutions in North America) are given credit weights. In Quebec, approximately 45 hours of student work is required per credit. Although the Ministry does not require a set number of synchronous in-person hours, the convention at McGill has been that a course has 13 “contact hours” per credit, which is operationalized for a three-credit course as 39 hours of scheduled class time. However, the concept of a contact hour is evolving. Technology has created affordances that enable technology-mediated experiences to be as valuable, and sometimes more valuable, than a traditional in-class experience with students and the instructor in the same physical space at the same time. This is especially true for large classes in which opportunities for individual and small-group interaction may be enhanced through online delivery.

To reflect this evolution, presented below are operational examples of contact hours*, which can be used to assess whether courses are respecting the concepts that underlie the University’s definition of a credit.

*Adapted from Office of Curriculum and Instruction, USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences (2022)

	Contact Hour	Non-Contact Hour
Synchronous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • live class meeting • instructor-guided study group • instructor-guided group feedback session • online or in-person labs, tutorials, small group activities • in class or scheduled midterms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • office hours • study groups (no instructor) • independent student group work
Asynchronous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pre-recorded video lecture (prepared by instructor or guest speaker) • audio podcast (prepared by instructor or guest speaker) • moderated video viewing • instructor-mediated discussion if whole class is involved (via online discussion forum or other interactive tools) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discussion forum not mediated by instructor • readings, assignments, self-assessments, quizzes or final exams • videos or podcasts not prepared by the instructor or a guest speaker • student blogs

Implementation and oversight of program delivery and contact hours (1-3)

Any reduction of synchronous, classroom-based activities should be implemented to enhance the pedagogical structure and learning outcomes of a course. Replacement of in-class activities with online or independent activities should never be considered for reasons of convenience or mere preference.

Where an instructor wishes to offer some portion of the synchronous components of a course online, or where they propose to replace some previously synchronous class time with self-directed learning, approval should be sought per the recommendations below. It is noted that this is a high priority recommendation to be implemented immediately (before Fall 2023) to ensure Faculties have the necessary flexibility to adapt courses based on the University definitions. This recommendation falls under the authority of University governance structures.

The following approval and notification pathways are proposed for Approval at the University, via the Academic Policy Committee's Subcommittee on Courses and Teaching Programs (SCTP). This was completed in the spring of 2023, culminating in Senate in April. The notification and approval pathways were approved for a one-year period. Specific wording is available on the Teaching and Learning Knowledge Base: <https://deptkb.mcgill.ca/display/TLK/McGill+Definitions+of+Modalities+of+Teaching>

- Blended learning where more than 15% but less than 50% of scheduled activities are online is to be implemented only with Faculty approval.
- It is recommended that each Faculty establish their own guidelines and approval process for developing blended learning in courses and such approvals be considered as implemented at a Programmatic or Unit/Faculty level.
- It is recommended that the Academic Policy Committee's Subcommittee on Courses and Teaching Programs (SCTP) be notified when (1) any course whose modality of delivery is modified to be blended in this way; or (2) a course is to be modified to be hybrid.

Notes:

- If necessary, Faculties may establish stricter guidelines than what is presented due to accreditation or for reasons related to learning outcomes or competencies that are not possible to complete online.
- Barring stricter guidelines, anything below the 15% threshold is therefore at the discretion of the instructor. For a standard three-credit Lecture based course at McGill, this means about six scheduled hours (i.e., two weeks in a course with three lecture hours per week) could be done online.
- If more than 50% of a course is designed online, or if a course is to be developed as hybrid, this is considered a complete re-design of a course, with relevant approvals and oversight at the program or Unit/Faculty level, followed by notification to SCTP.

A note on flexibility and accommodations: some instructors use a version of hybrid delivery that was adopted by the University during the pandemic, called *online synchronous participation*. One common arrangement involves "Zooming in students" if they are unable to attend a course activity in person. It is beyond the scope of this Working Group to specifically address such *ad hoc* accommodations, but it should be noted that the quality of the experience among the learners participating virtually compared to those attending in person is not likely to be as engaging and would thus be considered lower quality. For this reason, the practice should not be encouraged. Many lecture halls are designed with lecture recording systems, and as is the current practice, it is recommended that instructors continue to record

materials whenever possible, since making materials available to students who are unable to attend is a best practice, and students often review recorded lectures as part of their studying.

Support for the development and sustainment of blended learning (1-4, 1-5)

Teaching and Learning Services (TLS) reports to the Associate Provost (Teaching and Academic Planning). TLS is the key central University office with the responsibility to support instructors in the development of pedagogical competencies, including support in the design, development, implementation, and ongoing maintenance of all courses, regardless of the mode of delivery. In this regard it will be important that staff in TLS continue to provide individualized support to instructors. Given the need for local consideration of how blended/online courses may be developed, TLS may need to expand support to Faculties (and Departments/Units) as they develop local guidelines around blended and online courses. **It is recommended that Teaching and Learning Services focus on developing or realigning frameworks for instructors who are considering blended or online teaching, including resources and guides for decision-making with respect to the use of synchronous or asynchronous activities.**

The University may not have the full suite of general digital infrastructure in place, and Faculties may require specialized and general educational software to implement more blended or online teaching. Resources may need to be earmarked to avoid the digital equivalent of deferred maintenance. Instructors will need access to high quality audiovisual equipment to ensure the desired level of quality of both asynchronous and synchronous activities. **It is recommended that the University assess what specific additional support and resources may be needed—notably for technological infrastructure, both software and hardware—to support a range of blended learning modalities.**

Thematic Area 2: Program types, development and offerings

The design and delivery of academic programs is core to any university. However, what we define as an academic program is evolving. The location and structure of programs of study are changing rapidly, as is the status of credentials. For instance, two decades ago, the idea of micro-credentials or “badging” was not a part of our thinking; nor did we imagine that a program might include courses offered both online and in person. Our students’ demographics are also changing. While “adult learners” were once only associated with continuing education units, they are now becoming integral to the student profiles of many universities. As a result, Faculties are rethinking their approach to teaching and learning, which includes considering new ways of scheduling programs by challenging the 9-to-5 norm, as well as different modes of delivery. Offering programs to the community or executives offsite is also becoming more commonplace. These shifts allow us to increase the diversity of our student base while also creating new avenues of revenue generation. Looking ahead, McGill will need to develop a strategy for where and how it wants to be present in this developing landscape.

As with modes of delivery, there is an opportunity to agree on common language and expectations with respect to a full range of for-credit and non-credit programs. A working lexicon is proposed as follows. **It is recommended that such terminology be reviewed and approved (with any modifications deemed necessary) through established governance processes**, that is, by the Subcommittee on Courses and Teaching Programs (SCTP), the Academic Policy Committee, and finally by Senate. Ideally such

definitions would be approved before the end of the Winter 2023 academic term, so that they can be in place for the 2023–2024 Academic Year. Therefore, this is both a high priority recommendation and it falls under University governance structures. This was completed in the Spring of 2023, culminating with a one-year approval in Senate in April. Final wording is available on the Teaching and Learning Knowledge Base: <https://deptkb.mcgill.ca/display/TLK/McGill+Definitions+of+Modalities+of+Teaching>

Program Definitions (2-1)

For-credit programs

- **Blended program:** An academic program that offers a combination of University-approved online or in-person, or blended courses necessary for students to achieve the learning outcomes of the program.
- **Modular degree:** A non-thesis (i.e., course-based or project-based) graduate degree consisting of at least 45 credits, generally completed over a one-year period and divided into three modules: a first module designed to deepen disciplinary knowledge; a second module designed to complement the student’s disciplinary knowledge through a set of University courses to broaden their skill set in complementary areas—for instance, a coherent package of courses from another discipline; and a third module that emphasizes experiential learning or similar opportunities to apply acquired knowledge and skills.
- **Online program:** An academic program that has been expressly designed for online delivery through the intentional implementation of instructional activities and selected technologies that support the achievement of program learning outcomes. In this program, all University-approved courses and course activities are completed online.
- **Program (or Academic program):** A University-approved, structured selection of official courses within an area of study or a discipline.
- **Short program:** A unit of achievement smaller than a degree that is credited, credentialled, and transcribed, such as a graduate certificate. A short program may also be condensed or delivered over a short period of time.
- **Stackable degree:** A degree formed by “stacking” (i.e., combining) short-program credentials that are in themselves recognized as units of achievement (e.g., certificates). A stackable degree is flexible in terms of completion time, and the student is granted a credential for each recognized unit of achievement before obtaining the full stackable degree.

Non-credit activities

- **Micro-credential:** A short unit of validated learning focused on the acquisition of industry-relevant competencies. The successful completion of a micro-credential is generally recognized and recorded through alternative digital credentials (ADCs), often called “digital badges.”
- **Workshop:** An activity that focuses on the acquisition of specific competencies that are often technical in nature. Workshops are not subject to central approval, do not carry university credit or Continuing Education Units, and do not appear on official university transcripts.

Other definitions

- **Experiential Learning:** The general application of academic content to applied situations, be it within the classroom, the community, or the workplace, followed by deliberate reflection on

this application. Experiential learning advances and complements program- or course-based learning outcomes and sometimes focuses on employability skills.

Program development: a proposed framework (2-2)

The design, development, and delivery of new programs is a complex process that requires substantial energy and resources, and therefore must be done carefully and intentionally in order to ensure buy-in from all relevant stakeholders. Historically, the University has tended to develop new programs based on the interests of teaching faculty and/or their home Faculty or Department. In a few cases, the decision to develop a new program has been informed by market research, or the opportunities presented by the new program have been of strategic importance to the University or to the Faculty involved. However, in many other cases, new programs have been developed in a somewhat unstructured manner, sometimes leading to the creation of programs that are difficult to sustain over time. The reality is that new programs need to be revenue positive—or at least revenue neutral.

With that in mind, **the Working Group recommends the implementation of a framework to help ensure consistency in new program development at McGill.** Given recent key trends in higher education as well as our experiences during the pandemic, we believe that the time is right to develop this framework. This framework will be led out of the Provost's Office, under the responsibility of the Associate Provost (Teaching and Academic Planning). This is a high priority item that requires work immediately in the Fall 2023 academic term to ensure our processes are clear and consistent for all stakeholders.

Below, we outline key factors to consider at the outset of the new program creation process. These factors can form the basis of an evaluative approach to new program development, and idea originators can perform a self-assessment of these factors before advancing to the new program creation process.

The key factors to consider in the creation of any new program—which apply mainly to for-credit activities, but may also be transferable to the development of non-credit activities—are divided into two categories: “Critical” and “Other.” “Critical” factors are those that must be considered to develop a new program. “Other” factors are relevant to only some contexts. While the number of factors listed below may appear daunting, a simplified checklist will be developed to guide idea originators through the process.

Critical factors in new program development

Market Demand and Student Value: When thinking of developing a new program, there must be evidence (market research, surveys, or other qualitative and quantitative data) that shows that there is demand for this new program as well as value for its potential students. It is also important to provide an outlook that indicates how competitive McGill would be compared to other institutions offering similar programs, particularly in Quebec. Programs may lose relevance over time, or perhaps no longer serve their original intention, and in such cases, major program revisions may be necessary. Additionally, program revisions may be necessary after the academic review of a program.

Strategic Importance and Institutional Fit: Any new program (credit or non-credit) must be of strategic importance to the Unit/Department/Faculty and align with the University's mission, vision, values, policies, and strategic priorities.

Delivery Modality: The costs of program development and delivery vary based on whether the program is offered fully in person, fully online, or in a blended or hybrid format. Program modality is therefore considered foundational to new program development and must be an early consideration rather than an afterthought.

Budget and Revenues: As an idea for a new program begins to take shape, it is necessary to have early conversations about revenues and expenses. The following factors need to be considered: the cost of development and delivery (which will vary depending on teaching modality and program type, among other factors); the cost of maintaining and performing quality control of online programming (online development should be viewed as a long-term process, generally requiring a minimum of 3–5 years as well as revisions every 3 years); whether grants or external funds are involved; whether the content is reusable, adaptable, or scalable; whether the content supports the creation of more than one program, or delivery in shorter formats (such as short programs or micro-credentials); and the cost to the student (which relates to a sound understanding of market demand and student value as discussed above). If the program is intended for credit, early conversations about tuition fees and program regulation need to take place with the Office of the Associate Provost (Teaching and Academic Planning) in collaboration with Analysis, Planning and Budget (APB).

Faculty Engagement: Faculty engagement in the development of the new program is paramount. For Interdisciplinary programs, inter-Faculty or inter-Unit new program development is more challenging to coordinate, and it is therefore important to establish clear communication and engagement from the early stages of development. It is also important to have fruitful consultation processes and stakeholder engagement sessions, and to establish agreements between the Faculties involved, which outline the division of resources and academic support such as admissions and advising.

Other factors in new program development

Flexibility and Originality: Both students and instructors have indicated that programs should offer some degree of flexibility. Many students who learned remotely during the pandemic are now seeking flexibility in the offerings they select. Many instructors are also eager to teach in non-traditional ways and to use new and different online tools and approaches. Additionally, there may be novel ways to collaborate across universities and international borders, and to develop agreements with different countries and sectors. The co-development of courses and programs (e.g., with community organizations, industry partners, or other sectors) may also be relevant.

Experiential Components: Students are showing increasing interest in learning beyond the classroom, and therefore experiential components may be considered during the development of new programs. Some considerations may include: opportunities for new experiences or skill-gap development; internships or collaborations with industry or the public sector; student exchanges or opportunities to study abroad; and opportunities for a local “stay at home” exchange. Students could also be given opportunities to acquire or apply other durable skills (e.g., communication, time management, critical thinking, or character-related skills such as growth mindset, resilience, etc.) through self-directed learning or learning opportunities outside normal course work.

Interdisciplinarity: Programs may have both disciplinary depth and breadth, but many new programs are also crossing boundaries; inter-Faculty collaborations are often fruitful ground for new programs. Whenever new programs are considered, we encourage a careful assessment of which other Units/Faculties could collaborate and how.

Program Retirements and Revisions: Given the limited resources and limited capacity to increase in-person enrolment at the University, new programs should bring new opportunities and not place a greater demand on resources. Units that are considering creating new in-person programs, for example, would normally consider ways to also retire some existing programs or to make complementary program changes to ensure that programs do not cannibalize each other, regardless of whether the programs are in the same department or cross between different Departments/Units/Faculties. In short, new program development may also mean careful consideration of program retirements or revisions.

Institutional support for academic innovation (2-3)

Exciting and innovate academic programs will in turn support curriculum and teaching development and further fulfill the objectives of the McGill University Strategic Academic Plan, which outlines commitments “to supporting pedagogical and curricular innovation.” In turn, this encourages “a culture of calculated risk-taking, with a commitment to ensuring agility, efficiency, creativity, and organizational learning across all our functions by eliminating barriers to change and through institutional support of the pursuit of new challenges.”

However, the Working Group has heard from the McGill community that new program development processes are excessively bureaucratized, difficult to navigate, and, as a result, discourage innovation. While this is in part due to the strict approval pathways that are required, there is room to make processes more efficient. In addition to the establishment and publication of a framework to help ensure consistency in new program development, **the Working Group recommends that the Office of the Associate Provost (Teaching and Academic Planning) revise and update the processes around new program development (and major program revisions)** to ensure the efficiency, clarity, and transparency of processes, as well as smoother communication workflows. APTAP should work with other stakeholders when reviewing these processes, including but not limited to Analysis, Planning, and Budget (APB), Enrolment Services, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS), and other Faculties. Attention to sustainability of new programs is important and will involve careful analyses of resources, appropriate academic reviews (i.e., through the Office of Academic Reviews), and (when necessary) also retiring some select programs that are no longer thriving. This high priority item requires attention during the 2023-2024 Academic Year.

The development of ideas for new, innovative programs also requires support. Such support might include direct resources (e.g., teaching release, funding, increased access to collaborators or support staff) for developing new courses/programs and revamping existing courses/programs, but also incentives for faculty to invest time in pedagogical development and curriculum/program development, and ensuring such work is valued as part of promotion. Teaching and Learning Services has a strong commitment to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and in partnership with Faculties, can ensure ongoing teaching development support across our campuses.

Non-thesis Masters programs (2-4)

The University has in place numerous Non-Thesis Masters Programs, most of which are designed to take 15 months or more. In these programs, students typically complete coursework for their degree during the Fall and Winter terms of the first year, and their internship, placement, or research project in the Fall term of the second year. However, it is becoming more common at McGill, as well as at other universities, to design Non-Thesis Masters programs that are intended to be completed over a 12-month period, which has the following advantages:

- Greater access for some students, since the program can be completed in one year
- Increased efficiency of University space if the Summer term is included in program design
- For some faculty, additional time to supervise or oversee research projects in the summer months when the pace of other activities may be reduced

After consultation and discussion among stakeholders, the Working Group recognized that there is value to considering that new Non-Thesis Masters programs should be designed to be completed over a 12-month period as the default timeline. This does not mean that all such programs must be designed in this format, but rather that the 12-month timeframe should be a starting point. It is also recognized that potentially overburdening staff, faculty, and/or students during the Summer term would not be ideal, so flexibility will be necessary. For example, 12-month programs should provide flexibility for students who need extra time to complete program requirements. **It is hereby recommended that Non-Thesis Masters Programs be designed as 12-month programs by default, and that the University also consider modifying existing Non-Thesis Masters programs to fit this timeline, as appropriate and feasible.** This work can be undertaken jointly by the Office of the Associate Provost (Teaching and Academic Planning) and the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. Communication with Faculties about this process will be important. This is a high priority item to be implemented during the Fall 2023 term.

Summer programming (2-5)

The Working Group heard from stakeholders that there is currently limited interest at the University in significantly altering its two-semester system. The bulk of McGill's academic programs will therefore remain largely bound within the September to May timeframe. The consultations (and the Working Group's own assessment) did reveal an opportunity for McGill to increase some of its summer offerings, provided attention is paid to the following concerns:

- Many faculty members use the summer for research activities and would therefore be unavailable for additional teaching; or the general timing and sequencing of teaching and research activities would need to be altered if there was more teaching in the summer.
- Vacation time is taken during the summer months, which means fewer staff and instructors would be available to support increased summer programming.

- Student support services (e.g., advising) and Teaching Assistantships may be lacking in the summer, and staff that are connected to teaching activities (e.g., technicians in laboratories) would be impacted.
- The current system for ancillary fees for students is based on Fall and Winter semesters and would require adjustment if a summer term was further developed.
- Summer (notably in May/June) is already a very hectic time for the community as the lead-up to graduation is extremely busy.
- While some students may be interested in learning in the summer, the interest will be highly varied since many in the community depend on employment (or other opportunities such as internships). In short, student availability and interest may be limited.

Taken together, the concerns are significant and suggest that any additional offerings in the summer require careful discussion with the community, as well as attention to planning and the distribution of work and effort. There must also be a clear and robust financial and resource model behind any summer offerings so as not to add “extra” work for anyone, but instead distribute work across the full calendar year.

Nevertheless, there remains significant potential for considering new and different kinds of offerings in the summer, which build on what already exists. In a typical summer term, McGill offers around 300 credit-bearing lecture-style courses amounting to roughly 12,000–15,000 course registrations. Other summer activities include field courses (off-campus fieldwork courses, practica, etc.), undergraduate and graduate seminars, labs, research project courses, studios, and other offerings. Non-credit activities are also offered in the summer and there may be an opportunity to increase these offerings as well.

With a view to assessing McGill’s capacity to further expand summer offerings, as well as the trade-offs they would require, **it is recommended that Enrolment Services lead a Working Group to support a cohesive vision and strategy for summer-offerings**, with the following aims:

1. Consideration of opportunities for increasing summer offering of undergraduate credit-bearing activities. The Working Group will produce an analysis on Inter-University Transfers (IUT) courses taken at McGill by students from other universities in the summer term, as well as the IUT courses that McGill students are taking at other universities in the summer term; assess opportunities for increasing McGill students taking such courses at McGill and attracting more IUT students to McGill; and explore opportunities for facilitating enrolment in courses where there is high demand during the fall and winter terms.
2. Development of a framework for summer non-credit offerings, including: “bridge programs” or academic pathway programs to prepare or upskill newly admitted students (e.g., language proficiency; study, critical thinking, and writing skills); summer camp style offerings akin to McGill Summer Academy; and outreach programs—especially for underrepresented learners—that increase university preparedness by facilitating an on-campus university experience in the summer.
3. Development of new micro-credential programs (e.g., [Summer Short Programs](#) currently offered by SCS) and intensive specialized complementary offerings (e.g., summer abroad opportunities such as the [Barbados Interdisciplinary Tropical Studies](#) program).
4. Consideration of resourcing and resource implications of these proposed programs and frameworks.

Thematic area 3: Looking Ahead

This first collection of recommendations from the Working Group on New Models of Academic Program Delivery has focused primarily on ensuring a stable foundation on which to support emergent trends in teaching and learning and academic program design and delivery. A common language and set of expectations with respect to modes of delivery and program types will be essential to the sustainability and further development of academic activities at McGill, particularly when we incorporate new tools and new modes of engagement. However, there is much more to innovation in teaching and learning than a choice between in-person or online engagement, or the adoption of in-class technologies; and agreed-upon structures for academic programs and other activities ensure consistency in form. With those frameworks in place, there will be further opportunities for considering course and program content.

Building on the frameworks and definitions recommended above and on an ongoing “bottom-up” approach to change and innovation, and keeping in mind the concerns expressed with respect to workloads and wellbeing, **we recommend an evolution of the Working Group on New Models of Academic Program Delivery, which should specifically consider two broad themes: 1) the University’s capacity to develop and sustain credentialed academic activities for non-traditional students, with a view to exploring a centralized, principled support structure that facilitates the design of content within the Faculties; and 2) the scope and scale of opportunities for integrating experiential learning meaningfully into academic programs across the University.**

1) Capacity for developing academic activities for non-traditional students: this concern emerges from a recognition that, in light of changes in students’ profiles and needs in a general sense, there are opportunities to rethink how we design our programs. While the School of Continuing Studies is clearly central to this, there are other Faculties considering other approaches to program design and delivery that may, for example, allow students in Indigenous communities to learn from their communities, or allow McGill to “pop up” in other communities for specific kinds of programming for learners unable to travel to Montreal to study. Furthermore, online programs can be developed for new populations of international or domestic students, many of whom are interested in an experience that is decidedly different from the “9-to-5, Monday-to-Friday” framework. Flexibility and adaptation in the delivery of credentialed activities may be further developed and considered across the entire University.

2) Scope, scale and opportunities for experiential learning: this topic was referenced in many consultation and feedback sessions and in many different contexts. Overall, there is a recognition that experiential learning can be available for all students, regardless of their program, and integrated into their McGill experience. Experiential learning means different things to different people; however, it is clear that developing a University-wide approach is necessary, as both an evolution of the McGill Commitment, but also to increase coordination within the suite of experiential learning that occurs locally in different Faculties (e.g., internships, design courses). There may also be ways to explore how

we can grow and develop such learning opportunities with local and national/international partners so that all students can benefit from relevant experiential learning opportunities.

Finally, as we step into the second quarter of the twenty-first century, and embark on McGill's own third century of excellence, the Working Group **recommends that the Office of the Provost and Executive Vice-President (Academic) ensure an integrated strategy for the use, renewal, and further development of our physical campuses such that we are able to optimize space to support academic activities.** There are significant infrastructure projects on the horizon, and careful academic planning related to these projects is necessary, and must build on best practices in teaching and learning, as well as what we have learned (and continue to learn) about new modes of course and program delivery. There may be efficiencies to gain, for example, in classroom design, scheduling, or the use of our campuses beyond traditional approaches. This is partially within the mandate of the Associate Provost (Teaching and Academic Planning) but will require a high degree of coordination and collaboration with many stakeholders.

While McGill has set a standard for excellence for centuries, it is important that we remain open to adaptation by continuously reflecting on what it can and should mean to pursue an education at McGill.