

Developing McGill's Capacity for Online and Technology-Enabled Course and Program Delivery

Working Group on Online Programs – Membership

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Terms of Reference

McGill University's Strategic Academic Plan, implemented in 2017, includes an explicit commitment "to accelerate the development and delivery of online degree programs and professional masters programs, with the goal of implementing five online programs in five years." This working group is tasked with recommending a strategy for achieving this goal and means to ensure that McGill develops a sustainable framework for a new online presence and the further incorporation of digital tools (where desirable) into existing programs. Such a recommendation should consider academic, pedagogical, organizational, technological and budgetary requirements as well as potential for new revenue generation and distribution.

The Working Group on Online Programs (WGOP) will consult broadly with all McGill Faculties as well as with representatives of graduate and undergraduate student groups. It is also encouraged to consult with colleagues at peer institutions that have developed a significant, successful online presence.

Academics

The mandate of the WGOP in the first instance is not to define or design the programs to be implemented online but to recommend an institutional infrastructure to support the successful delivery of such programs. The WGOP is asked to undertake the following with respect to the academic planning of future online programs:

- Consult broadly with Faculties to identify areas of potential development as well as interest and capacity among faculty members to participate in the development of online programming.

- Identify any online programs in development at the Faculty level; should any of these be used as pilots?
- Consider existing internal processes for the review and approval of new academic programs and the criteria through which the University illustrates the need for and value of any such new program to the University and to the province generally. Is our existing approvals process sufficient or would it require modification?
- Consider how participation in the delivery of online degree programs is recognized as part of an academic staff member's teaching obligations; consider how teaching effectiveness is assessed in this environment
- Consider admissions criteria and mechanisms for assessing qualifications of candidates. Are there any considerations separate from those identified for on-campus programs?
- Consider the potential for programs at the undergraduate level – e.g., fully online programs and/or qualifying years as a means of admitting a more diverse range of students to on-campus programs

Pedagogy

While the core academic content of online programs may still be developed similarly to that of traditional classroom-based programs, distinct teaching tools and methodologies have developed to maximize the utility of the digital environment and mitigate any loss of direct contact in the virtual teaching environment. We recognize that content experts may not necessarily have the training and expertise necessary to share teach effectively in such an environment. With respect to the development and implementation of an effective online pedagogy, the WGOP is asked to:

- Consider how best to develop depth of expertise in online or digitally mediated teaching and supervision across campus; how to blend disciplinary expertise and tradition with new modes of communication and knowledge transfer
- Identify existing resources (people and tools) across campus and also identify areas of weakness in this respect;
- Offer recommendations to build capacity within TLS, build stronger connections between TLS and the Faculties to facilitate course and program design, advising mechanisms and assessment tools;
- Review existing best practices with respect to student advising and evaluation in an online environment and make recommendations as appropriate to future McGill programming;
- Recommend new investment where necessary;

- Consider leveraging the investment in new tools and technologies to support online program delivery to augment on-campus program delivery.

Organizational Structure

Traditionally academic program design and delivery has been managed wholly by academic staff within academic Faculties. To maximize both human and financial investment in the development of an digital platform for online program delivery a different sort of hybrid organizational structure may be necessary. With this in mind, the WGOP is asked to address the following:

- Consider where and how management of online programming should be located. Does a central hub, separate from but coordinated with the Faculties, make sense? Where should such a hub fit in the reporting structures of the University?
- How might such an extra-Faculty unit relate administratively and organizationally to the core academic Faculties?
- Does the University currently have the technological and pedagogical expertise to develop and sustain online programs? Does this need dedicated leadership? A better concentration of existing talent? Recruitment of new staff with specific expertise?

Technological Requirements

McGill has not yet identified a viable platform to support the delivery of online programs. The WGOP is asked to review products available for purchase or contract use and weigh the benefits of an external platform against in-house development. Any recommendation to purchase or develop software should include a complete business plan.

Budgetary Considerations

With a view to maximizing existing resources, the WGOP is asked to provide a comprehensive review and estimation of costs associated with preparatory work, organizational changes, staffing needs, hardware requirements, software purchases, advertising plans, etc., as necessary to ensure the complete and effective implementation of new online programs. Budget recommendations should consider both implementation and ongoing maintenance costs.

Revenue Potential and Revenue Distribution

New online programs should attract new students in addition to those already enrolling in on-campus programs. The intention is to augment current enrolments, not to cannibalize existing, healthy programs by redirecting on-campus students to new online options. In this respect, the WGOP is asked to:

- Provide an assessment of the potential scale of new enrolments generated by new online offerings and an estimation of associated tuition revenues. Part of this assessment may

be a determination of whether a full-scale market assessment and cost-benefit analysis would require external consultation.

- Propose a mechanism for the effective and equitable distribution of revenues through an assessment of initial investments, ongoing stakeholder unit contributions (human and financial) and general operations costs, etc.

The WGOP will submit its final recommendations to the Provost and Vice Principal Academic by 1 June 2018; a preliminary report is expected 1 February 2018.