The Student Affairs Collective

Community Building Through Grassroots Professional Development Initiatives

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McGill University, Montreal (QC)
Presentation Outline

- What is the Student Affairs Collective?
- Our history
- Our initiatives
- Complementary knowledge
- How we did it
- What we’ve learned
Who We Are

The Student Affairs Collective is a volunteer group with a self-directed mission, comprised of core members from diverse faculties and units across McGill.

Our members include:

- Admissions Officer - Faculty of Law
- Student Financial Aid Counselor - Scholarships and Student Aid Office
- Advising Consultant - Office of the Dean of Students
- Internship & Field Studies Officer - Faculty of Science
- Faculty Advisor - Faculty of Arts
- Communications Officer - Office of the Deputy Provost (Student Life & Learning)/Office of the Dean of Students*
- Program Administrator - Human Resources (Organizational Development)*

* SAC alumni
Our Mission

Staff Empowering Staff

The mission of the Student Affairs Collective is to provide a supportive, inclusive and empowering forum for all administrative and academic staff who support students, to broaden institutional knowledge, to share best practices, and to offer opportunities for personal and professional development.
Our Context

- McGill University = Two campuses, 22 Faculties and Schools, over 40,000 students, over 7000 staff members
- Decentralized advising system, with both administrative and academic staff
- Student affairs and student services offices spread across the University
- Very little opportunity to spontaneously meet with others who do the same work
What was here

- Formal committees: Subcommittee on Student Affairs Policies, Subcommittee on Undergraduate Student Advising, etc.
- Informal groups: Academic Advisers' Network, etc.
- Tiered HR structure, with distinctions between faculty, managerial ("M") and clerical ("C") staff
  - HR Leadership Development Program: year-long training, not open to "C" staff
What was missing

- University-wide orientation and onboarding
- Opportunities for internal or external professional development or training
- Information downloading
- Regular updates on student affairs and services changes
- Human, technological and material resources
- Enthusiastic morale
- Peer engagement
SAC History

- Founding members met in the Leadership Development Program for Managers (run by central HR Organizational Development office)
- Interesting student affairs initiatives were taking place at the university, but no channels to effectively disseminate this information
- Lack of knowledge sharing was having a negative impact on the academic advising that was provided to McGill students
- Research taking place at the university that could be utilized for professional development opportunities
What we do

Advising Day
- Annual half-day conference with a theme or focus
- 45 minute presentations
- Special guests and speakers who are experts in their fields
- Taps into University resources and guests

Speed (Up)Dating
- 1.5 hour session, usually at lunch time
- ~ 15 presenters
- 3 minute presentations, with 1 slide on new or updated initiatives
- Fast-paced, fun, energetic event
- There’s a bell!
## Advising Day: Sample Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30 a.m. – 8:55 a.m.</td>
<td>Registration and Light Breakfast</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00 a.m. – 9:10 a.m.</td>
<td>Welcome and Introductions by Ruth Kuzaitis and Rosalia Felice</td>
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<td>9:15 a.m. – 9:25 a.m.</td>
<td>Introductory Remarks, presented by Dr. Suzanne Fortier, Principal and Vice-Chancellor</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:30 a.m. – 9:55 a.m.</td>
<td>Getting to Know Each Other, led by Dr. Ollivier Dyens, Deputy-Provost (Student Life and Learning), Dr. André Costopoulos, Dean of Students and Glenn Zabowski, Associate Dean of Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 a.m. – 10:55 a.m.</td>
<td>Compassion Fatigue, presented by Evelyn Rocinos, Psychologist</td>
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<td>11 a.m. – 11:20 a.m.</td>
<td>Networking and Coffee Break</td>
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<td>11:25 – 11:55 a.m.</td>
<td>Self-Care in Advising, presented by Dr. Lucyna M. Lach, Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts</td>
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<td>Noon – 12:35 p.m.</td>
<td>Leadership and Student Advising, presented by Dr. Robert E. Siggers, Instructor, School of Continuing Studies</td>
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<td>12:40 p.m. – 12:55 p.m.</td>
<td>Leadership Development Program, presented by Johanne Houle, Organizational Development, Human Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:55 p.m. – 1 p.m.</td>
<td>Closing Remarks by the Advisor Appreciation Day Planning Committee</td>
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Speed (Up)Dating: Sample Topics

- Integration of Counselling and Mental Health Services – Student Services
- Updates from #ConsentMcGill
- Undergraduate Skills Development Program – Teaching and Learning Services
- Interactive Campus Map – Campus and Space Planning
- Revised International Buddy Program – International Student Services
- Safer Space Certificate – Social Equity and Diversity Education Office
- Advising Syllabus – Academic Advisers Network
- Helping Students in Difficulty folder – Office of the Dean of Students
- Task Force on Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education – First Peoples’ House
- News from Service Point – Enrolment Services
- Mental Health First Aid – Counselling Services
- Updates from the McGill Writing Centre
Event Timeline

- **2012:** Founders meet in LDP training and discuss need for ongoing PD for advisors
- **June 2013:** Our first event! Theme: Student mental health and emerging adulthood
- **2014:** Group expands and formalizes Mission
- **June 2014:** 2nd Annual Advising Day - Theme: Advisor appreciation
- **Dec. 2014:** First Speed (Up)Dating event
- **June 2015:** 3rd Annual Advising Day(s) - TWO days of events!
- **Nov. 2015:** 2nd Speed (Up)Dating event
- **June 2016:** 4th Annual Advising Day - Theme: Communications
- **Oct. 2016:** 3rd Speed (Up)Dating event
- **Aug. 2017:** 5th Annual Advising Day - Theme: TBD!
Complementary Knowledge

- Information that isn’t strictly necessary to perform specific job tasks but is necessary to provide quality academic and personal support to students
  - Updates related to student-facing programming and policies
  - Tools to enhance student support initiatives
  - Inspiration for personal development
  - Best practices

- Vital knowledge that is not centrally documented on a website or in a training manual – but is communicated informally when connecting with colleagues
Complementary Knowledge

- Student affairs staff have many more similarities than differences in the work that they do (despite job titles)
- Some skills and knowledge are useful to almost all student-facing staff, regardless of their exact role
- Formal training and orientation do not encompass everything that new staff need to know to effectively support students
- No formal channel for disseminating this complementary knowledge to the SA community
Knowledge Management

- Synthesizing, sharing and managing the knowledge and information of an institution
- Involves ensuring that key pieces of knowledge in the workplace are utilized and survive staff turnover and organizational change
- Intentional knowledge management and information dissemination weren’t embedded within the student affairs community, so the SAC aimed to make it the culture of the campus as a whole
Knowledge Management

"As new advisors begin to transition into academic institutions, it is important for these new individuals to obtain the knowledge collected and stored by the current advisors within those institutions. Throughout the years, advisors and organizations have collected, processed, and stored information related to student records, academic policies, and other general areas. With new advisors entering the academic support arenas, it is necessary for these prior knowledge components to be shared and exchanged."

How we did it

- We just got started!
- Began by hosting events that were open to all
- Did things as volunteers, without formal backing from upper administration or a specific unit
- Made invitations as wide and inclusive as possible (“for all academic and administrative staff who support students”)
- Let interest and participation grow naturally
- Asked for regular feedback and event suggestions, made changes as needed
What we did

**Group organization:**
- Self-directed
- Common mission and goals
- Informal structure
- Shared roles
- No hierarchy

**Group norms:**
- Shared responsibility
- Flexible attendance and contributions
- All ideas are welcome, no matter how ambitious or outside-the-box
- No apologies!
What we did, cont.

Communications:
- Listservs
- University-wide newsletters
- Created a SAC website
- Collaborations with other groups/Units

Events:
- Food
- Door prizes
- Time to talk
- Strategic scheduling
- Make it useful
- Make it fun!
Event attendance

- 42% of our attendees have been to more than one event
- Beyond student affairs!
- Attendees from across the University: Faculty members, Finance, Athletics, University Advancement, TLS, Residence porters, etc.
Event Feedback

Post-event surveys:

- Who attended?
- What unit are they from/what’s their role?
- Were the sessions an effective use of time?
- Was the venue appropriate?
- Were the topics relevant?
- Was there time to network and connect with colleagues?

Survey results:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>What would you like our future events to feature? Please select all that apply.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information about programs at other universities/colleges</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and updates about McGill student services, resources and programs</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations on professional development topics</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops and skill-building sessions</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Panel discussions</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time to network and exchange ideas with colleagues</td>
<td>7</td>
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</table>
More Event Feedback

Post-event surveys:

- What types of programming or themes do attendees want?
- When do they prefer events to be scheduled?
- What format is the most effective (i.e. speakers vs. panel discussions vs. workshops)?
- Who should we partner with for events?

Suggestion form:

Topic Suggestion

I would like to see the following topic(s) presented:

I have a topic I would like to present:

Presenter Contact Information

Please fill out the information below if you would like to present at our fall Speed (Up)Dating event.

Name:

Email:
Speed (Up)Dating

2016 Survey Results:

- 100% agreed that the Speed (Up)Dating format was effective
- 96% said that it was a good investment of their time

Comments:

- “I loved the format and thought that it was an effective way of updating people on relevant projects while also building some staff community...”
- “Fantastic event! I loved the format and the fact that staff at all levels were given an opportunity to present their initiatives.
- “Very good format... it makes it efficient and easy to follow.”
Advising Day

2016 Survey Results:

- 81% thought that the event was a good investment of their time
- 85% said they would attend similar events in the future

Comments:

- “Both sessions were very informative; and all apply to what we do.”
- "It was a nice to be able to come away from the office for a few hours to network, brainstorm, and gather new ideas.”
- “I did enjoy the late afternoon; we go, we learn, we go home and ponder about what we learned.”
Benefits to the SA community

- Strengthening institutional knowledge
- Space to network and connect with colleagues
- Peer learning and sharing
- Engagement with others who do similar work
- Connections between administrative and academic staff
What we have learned...

- Use your own time
- Don’t be afraid to ask
- Get creative about budget
- Use internal resources
- Solicit and integrate feedback
- Connect with existing networks
- Don’t force it
- Make time for networking
- Serve food
- Just get started!
Future plans

We’re not going anywhere! The Student Affairs Collective is fulfilling a need and we intend to continue

- **Membership:** Pros/cons of membership growth
- **Additional workshops:** Expand to 2 Speed (Up)Dating events per year
- **Panel presentations:** Panel discussion format was a big hit at last year’s Advising Day
- **Mentorship possibilities:** Multiple mentorship programs already exist on campus, so we may not be needed here
Time for questions!
Thank you for joining us!

For more information:
- studentaffairs.collective@mcgill.ca
- www.mcgill.ca/savc