McGILL UNIVERSITY **SENATE**

Memorandum

Secretariat
845 Sherbrooke Street West, Room 313
Montreal, Quebec, H3A 0G4
Tel: 514-398-3948 | Fax: 514-398-4758

TO:	Senate
FROM:	Ms. Edyta Rogowska, Secretary-General
SUBJECT:	Open Discussion: Student Academic Experience
DATE:	February 24, 2021
DOCUMENT #:	D20-34
ACTION REQUIRED:	☒ INFORMATION ☐ APPROVAL/DECISION

ISSUE:	Proposed discussion questions in support of the open discussion are provided.
BACKGROUND & RATIONALE:	**Context**

Following a review of potential topics, the Senate Steering Committee selected to focus the February 24, 2021 Senate open discussion on the student academic experience.

COVID-19 has had a tremendous impact on student learning, the delivery of curriculum, and the administrative staff's day-to-day operations. A survey entitled Checking in on Your Fall Semester was conducted by the Academic Planning and Budget Office and Student Services in October 2020. The goal of the survey was to better understand how students were experiencing the Fall term and to ascertain how the McGill community, including Student Services, could better support student needs in this altered context. Select findings from this survey and highlights of some of the strategies and best practices that have been implemented by members of the McGill community (including faculty, administrative staff and students) are included in Appendix A.

The open discussion will provide an opportunity for Senators to reflect on how the academic student experience has been impacted by COVID-19. With that in mind, key questions have been developed to guide the open discussion.

Questions

The following questions are presented to Senate for discussion:

1. Reflecting on the student academic experience during COVID-19, what strategies have worked well to maintain a strong commitment to student academic success and what could be improved?

2. What steps should be taken to encourage a sense of shared responsibility within the University when it comes to promoting student academic success and well-being?

Discussion Format

In line with our standard practice, it is proposed that we allocate 45 minutes to this discussion, to be distributed as follows:

- Brief introduction by Ms. Martine Gauthier, Executive Director, Student Services (10 minutes)

- Senators will be divided into small groups and invited to discuss all of the questions (with a particular focus on one of the questions) noted above in virtual chat rooms. A discussion leader and rapporteur will need to be appointed. Please see Appendix B for more information. (20 minutes)

- After the small group discussion, the rapporteur of each group will be invited to report on the themes that arose during the small group discussion to the larger group, and, time permitting, Senators will be invited to share any final remarks. (15 minutes)

PRIOR CONSULTATION:	Members of the Open Discussion Working Group
	Senate Steering Committee
SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS	N/A
IMPACT OF DECISION AND NEXT STEPS	Follow-up action may result from the Open Discussion.
MOTION OR RESOLUTION FOR APPROVAL:	N/A
APPENDICES:	Appendix A: Interim Report of the Committee on Student Services
	Appendix B: Breakout session instructions

Open Discussion on Student Academic Experience

Supplemental Presentation

February 24, 2021

Lucyna Lach and Brooklyn Frizzle (Co-Chairs, *Committee on Student Services*)

Presented by Martine Gauthier (Executive Director, *Student Services*)

Overview

1. Select findings from 'Checking in on Your Fall Semester' Survey

2. Solutions and Engagement Strategies

3. Student Services During COVID

Checking in on Your Fall Semester Survey

Prepared by Lina Di Genova & Natalie Phillips-Elgar

Co-Leads of the Student Needs Assessment Working Group, Student Engagement Collective

Purpose

- "How the Fall semester is going so far?"
- Support the work of the Student Engagement Collective.
- Provide and adapt student supports during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Survey Details

- Launched October 6 to 18, 2020
- 28% response rate (or 9900 out of 36,500 students)
- Made use of quantitative and qualitative survey components.

Student Preparedness for Fall 2020 Semester

|	Preparedness in June/July 2020	Preparedness in Fall 2020
Academically	80%	79%
Emotionally	63%	55%.
Financially	80%	81%
Socially	51%	51%

Di Genova, L., & Phillips-Elgar, N. (2020, December 9). "*Checking in on your Fall Semester.*"

Academic Experience: Fall 2020 Workload

Compared to Fall 2019

70% of returning undergraduates and **29%** of graduate students are **spending more hours on each course**
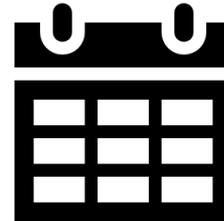
Di Genova, L., & Phillips-Elgar, N. (2020, December 9). "*Checking in on your Fall Semester.*"

Undergraduate Students

Challenges:

Difficulty focusing or paying attention to remote instruction	79%
Getting and staying motivated	78%
Balancing learning and personal responsibilities	65%
Time management	59%
Participating in group work	58%
Being in a different time zone (internationally-based students)	71%

Di Genova, L., & Phillips-Elgar, N. (2020, December 9). "*Checking in on your Fall Semester.*"

Undergraduate Students

Working well:

Flexible hours to complete coursework	77%
Pre-recorded class sessions	65%
Flexible assessment options	46%
Instructor/supervisor availability and responsiveness	31%

Di Genova, L., & Phillips-Elgar, N. (2020, December 9). "*Checking in on your Fall Semester.*"

Graduate Students

Challenges:

Difficulty focusing or paying attention to remote instruction	63%
Getting and staying motivated	61%
Balancing learning and personal responsibilities	50%
Time management	46%
Participating in group work	40%
Being in a different time zone (internationally-based students)	60%

Di Genova, L., & Phillips-Elgar, N. (2020, December 9). "*Checking in on your Fall Semester.*"

Graduate Students

Working well:

Flexible hours to complete coursework	60%
Pre-recorded class sessions	42%
Flexible assessment options	37%
Instructor/supervisor availability and responsiveness	30%

Di Genova, L., & Phillips-Elgar, N. (2020, December 9). "*Checking in on your Fall Semester.*"

Thematic Analysis:
How Can McGill Support Students?

Academics

Student Life Connections

Wellbeing

Documentation and Tuition Fees

McGill Student Experience: Common Themes Expressed by Students

- **Overworked** and **Overwhelmed**

- Questions about available supports from **and** for instructors

- Managing technology (*and **feeling zoomed out***)

- Needing tools, tips, but also **resources to stay on track** (*academically and holistically*)

- Finding time for **social connections and wellbeing**

- Questions about **cost and value of education**

McGill Student Experience: Student Concerns and University Response

- Overwhelmed by the "multiple smaller assessments" model
- Lack of cohesion with the expectations for online learning
- Little consistency in platforms and resources used by instructors
- Appreciated flexibility and understanding from instructors
- Increased tech support for students and instructors

- TLS Winter 2021 guidelines address workload and issues with "smaller assessments"
- TLS is providing one-on-one and group support to Faculties
- Remote Learning Assistants were allocated to Faculties to assist with technological difficulties

McGill Student Experience: Student Concerns and University Response

- Current tuition and fees no longer feel worth it
- Financial stress leaves little time for self-care and wellness
- Difficulty accessing information and resources available to students
- Need more occasions for social engagement
- Missing opportunities to enjoy arts and culture

- SSAO has allocated additional resources to support students
  - Working with ISS to mitigate financial concerns
- Programs like KeepMeSafe were introduced to address student mental health concerns
- Students Services continues to promote resources for students
- Workshops on sleep hygiene, study habits, managing stress, and suicide response

McGill Student Experience: Common Words Expressed by Students Related to Solutions

- "Flexible," "Easy," and "Coordinated"
- Reduce:
    - e.g., assignments/quizzes, bureaucracy, number of platforms
- Increase access to:
    - e.g., mental health, financial aid, libraries, gym, social engagement, in-person activities, opportunities for discussion

Student Services During COVID

Student Services has adapted services and programming to support students during this unprecedented semester:

- Remote services across all units and limited in-person services on an as-needed basis
- Reimagined programming offered remotely, as well as new programming to help build connections, including:
    - Art Hive @Home
    - Quarantine Support Group
    - Coffee with Career Advisors
    - First Friend Program, connecting students within the same time zone
    - First Year Support Group
    - Guide to Remote Learning
    - Pre-recorded on-demand workshops

- Connection opportunities during holiday periods, supporting students when University Operations were closed:
    - Mentoring Circles, connecting students with young alumni in their industry
    - Well-being appointments with a Local Wellness Advisor over winter break
    - Café CL&E: Virtual meetups tailored to specific communities

Open Discussion on Student Academic Experience

Appendix: Sample Comments from Students

- More cohesion with the expectations for online learning. We should not be doing 2+ hours on Zoom and then expected to spend many hours a week outside of lectures to meet with group members in different time zones for weekly assignments. On top of this having to write assignments. We are spending 3 times the amount of time on one class than last year.
- I also feel like because there is not any class, profs are giving a lot more work (in terms of small assessments) and it gets muddled quickly- there's no beat/rhythm to my academics this year.
- I think that my professors are honestly doing the best that they can. I also think McGill is doing the best that it can for now, given the circumstances. To an extent, whatever is done will never be able to replace human interaction.

Appendix: Sample Comments from Students

- Ensure teachers don't use too many different platforms (I have a teacher who uses 5 different platforms for only one course); make resources available for teachers who have difficulty navigating the MyCourses platform (if not already in effect)
- Too many technological malfunctions (e.g., lecture is recorded but never appears on MyCourses) or professor's computer crashes during lecture and we have to wait around for them to reappear
- Provide better access to the information about the resources available to help students during the pandemic (medical, mental health support, financial, etc.). These resources probably exist but it is hard to keep track of which resource is still available and how and this information gets lost in too many emails.

Appendix: Sample Comments from Students

- Lower tuition, it's ridiculous to pay the same price for online classes as in person, especially for classes which require in-person involvement to be truly beneficial
- I am also extremely concerned about my financial situation if I cannot arrive in Montreal to establish a bank account and receive my funding. I have been forced to live off a small savings, which may soon be depleted... For the first time in my life, signed up for the Keep Me Safe counseling appointment to cope with the stress of the pandemic and the program.. I am worried about taking away a single hour from studying/working to talk to a counselor because my coursework is so busy-work heavy.

Appendix: Sample Comments from Students

- More flexibility and personalized learning, more opportunities for engagement and social environments, more arts and culture groups and opportunities
- McGill could make off-campus academic and social opportunities related to clubs and groups more accessible to the student population. It is hard to keep up with the many announcements on Facebook or influx of informatory emails - McGill should have a separate hub with information about and guidance with getting more involved in the community.
- I think that McGill is mostly doing everything it can given the parameters and what can and cannot be transitioned to online/remote. I have noticed that there are fewer guest speaker conferences which I would really enjoy to stay engaged with both academically and socially.

Open Discussion on the Student Academic Experience
Breakout Session Instructions

Breakout rooms are sessions that are split off from the main Zoom meeting. They allow the participants to meet and discuss topics in smaller groups.

- Participants will be randomly divided into **ten groups** and moved automatically to breakout rooms.

- Breakout room participants have full audio, video, and screen sharing capabilities.

1. **ASSIGNMENT OF QUESTIONS BY BREAKOUT GROUPS**

   Each group is asked to focus on one of the **two questions** included on the memo above, as follows:

   o **Breakout Groups: Rooms 1 to 5** → **Question 1:**

     Reflecting on the student academic experience during COVID-19, what strategies have worked well to maintain a strong commitment to student academic success and what could be improved?

   o **Breakout Groups: Rooms 6 to 10** → **Question 2:**

     What steps should be taken to encourage a sense of shared responsibility within the University when it comes to promoting student academic success and well-being?

2. **INDICATION OF THE NUMBER OF YOUR BREAKOUT ROOM**

   If you are joining by videoconference, you will be able to view your room number once you are in your breakout session. The number of your breakout room will be indicated in the top left-hand corner of your screen.

   Members participating by phone will be automatically transferred to one of the ten virtual rooms. An operator will inform them of their room number, prior to transferring them to the breakout room.

3. **ASSIGNMENT OF DISCUSSION LEADERS AND RAPPORTEURS**

   For efficiency purposes, we recommend that you open the list of participants (by clicking on "Participants" in the meeting controls located close to the bottom of your screen) and assign the first participant on the list as the discussion leader and the second participant on the list as the rapporteur.

   In the event that either of these participants would prefer not to assume their role, please ask for a volunteer from amongst the other participants.

The **discussion leader** facilitates the discussion to ensure members have sufficient time to discuss the question and agree on the top points that will be presented by the rapporteur to the rest of Senate.

The **rapporteur** will take note of the ideas generated from the discussion and present a brief verbal report on the top points to the rest of Senate.

4. TIME, TOOLS AND ASSISTANCE

20 minutes are allocated for the small group discussions. If there is time remaining, groups may discuss the other question but will only report on their assigned question. Participants can use the Whiteboard feature on the conferencing application to collaborate and take notes. (The Whiteboard tool is located in the Share Screen icon on the meeting toolbar.) Please be sure to save your work to your device before leaving the breakout session.

For assistance, participants can click on "Ask for Help" in the meeting controls to submit a query to the host of the meeting (i.e. representative of the Secretariat).

5. END OF BREAKOUT SESSIONS AND RETURN TO MAIN SESSION

Participants will be notified when the breakout session ends and will be given the option to return to the main room immediately, or in 60 seconds, which is the time notice established by the Zoom application. Participants joining a breakout room by telephone **may press #** to join the main room immediately or wait to be automatically transferred back into the main room at the end of the 60 seconds.

When all participants return to the main room and the Senate meeting resumes, the Chair will call on the rapporteurs, one by one, to share the key themes that arose during their small group discussions. Rapporteurs should be precise and concise in the delivery of their verbal reports.