

Question

TO: Senate

QUESTION FROM: Senator Adrienne Tessier

RESPONSE FROM: Senator Christopher Manfredi, Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic)

SUBJECT: Question Regarding the Use of University Facilities by External Organizations and Individuals

MEETING DATE: November 20, 2019

PREAMBLE: On September 29th, 2019, Maxime Bernier spoke at Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ontario. While there, Bernier, two candidates from the People’s Party of Canada, and American political commentator Dave Rubin spoke of repealing the *Multiculturalism Act*, and reducing immigration to Canada.

Mohawk College has been criticized for renting space to the event. In response, a spokesperson [said to CBC](#) that, “the space that's being used is space that's rented to the public regularly and the party is a party that's part of the federal political dialogue right now. We're not endorsing anybody when we rent our space.”

McGill’s [Policy on Discrimination and Harassment Prohibited by Law](#) (“Policy”) defines “discrimination” as “any action, behaviour, or decision based on race, colour, sex (including gender identity), pregnancy, sexual orientation, civil status, age (except as provided by law), religion, political conviction, language, ethnic or national origin, social condition, a disability or the use of any means to palliate a disability which results in the exclusion or preference of an individual or group within the University community.” The policy applies to all members of the University community, and “includes both the actions of individual members of the University and systemic institutional practices and policies of the University.”

Arguably, as an action of a university staff member, renting space to a group that espouses anti-immigrant rhetoric, or other discriminatory views, is contrary to the policy.

QUESTION: Does McGill have a policy on the use of university facilities by external organizations or individuals, that espouse views that may violate the dignity of members of the university community?

If no such policy exists, does McGill have a procedure for screening external organizations or individuals who rent university facilities? What would the procedure be for creating such a policy?

RESPONSE:

No policy at the University addresses this specific issue.

Requests to book McGill venues by members of the McGill community or the community at large are made through the Events Bookings staff: <https://mcgill.ca/eventsbookings/apply>.

McGill is committed to upholding the rights of all to freedom of expression, as well as the academic freedom of members of its internal academic community. In general, decisions about permitting the use or rental of space are content neutral.

With respect to venue bookings by members of the McGill community, the University administration does not screen prospective speakers with a view to potentially barring them from being present or speaking on campus when they are speaking by invitation.

Applications from individuals or groups external to McGill with whom the events booking staff has no previous experience are referred to the Office of Provost to review whether hosting this individual or group poses a material or reputational risk to the University. The University administration will intervene to prevent an external individual or group from booking a McGill venue *only* where it is foreseeable that the event in question will occasion unlawful speech (e.g., hate speech, as defined by law) or pose a threat to physical security.

McGill's recognition of the rights of individuals and groups to express views that may be perceived by some as hurtful or offensive does not derogate from its overarching commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion on our campus.
