



Memorandum

Secretariat

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TO: Senate

FROM: Ms. Edyta Rogowska, Secretary-General

SUBJECT: Open Discussion on the Future of the Master's Degree

DATE: April 17, 2019

DOCUMENT #: D18-55

ACTION REQUIRED: INFORMATION APPROVAL/DECISION

ISSUE: Background documents and discussion questions in support of the open discussion are provided.

BACKGROUND & RATIONALE: Following a review of potential topics, the Senate Steering Committee selected to focus the April 17, 2019 Senate open discussion on the future of the Master's degree. A Working Group was struck to frame the open discussion.

CONTEXT

Historically, in Canada, the Master's program was mainly a preparatory program for doctoral study. In the US, as students were admitted into doctoral programs directly from an undergraduate degree, only professional Master's programs were offered, such as the MBA, with the research-based Master's being conferred to students who withdraw from doctoral programs. Enrolment in Master's programs has been strong in the past decade. This is true not only at McGill but across North America. More recently, the numbers of applications to professional and non-thesis programs are outstripping those for research-based thesis programs. (For a recent definition of Master's (research) and Master's (professional or non-thesis), please refer to Appendix A).

McGill currently offers 172 Master's programs of which 71 are non-thesis programs. In Fall 2018, there were almost 2700 students enrolled in non-thesis Master's programs. The proliferation in both Canada and the US of professional and course-based (non-thesis) Master's programs may be in response to employers who now require additional credentials, although it is unclear what workforce needs these programs might address.

This growth in interest in Master's programs both here and abroad represents an important opportunity for McGill. Master's programs typically fall between the basic education of students at the Bachelors level that forms the foundation of a discipline and an PhD that is focused on depth and research. As such, Masters programs might be the best opportunity to broaden the

horizons of students beyond the typical boundaries of their undergraduate discipline with the intent that they be “future ready” for a career that could follow many possible paths that are not simply defined by their undergraduate preparation. Masters programs appear to have the least constraints placed upon them and are quite open-ended in terms of what the students want to accomplish through their studies – thereby allowing flexibility for universities to personalize programs beyond the boundaries of those that are typically housed within individual Faculties. And, finally Masters programs might provide an interesting opportunity to develop niche programs that could attract a clientele that can be reached through distance learning. As such, there is an opportunity for McGill and its Faculties and units to distinguish themselves from other institutions and broaden our international reach through innovation in Masters programs.

QUESTIONS

In light of the above, the following questions are presented to Senate for discussion:

1. Keeping in mind the trend of increasing enrollment in non-thesis Master’s degrees and the flexibility that we have in offering such degrees, what goals might we envision for non-thesis programs to meet the educational needs of prospective students?
2. What opportunities do we have for innovation both in the learning outcomes of such programs and the manner in which they are delivered?
3. What should the University do to facilitate the creation and delivery of innovative Master’s programs?

After the discussion, Senators will be asked to complete the following sentence:

“I wish we had a Master’s program that ...”

Multiple suggestions from individual Senators are welcome. The feedback will be collected by the Secretariat after the meeting and can be emailed to the Senate Governance Officer at georgia.ntentis@mcgill.ca.

PRIOR CONSULTATION:	Senate Steering Committee; Senate Open Discussion Working Group
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: Definition of Master's (research) and Master's (professional or non-thesis) by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education

Appendix B: Additional Information (for Reference)

Open Discussion – The Future of the Master’s Degree
Definition of Master’s (research) and Master’s (professional or non-thesis)

In the context of the work being done with respect to the deregulation of tuition in Quebec for international students enrolled in non-research 2nd cycle programs, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education retained the following definitions for research Master’s and other Master’s programs:

Criteria	Research Master’s	Other Master’s
1. Program characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University program leading to a 2nd cycle degree • Focused on research • 45 credit weight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University programs leading to a 2nd cycle degree • Focused on courses and professional practice • A minimum of 45 credits • May include a mandatory internship
2. Program objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop competencies in analysis, research practice, research interpretation and communication; provide knowledge of research methods allowing transition to doctoral studies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training of individuals for professional practice • May lead in some cases to doctoral studies
3. Written work associated with the program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research project must demonstrate the student’s capacity in producing scientific knowledge, to integrate the research community • Culminates in a dissertation, dissertation in research-creation or research-production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written work/review article • Essay • Project report • Internship report • Report of technical intervention
4. Number of credits associated with the written work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 18 credits are dedicated to the thesis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 credits or less
5. Evaluation of written work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluated by the arms-length experts • Evaluation process standardized across the institution • The details of the evaluation process are part of the institutional rules and regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared under essay-supervision by a professor, with examination at departmental level • Project report – evaluated by supervisor

Open Discussion – The Future of the Master’s Degree

Additional Information (for Reference)

- **Reports from the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS)**
 - Master's Completion Project: <https://cgsnet.org/node/333>
 - Outcomes for PSM Alumni 2012/13: https://cgsnet.org/ckfinder/userfiles/files/PSM_Outcomes_Report_2013.pdf
 - Discipline-specific Masters: <https://cgsnet.org/professional-masters-degree>
 - Recent enrolment data:
 - “Healthy Growth in Master’s Enrollment Continues at U.S. Graduate Schools (September 28, 2017): <https://cgsnet.org/healthy-growth-master%E2%80%99s-enrollment-continues-us-graduate-schools>
 - “Data Sources: Four out of Five: A Closer Look into Master’s Degrees: <https://cgsnet.org/data-sources-four-out-five-closer-look-master%E2%80%99s-degrees>
 - “Master’s Admissions: Transparency, Guidance, and Training”: https://cgsnet.org/publication-pdf/5396/CGS_Masters_Web_Final.pdf

- **Status of the Masters in Quebec (ADESAQ)**
 - Competency grids in higher education
 - « Pour une maîtrise mieux circonscrite dans le temps », Le Devoir, November 15, 2014: <https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/education/423655/association-des-doyens-des-etudes-superieures-au-quebec-pour-une-maitrise-mieux-circonscrite-dans-le-temps>
 - « Les compétences visées dans les formations aux cycles supérieurs. » May 2015. https://ssa.uqam.ca/fichier/document/Programmes/Rapport_Comite_de_travail_comp-etences-FINALE.pdf
 - Report on the status of the Masters:
 - « Rapport déposé par le comité ADÉSAQ sur la nature, la structure et les activités associées à la maîtrise au Québec » : http://adesaq.ca/wp-content/uploads/Rapport2_ADESAQ_ma%C3%AEtrise.pdf

- **Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS)**
 - “A Profile of Master’s Degree Education in Canada” (December 2006): https://cags.ca/documents/publications/best_practices/CAGS-Master.pdf