



# Memorandum

**Office of the Provost & VP(Academic)**

James Administration Building, Room 504

Tel: 514-398-4177 | Fax: 514-398-4768

**TO:** Senate

**FROM:** Professor Angela Campbell (Associate Provost, Equity & Academic Policies)

**SUBJECT:** Report of the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on COVID Academic Planning and Policies

**DATE:** October 20, 2021

**DOCUMENT #:** D21-11

**ACTION REQUIRED:**  INFORMATION  APPROVAL/DECISION

**ISSUE** The first monthly report of Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on COVID Academic Planning and Policies (“Committee”) is presented to Senate for information.

**BACKGROUND & RATIONALE** At its regular September meeting this year (22 September), Senate approved a motion to establish the Committee. Its terms of reference and membership were approved at a special meeting of Senate held on 4 October, on the recommendation of the Senate Nominating Committee.

The Committee’s mandate stipulates the following:

*The Advisory Committee shall meet weekly throughout AY2021/22 and shall report to Senate throughout AY2021/22 through a standing agenda item for information.*

This report includes the minutes of the two meetings the Committee has held to-date.

**PRIOR** N/A

**CONSULTATION**

**SUSTAINABILITY** N/A

**CONSIDERATIONS**

**IMPACT OF DECISION AND NEXT STEPS**

- Ideas and feedback generated within the Senate discussion will be taken back to the Committee for review and development of recommendations.
- Continued reporting to Senate each month.

**MOTION OR** N/A

**RESOLUTION**

**FOR APPROVAL**

**APPENDICES** Appendix A: Committee Meeting Minutes 8 October 2021

Appendix B: Committee Meeting Minutes 15 October 2021



**Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on COVID Academic Planning and Policies  
MINUTES**

Meeting of October 8, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. TEAMS Conferencing Application

Present: Chris Buddle (Co-Chair)  
Angela Campbell (Co-Chair)  
Jennifer Chen  
Nancy Czemmel  
Claire Downie  
Rebecca Fuhrer  
Gillian Nycum  
Petra Rohrbach  
Daniel Weinstock  
Laura Winer

This was the inaugural meeting of the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on COVID Academic Planning and Policies (Committee).

Following introductions, the Co-Chairs invited preliminary questions tied to the Committee's Terms of Reference. The following questions were addressed:

- 1) *The Committee's mandate indicates that it will "liaise with and advise the University's senior administration" – who would be the "senior administration" concerned?*  
Further to some discussion, it was determined that "senior administration" would mean different actors depending on the matter in question. This could include, for example, the Principal, Provost, or Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) notably in the latter's role as Lead of the EOC.
- 2) *The terms of reference do not set a meeting quorum; what should that be?*  
Further to some discussion, it was determined that two-thirds attendance (i.e., six members) would constitute quorum. It was also decided that in the event that either student member could not attend the meeting, a delegate could attend in their place.
- 3) *To what extent is the Committee's work confidential?*  
The Committee had a substantial discussion on the importance of transparency. None of the Committee's members felt that the Committee's business should be treated as confidential unless the Committee otherwise determined this would be necessary in regard to a particular question. Hence, members of the Committee are able to share with stakeholders information about the Committee's discussions and recommendations.
- 4) *To what extent can the Committee members speak if asked to publicly state their views on University policies and protocols regarding COVID-19?*

Members of the Committee agreed that each retains full freedom to express their views, whether supportive or not of McGill's policies and protocols.

5) *How will the Committee proceed in case of disagreement among members on a matter under review?*

The Committee determined that it would strive for consensus but where that could not be reached, a recommendation would be made to the McGill administration if supported by a majority of members, with any dissenting view(s) recorded.

The Committee engaged in an extensive discussion about how to communicate with the McGill community in relation to its mandate and activities. Members were of the view that the credibility of this Committee calls for a high level of visibility into its work and the ability to react nimbly when necessary to evaluate and advise on any matters that fall within its mandate.

Members articulated the importance of communicating our mandate to the McGill community, stressing the need for clarity that this Committee is not an EOC replica and that our work is about academic planning and policies.

The Committee determined that it would be beneficial to create a site to post regular updates of the Committee's activities and recommendations. Members also underscored the need for a two-way flow of information. The Committee thus determined the need to create opportunities to hear and learn from members of the McGill community about matters germane to this Committee's mandate. The following ideas to meet this objective were posited:

- Creating a resource email account to field questions, concerns, ideas
- Survey(s)
- Town hall(s)
- Focus groups

The Committee also noted the need to engage directly with stakeholders who have been most vulnerable in the face of COVID-19. The Committee further recalled the importance of not losing sight of the way in which academic planning revisions have affected the workload of administrative and support staff.

The Committee reviewed part of a presentation that had been made to the Board of Governors on October 7<sup>th</sup> outlining COVID-related data at McGill. Members agreed that the new [COVID-19 Situation Dashboard](#) would be beneficial for the community to understand the state of affairs at McGill and will inform the work of this Committee in relation to academic planning and policies.

The Committee determined that as a first item of business at its next meeting, it would begin to examine and clarify the parameters around blended (partially remote + partially in-person) teaching, the discretion Faculties can be given to allow some courses to be taught remotely, and the parameters pursuant to which academic accommodations for instructors and students are made.

**Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on COVID Academic Planning and Policies  
MINUTES**

Meeting of October 15, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. TEAMS Conferencing Application

Present: Chris Buddle (Co-Chair)  
Angela Campbell (Co-Chair)  
Jennifer Chen  
Claire Downie  
Rebecca Fuhrer  
Gillian Nycum  
Petra Rohrbach  
Daniel Weinstock  
Laura Winer

Regrets: Nancy Czemmel

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This was the second meeting of the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on COVID Academic Planning and Policies (Committee).

Two main items were set for the agenda of this meeting:

1. Faculty oversight of teaching and course delivery decisions
  2. Academic accommodations
- 1) Faculty oversight of teaching and course delivery decisions

The Committee began its discussion of this item by considering the continuum on which courses can be delivered, from “fully” in-person on one end, to “fully” online or remote on the other. The Director of Teaching and Learning Services helpfully reminded the Committee that all courses at McGill have some online or IT component to them, particularly since all courses use the myCourses platform. There has also been some confusion about different modalities of teaching and this may have led to some instructors’ view that they were not allowed to teach any part of their course using remote delivery.

Committee members agreed that parameters are required regarding the following questions:

- 1) At what point does an instructor need to signal to their Chair (or for Faculties without Departments, to their Deans) that they are offering their course in whole or in part via an online channel?
- 2) What level of detail is needed in course outlines around mode of delivery?

- 3) What criteria should guide University and Faculty-level decisions about remote instruction?
- 4) Should these criteria (see item #3) apply only during this exceptional period, while the pandemic persists, or should we be planning for the longer term even following a decision – whether by the University or by the Province – that we will return to our activities “as usual”?

The Committee agreed on the importance of clarity in terminology about teaching modes, noting that members of the McGill community are often using such terms incorrectly or interchangeably, and this can lead to confusion and frustration in communication channels. The Committee reviewed and agreed upon the following definitions, which have been developed by TLS:

- **Blended learning** refers to teaching and learning activities made up of a combination of online and in-person course components, both of which are necessary for students to achieve the learning outcomes of the course. The online components may be **synchronous** (e.g., delivered ‘live’ via Zoom), or **asynchronous** (e.g., pre-recorded and available for students to access at their convenience).
- A **Flipped classroom** is a kind of blended learning where students engage in learning activities such as doing readings, completing individual learning activities, and perhaps viewing pre-recorded lectures outside class time, and class time is designed for learning activities that require interaction and inquiry.
- **Online course** refers to a course that has been expressly designed for online delivery through the intentional implementation of instructional activities and selected technologies that support the achievement of course learning outcomes. Students taking online courses have registered for such an experience with *a priori* knowledge that these courses are designed for online delivery.
- **Remote delivery** or **Remote instruction** refers to a situational need to deliver a course online that would normally be delivered in person. During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote instruction happened largely through lectures delivered over Zoom instead of in person and, in some cases, with the implementation of additional technologies on an ad hoc basis.
- **Hybrid** (often referred to as **Hyflex** elsewhere) refers to a class where some students are physically present and others attend virtually at the same time with all students having the same opportunities to participate and engage in the classroom activities. Hybrid classes require technologies not readily available in most McGill classrooms and additional instructor support for course planning and delivery; McGill is not supporting hybrid classes.

The Committee further reviewed five principles that were developed previously by the Associate Provost (Teaching & Academic Programs) to guide decisions about whether a Faculty can consider a course to be delivered remotely in full or in part:

- Program and accreditation requirements are met.
- Core student learning outcomes, experiences, and/or competencies that require in-person activities are maintained or enhanced.
- Synchronous course contact hours are met through an appropriate balance of remote or in-person, depending on the context/discipline.
- Unless programs are specifically designed as online, the proportion of online courses in a Department/Unit should be a minority and courses depending on experiential learning components should remain at least in part in person.
- Decisions are based on pedagogical value – that is, there is evidence that the course will be as good or better with a remote component.

All Committee members agree that these principles, and how to balance them, could usefully form the basis of further discussion at Senate but also within Faculties.

On the question whether the Committee should be making recommendations only for the “pandemic period”, several members indicated that many instructors want to build on the growth and experimentation that remote teaching during the COVID period has permitted. Most Committee members took the view that the Committee’s recommendations should be framed with the intention of enduring beyond the point when McGill’s academic life resumes “as usual”.

The Committee members agreed on the importance of finding multiple opportunities and modes for communicating to the McGill community the issues discussed in its two meetings held thus far. Members stressed that there is wide variance in communications and understandings across academic units on important matters, such as whether instructors may offer part of their course(s) via a remote platform. Some members of the Committee noted that some instructors have been informed that this is simply “not allowed”, which generally is not the case.

## 2) Academic accommodations

The Committee had time in this meeting to touch upon this matter only briefly. It was determined that, at its next regular meeting, this item would be the first agenda item, and that the discussion would centre the question of accommodations for students, given that much of the present meeting had focused on academic planning from instructors’ perspectives.

The Committee had time to begin a discussion whether it would be possible to offer courses via a “hybrid” mode of delivery (see above definition), to accommodate students unable to attend class. This would be extremely difficult to implement given the current state of IT infrastructure in most classrooms on our campuses. In present circumstances, hybrid teaching would impose a significant cognitive load on instructors and give rise to needs beyond those McGill can currently support. As such, it would not be wise to recommend hybrid teaching as a way forward.

Before adjourning, the Committee determined that it will likely need a meeting early in the coming week to discuss matters central to its mandate in connection with the Winter 2022 term.