McGILL UNIVERSITY **SENATE**

Memorandum

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TO:	Senate
FROM:	Professor Suzanne Fortier, Principal and Vice-Chancellor
SUBJECT:	Report of the Joint Board-Senate Meeting (2020)
DATE:	December 2, 2020
DOCUMENT #:	D20-28
ACTION REQUIRED:	☒ INFORMATION ☐ APPROVAL/DECISION

ISSUE	The report of the Joint Board-Senate Meeting held on November 12, 2020, is presented for information.
BACKGROUND & RATIONALE	Article 6.3.9.1 of the Statutes of McGill University states: *The Senate and Board of Governors shall hold an annual joint meeting in the fall term. At this meeting, the Principal, the Provost, the Deputy Provost, and the vice-principals, as appropriate, shall present for discussion matters they consider relevant to the University's mission for the ensuing year.* At the joint Executive Committee/Senate Steering Committee meeting of March 26, 2020, the following topic was proposed and agreed upon for the 2020 joint Board-Senate meeting: "Pandemic Planning and Preparedness: Local Impact of Global Health Crises." The Joint Board-Senate meeting was held on November 12, 2020.
PRIOR CONSULTATION	N/A
SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS	The Joint Board-Senate meeting is an annual meeting that provides a sustainable framework for the University governing bodies to discuss topics relevant to the University's mission.
IMPACT OF DECISION AND NEXT STEPS	The report will be presented to the Board of Governors on December 10, 2020.
MOTION OR RESOLUTION FOR APPROVAL	This item is presented for information
APPENDICES	Appendix A: Report of the Joint Board-Senate Meeting of November 12, 2020

D20-28 Appendix A

Report of the Joint Board-Senate Meeting of November 12, 2020

The Chair of the Board welcomed the 97 Senators, members of the Board of Governors and guests attending the joint meeting. He reminded participants that the annual joint meeting provides an opportunity for Senators and members of the Board of Governors to explore important matters affecting the University's mission. He then presented a brief progress report on the 2019 Joint Board-Senate meeting on "How can McGill be a Model of an Open, Connected and Purposeful University?"

The Principal introduced the meeting's topic, "Pandemic Planning and Preparedness: Local Impact of Global Health Crises." She noted that the transition in March 2020 of about 2,000 classes to remote learning in two weeks required the collaboration and creativity of the entire McGill community. She stated that McGill's scalable emergency management framework has proven adaptable and resilient within the current context. On the research front, the Principal highlighted that the University holds key strategic roles within several provincial and national programs to fight the COVID-19 outbreak, including the Quebec COVID-Biobank initiative, the McGill Interdisciplinary Initiative in Infection and Immunity (MI4) and the COVID-19 Immunity Task Force. She ended her remarks by thanking members of the McGill community for their resilience, strength, and contributions during the pandemic.

Dr. Tim Evans, Director and Associate Dean, School of Population and Global Health (SPGH), Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, and Associate Vice-Principal (Global Policy and Innovation), delivered a presentation on the research perspective of the global health crisis. He provided an overview of some of the available data and statistics on COVID-19 (e.g., the number of cases, hospitalizations and deaths in Canada) and projections with respect to the second wave (e.g., hospital bed capacity, daily infections and deaths). He spoke about the SARS-CoV-2 seroprevalence study that suggested herd immunity was a long way off and several other studies that demonstrated that we are still learning about the virus. He stressed the importance of science-based decision-making and interventions and mentioned that promising vaccines are being developed at unprecedented speeds (10 vaccines have already reached phase 3 trials). The presentation concluded with the example of Tufts University that has remained open thanks to large investments in smart testing.

Professor Christopher Buddle, Associate Provost (Teaching and Academic Programs), then delivered a presentation on the local impact of the pandemic. He provided an overview of the preparations and changes that took place for the Winter, Summer and Fall 2020 terms in response to the pandemic. He shared some challenges and success stories and noted opportunities for change (e.g., including faculties directly in the discussion with the Emergency Operations Centre; continuing to create opportunities for feedback from the community). He mentioned that planning for the Winter 2021 term and beyond was ongoing and would include enhanced in-person activities where possible. Professor Buddle concluded his presentation with some key takeaways (including the importance of feedback mechanisms, communication and remaining mission focused) and questions to ponder regarding the future of learning.

Following the presentations, Senators and Governors engaged in breakout room discussions on the following question, which had been circulated prior to the meeting:

> *Based on your own experiences and drawing on any lessons learned resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, what do you consider to be the three top opportunities and challenges that the University faces in its ability to carry out its mission*
>
> *a. in the immediate to the short-term (now to the start of the fall 2021 academic session)?*
>
> *b. in the medium-term (start of the fall 2021 to the end of the winter 2022)?*
>
> *c. in the longer-term, post-pandemic context (assuming the availability and administration of a vaccine)?*

Groups were assigned specific elements of the question (a, b, or c) to address during their discussions. Each group was asked to select a discussion leader to facilitate the exercise.

At the end of the discussion, participants shared with the general group, in an open discussion format, comments and ideas discussed in their breakout rooms with respect to opportunities and challenges that the University faces in its ability to carry out its mission.The main ideas that emerged from the discussion are summarized below. (As most of the opportunities and challenges that were shared were not specific to the short, medium or long term context, the comments were grouped by theme instead of time frame.)

- Participants saw opportunities to leverage the remote work model to increase work-life balance. Staff and students are enjoying the flexibility and increased productivity that remote work affords and would like to see the option of remote work and virtual meetings continue (even post-pandemic). Some of the challenges identified include the impact on labour relations, collegiality and new hires (notably with respect to onboarding and mentoring).

- Similarly, there are opportunities to review and maintain innovative teaching and learning strategies developed in response to the pandemic (e.g., remote teaching, flipped classrooms), to increase online resources (particularly lectures and library resources) and to implement hybrid approaches. A review of programs could be done to determine whether they are more effective in-person or online.

- An added benefit of remote teaching includes broadening offerings to new audiences (e.g., remote and lower income communities). Challenges identified include the inability to simulcast in most classrooms and the investments needed in technology.

- With the evolution of enhanced technologies to interact and share information, there are opportunities for all types of extended learning experiences and collaborations. Participants spoke favourably about having external guest lecturers, external examiners virtually attend doctoral thesis defenses and the ability to participate in virtual conferences or courses at other institutions.

- The transition to online teaching and carrying out scholarly work and research remotely has made significant demands on time. It has also required an evolution of teaching tools and an adaptation to an ever-changing technology. Support from Teaching and Learning Services has been critical and participants emphasized that a growing commitment to this type of support is needed. A review of requirements for credits and contact hours in the online environment is also necessary so as to properly calibrate the student workload.

- The quality of the student experience is an important challenge. Fostering a sense of belonging (notably for cohorts that have never met face-to-face or experienced regular curricular or extracurricular activities on our campuses) is critical to student retention and engagement. The loss of hands on activities, such as laboratories and music recitals, can negatively affect learning. Addressing stress, burnout, Zoom fatigue and mental health issues is crucial for student and staff success. Continuing with remote appointments (e.g., advising, instructor office hours, appointments at the Student Wellness Hub), demonstrating empathy and compassion towards students (e.g., flexibility in grading schemes, lecturing, medical notes) and understanding the reasons students adapt differently to online teaching were some of the ways in which support to students could be strengthened. There is also an opportunity to rethink assessments and align assessment methods to meet the needs of students and the 21st century workforce.

- Participants identified opportunities to repurpose existing space. They also noted that, when renovating buildings or planning new construction projects, universal design, accessibility and "pandemic-proofing" are important elements to consider.

- The public health crisis has exacerbated existing racial and ethnic inequalities. This is an opportunity to advance equity, diversity and inclusion at the University and build on the momentum to build a more inclusive society.

- Finally, participants noted that it was crucial that students and staff feel comfortable returning to campus. There is a need to instill confidence that being on campus is safe and that a return to in-person attendance would be more effective than the virtual options. This would involve ensuring that existing protocols are scalable, decision-making is transparent and evidence-based (beyond simply following provincial health directives), masks are worn in classrooms and on-campus COVID-19 testing is implemented, if necessary.

Feedback provided from Senators and members of the Board of Governors was generally positive and will be taken into account in planning future Joint Board-Senate meetings.

- Participants responded positively to presentations provided by the guest speakers and suggested that the break-out room discussions worked well as they provided the opportunity to have focused conversations with colleagues. They were of the opinion that the ideas that came out of the discussions were relevant and timely.

- Participants indicated that they were satisfied / very satisfied with the overall session, meeting documents, format, logistics and timing.