



# Memorandum

**Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning)**  
James Administration Building, Room 621  
845 Sherbrooke St. West  
Tel: 514-398-3109

**TO:** Senate  
**FROM:** Professor Fabrice Labeau, Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning)  
**SUBJECT:** Annual Report of the Committee on Student Services (2018-19)  
**DATE:** September 18, 2019  
**DOCUMENT #:** D19-06  
**ACTION REQUIRED:**  INFORMATION    APPROVAL/DECISION

**ISSUE** The activities of the Committee on Student Services (CSS) are summarized and presented in the Annual Report for information, in accordance with the Committee’s terms of reference.

**BACKGROUND & RATIONALE** The Committee on Student Services is Standing Committee of Senate that advises the Executive Director, Services for Students, on the objectives and priorities relating to Student Services and that receives and reviews reports regarding Student Services. It reports annually to Senate.  
  
The work of the Committee in 2018-19 centered on reviewing progress and providing input during the development of the Student Wellness Hub and the associated processes and internet-based resources. The new Wellness Hub is progressing at a remarkable rate. The progress of new initiatives to increase access and effectiveness of services has been impressive.  
  
On many occasions the Committee returned to the issue of academic stress as a driver of the need for services.

**PRIOR CONSULTATION** N/A

**SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS**

**IMPACT OF DECISION AND NEXT STEPS** For information of Senate

**MOTION OR RESOLUTION FOR APPROVAL** This item is presented for information

**APPENDICES** Appendix A: Annual Report of the Committee on Student Services



**Annual Report of the Committee on Student Services for 2018-19**  
**Prepared by Professor Jim Fyles, co-chair, Committee on Student Services.**

**Highlights**

The work of the Committee in 2018-19 centered on reviewing progress and providing input during the development of the Student Wellness Hub and the associated processes and internet-based resources. The new Wellness Hub is progressing at a remarkable rate. The progress of new initiatives to increase access and effectiveness of services has been impressive.

On many occasions the Committee returned to the issue of academic stress as a driver of the need for services. The University itself is responsible for generating academic stress and new initiatives are required to ensure that academic stress levels are appropriate.

**Mandate of the Committee**

The Committee on Student Services (CSS) advises the Executive Director on the objectives and priorities relating to Student Services. CSS has a mandate to meet regularly to review Student Services initiatives based on reports from the Service Directors and Advisory Boards, formulate and promote policies in support of planning, and provide advice on budgetary matters.

**Membership in 2018-19**

Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning): Professor Fabrice Labeau (Interim)

Executive Director of Services for Students: Ms. Martine Gauthier

Associate Dean (Student Affairs), Macdonald Campus: Professor Jim Fyles - Co-Chair

Two Directors of Student Services:

Dr. Vera Romano

Mr. Ian Simmie

Two Associate Deans (Student Affairs and/or Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies) or equivalent:

Dr. Aimee Ryan (Associate Dean, Biomedical BSC., Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs, Faculty of Medicine) - 2021

Dr. Axel Hundemer (Mathematics and Statistics, SCIENCE) – 2019

Three Representatives appointed by Senate:

Professor Dusica Maysinger (Pharmacology and Therapeutics, MEDICINE) - 2019

Professor Jacqueline Leclair (Music Performance, MUSIC) – 2019

Professor Jonathan Britt (Psychology, SCIENCE) – 2021

Three Graduate Students:

Mr. Wajih Jawhar

Ms. Saumeh Saeedi

Ms. Kira Smith

Macdonald Campus Student:

Ms. Sophie Courtemanche-Martel

Six representatives of undergraduate Student Societies (three of whom shall be from Arts, Science, Engineering, Management, or Education):

Mr. Jacob Shapiro (History, ARTS)

Ms. Sophia Esterle (Math and English Literature, ARTS)

Mr. Andre Lametti (Medicine, MEDICINE)

Mr. Réginal Labonté (LAW)

Ms. Robyn Lee (History, ARTS)

Mr. Jack Collis (Pharmacology and Therapeutics, MEDICINE) - Co-Chair

Resource persons with voice, but no vote:

Manager, Finance and Systems, Office of the Executive Director, Services for Students: Rosella De Stefano

Manager - Student Assessment, Student Services: Lina Di Genova

Secretary: Ms. Tatyana Roméus-Kébé

## **Work of the Committee**

In 2018-19 the Committee met on five occasions.

The meeting agendas revolved around two main issues: generating a shared understanding of Student Services and its context based on verbal reports by the Executive Director and others, and review and discussion of annual reports submitted by the Student Services Advisory Boards; and discussion of issues raised by students and other CSS members or emerging from the reports and leading to advice to the Executive Director.

## **Reports and Presentations**

It is important that members of CSS develop a good understanding of the many dimensions of student services on McGill campuses to inform their advice to the Executive Director. The Committee received a report from the Executive Director at each meeting, and presentations and written annual reports from the different services of Student Services.

*Reports of the Executive Director:* The Executive Director reported on current Student Services throughout the year. Highlights included:

- Planning for and renovation of the Brown Building to improve and consolidate services, along with improved reception processes and waiting areas.
- Consolidation of many websites into a single portal through which students can access resources for all services. Development of a web-based service mapping project through which students can easily locate services with desired characteristics at McGill campuses and in their neighbourhoods.
- Development of the new Local Wellness Advisor (LWA) program which embeds wellness advisors in Faculties. The Advisors are to raise awareness and knowledge of wellness among students, provide easier access to advice and referral to other services, and support early intervention to avoid mental health crises.
- Despite the many new initiatives supported by philanthropic funding, Student Services continues to run a budget deficit. Organizational restructuring is occurring to ensure financial viability. Referendum-supported student fee increases approved in spring 2019 will relieve some of the fiscal pressure.

*Advisory Boards:* Each Student Services unit has an Advisory Board involving a diversity of students and key unit administrators. The purpose of the Boards is to provide feedback regarding the work of the Unit. CSS received and reviewed reports from the following units:

- Career Planning Service (CaPS)
  - CaPS undertook an extensive internal needs assessment during the year to assist in re-envisioning student career-related services at both campuses.
  - The critical role of communication with student and other stakeholders was emphasized. Better integration across online media platforms was aimed at enhancing the student experience and reduce the need to shift between platforms.
- Counselling Services
  - The Advisory Board was engaged in discussions of the developing Wellness Strategy. Particular emphasis was placed on providing timely access to students in need, leading to a commitment to re-instate drop-in appointments.
  - The development of the Wellness Hub and its implications for student service delivery were well discussed.
- Health Services
  - Advisory Board discussion focused mainly on planning for the new Hub and its online support.
  - The Student Wellness Action plan was launched.
  - McGill participated in the National College Health Assessment survey again this year.
  - New initiatives included exploring expressed interest in physicians working on the Macdonald Campus, and an evaluation of online booking services.
- International Student Services (ISS)
  - ISS has introduced several new programs and activities for pre- and post-arrival student orientation and for students who stay on campus over the summer. Participation has increased.
  - Partnering with CAPS, a new program to deliver SIN to international students was initiated.
  - Changes in immigration insurance regulations and processes were incorporated into ISS' processes and communication media. A Health Insurance working group was initiated to assist in understanding and managing the implications of the changes.
- Psychiatric Services
  - The Advisory Board considered several challenges facing Psychiatric Services including changes in the organizational model associated with the integration of the Mental Health Psychologists and Counselling Services and processes associated with delivering the Collaborative Care model.
  - Discussions of future goals emphasized the need to develop the collaboration with Counselling Service and the potential value of cross-training. The new centralized intake highlights the need to review processes for emergency walk-in cases.
- Scholarships and Student Aid (SSAO)
  - The Advisory Board reviewed the diverse activities of SSAO and the several new initiatives underway. Numbers of students with entrance scholarship increased relative to previous years. SSAO tracks changes in regulations of various government funder which introduce uncertainty for students. Changes in automated processes for Quebec students has increase efficiency and allowed more personal appointment capacity.
  - SSAO has been involved in advocacy communication with respect to Canadian and US federal student funding programs.
  - SSAO has introduced more need-based funding programs, supported by tuition-set aside, including increased numbers and value of entrance bursaries, the Enriched Educational Opportunities Fund and as loan program to support OSD testing. Demand for McGill aid for graduate students is increasing. The Work Study program is being revisited to improve service and increase transparency to students and employers. A new financial assistance program for Indigenous students is being explored.

- Future initiatives include increasing offerings on the Macdonald Campus and working to ensure that Financial Wellness is well integrated into new Student Wellness Hub activities.

## **Emerging Issues**

*How can the system of student services provide effective student access despite the inherent complexity of the system and student needs?*

Aspects of this question are foundational to the development of the new Wellness Hub and its processes, and were discussed at several CSS meetings. New initiatives are oriented to improving the effectiveness of access. These include: the Collaborative Care Model for Counselling and Mental Health, which offers a range of online and face-to-face support as appropriate to the needs of the student; space renovations and organizational restructuring to allow a single integrated entry point for students with physical and/or mental health concerns; systems to provide priority access when required; and on-going evaluation processes to assess outcomes. Technological solutions are being sought and tested to provide access to patient dossiers across service providers while ensuring necessary confidentiality for students.

*What is the responsibility of the University to reduce the mental health burden of students?*

This theme was the focus of on-going discussion by the CSS throughout the year, raised by students, academic staff and Student Services directors.

We know, from several surveys, that a large majority of McGill students suffer poor mental health sufficient to negatively affect their academic performance. The main driver of poor mental health identified by students and supporting health professionals is academic stress. There is general agreement that coping with stress is one of the key life-skills that is learned at university. However, given that being in the University environment itself creates some of the stressful conditions to which the students are subjected, the University must accept some responsibility for the stressful environments that drive mental ill-health.

Student Services has made great progress in recent years in raising the accessibility and effectiveness of counselling and mental health services. More and better services emerge each year. But even as these initiatives roll out, it is clear that the demand increases faster. New initiatives are required that decrease levels of academic stress and thus the demand for services.

The student learning environment, with its academic demands and inherent levels of stress, is a product of administrative regulation, program curricula, and course teaching and assessment requirements. Development at each of these levels generally considers issues of student workload and, more broadly, the potential for generating academic stress. However, there is little capacity in the university system for feedback and reflection that ensures a balanced workload and an appropriate stress level for students. When was the last time academic administrators, undergraduate program directors, professors and teaching assistants sat down together to discuss how our work affects student mental health?

The discussion of this topic in the CSS has demonstrated that the question of how to integrate academic stressors in a way that creates an appropriate stress level, or even the question of what is an appropriate stress level, are very difficult. McGill has a recent Student Wellness Strategy that helps to place the problem in context. However, it is seen as problematic that there is no obvious institutional body with the breadth and depth to effectively address the issue in all its dimensions. The CSS has the mandate to raise the need to address these questions and to communicate this need to the wider university. It will continue to raise and develop the issues but a much broader avenue of discussion and action is required.