

# Memorandum

**Office of the Principal and Vice-Chancellor**

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**TO:** Senate

**FROM:** Professor Suzanne Fortier, Principal and Vice-Chancellor

**SUBJECT:** Report of the Joint Board-Senate Meeting (2021)

**DATE:** December 1, 2021

**DOCUMENT #:** D21-27

**ACTION REQUIRED:** ☒ INFORMATION ☐ APPROVAL/DECISION

**ISSUE** The report of the Joint Board-Senate Meeting held on November 11, 2021, 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.*

On November 11, 2021, members of the Board of Governors and members of Senate met to discuss following topic: "The Execution of McGill's Mission in a Changing World." Appendix A provides a report of the meeting.

**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 16, 2021.

**MOTION OR  
RESOLUTION  
FOR APPROVAL**

This item is presented for information

**APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Report of the Joint Board-Senate Meeting of November 11, 2021



**Report of the Joint Board-Senate Meeting of November 11, 2021**

The Chair welcomed the 76 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 discuss important issues related to McGill's academic mission. The Chair noted the importance of the University to be "bolder, better, and sooner" in its achievements, highlighting the fact that McGill had been named Canada's best university by Macleans magazine for the 17<sup>th</sup> year in a row. He reminded participants that the theme of the 2020 Joint Board-Senate meeting was "Pandemic Planning and Preparedness: Local Impact of Global Health Crises," and mentioned that the 2020 meeting report had been shared with the 2021 meeting documents.

The Principal, who was attending a meeting of the World Economic Forum in Dubai, introduced the meeting's topic, "The Execution of McGill's Mission in a Changing World," via a pre-recorded video message. She asserted that the pandemic had dramatically changed the way we teach, learn, and work at McGill, and stated that the lessons learned during the pandemic would help the University transition into a "new and better normal." She highlighted the establishment of the New Models of Work Project Office and the Working Group on New Models of Academic Program Delivery as two initiatives that the University had undertaken to achieve this goal.

Professor Christopher Buddle, Associate Provost (Teaching and Academic Programs) and Diana Dutton, Associate Vice-Principal (Human Resources) addressed participants prior to the four presentations slated for the meeting, providing context for the shifting landscape and its implications for higher education and the world of work.

Dr. Laurie Snider, Director of the School of Physical and Occupational Therapy (SPOT), started off the meeting's presentations with an overview of SPOT's blended learning techniques. She noted that, due to SPOT's requirement for hands-on learning, her School had been faced with a specific need to create hybrid learning solutions during the pandemic. She emphasized the amount of work that went into adapting course content to virtual formats, including the development of video content for before, during, and after the limited, socially-distanced in-person class time. Dr. Snider noted that online tools such as teleconferencing breakout rooms had also been helpful with the teaching of complex lessons and would be valuable in a hybrid learning structure moving forward.

Josephine Nalbantoglu, Associate Provost (Graduate Education) gave a presentation on new interfaculty, interdisciplinary, and interdepartmental graduate programs launched at McGill. She summarized the structure and requirements for McGill's interfaculty doctoral program, Master of Arts, and cumulative (stackable) Master's degree, noting that these options were gaining popularity.

Lorraine Mercier, Director of Facilities Management and Ancillary Services, presented an ongoing initiative of the New Models of Work Project Office to explore different space typologies on campus and repurpose existing space. She noted that the pilot project was testing open shared workspaces with adjustable furniture and some closed offices for quiet, focused work.

Manuel Balán, Associate Dean of Student Affairs, presented an update on current activities in the Office of Advising and Student Information Services (OASIS), noting that there has been an increased demand for advising from students since the start of the pandemic. He explained how the move from almost all in-person services to online services provided many benefits for both students and OASIS staff, such as easy access to documentation, saved records of interactions, and more collaboration between advisors. He stressed that the flexibility of offering both in-person and online advising accommodated the individual needs of students and improved efficiency.

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

- a) *What are the challenges and opportunities in realizing the University's mission in a changing world when it comes to:*
  - *Innovation in teaching and learning;*
  - *Creating flexibility in our model of work*
- b) *What actions, projects, or initiatives could be undertaken when considering:*
  - *Delivery of academic programs*
  - *Facilitating a flexible working environment*
- c) *What can we learn from other sectors or other stakeholders around doing things differently in both our academic program delivery and the work environment?*

Groups were assigned a specific 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 the three questions proposed. The main ideas that emerged from the discussion are summarized below.

- Participants felt that the successful implementation of a long-term hybrid work model would require a lot of planning and noted that it would be important to identify which tasks were better suited for in-person or remote work environments, respectively.
- Similarly, participants noted that online learning was easy to a point but posited that students could have difficulty remaining engaged in the long-term. It was also noted that the University might not have the best technology across all faculties and departments to provide an optimal learning experience, and that a standardization of such resources should be done moving forward.

- Participants suggested that it was important to evaluate current initiatives related to hybrid work and teaching to determine the ideal structure for University activities moving forward. They emphasized that individual needs should be considered, as some people or units might have limited options when choosing between remote or in-person work environments, or a strong preference for one over another.
- Participants spoke favourably about some of the opportunities available to the University in a virtual or hybrid learning environment, such as access to external guest lecturers and prominent public speakers.
- It was noted that the University's operational and budgetary structures would have to be adapted to accommodate changes to its learning and working environments. For instance, an increase in remote teaching and work would require, over the long-term, extra funding and increased digital security to protect personal information and intellectual property.
- Participants noted that initiatives to repurpose existing on-campus spaces to suit a hybrid work model should involve collaboration with the McGill community and consideration of individual needs. They noted that collective workspaces adopted in other sectors might not serve as good prototypes for the University given that non-academic enterprises have fewer space and funding constraints but proposed that these models could serve to demonstrate some of the benefits and challenges of these arrangements.
- It was also noted that having a personal working space can foster a sense of belonging for employees and might be a necessary component for engagement and retention. Participants discussed possible ways to accommodate personal touches in shared workspaces, such as digital or sliding backgrounds that could be accessed by employees when sitting down at a desk.
- Participants emphasized that the McGill experience extends beyond lecture content, noting that an in-person campus experience was important to many students. It was also noted that, in a hybrid work and learning model, the University should consider how to extend this sense of community to online activities.
- Finally, participants noted that it was crucial for the University to seek as much feedback as possible from students and staff about new initiatives and changes to existing structures.

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.

- Overall, participants responded positively to the presentations provided by the guest speakers and to the breakout room discussions that followed. It was suggested that more time could be devoted to the debriefing following these discussions in future meetings to relay more of the valuable content of these conversations.