

# Question

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**TO:** Senate  
**FROM:** Terry Hébert and Dan Bernard  
**SUBJECT:** Question Regarding McGill's Response to the Federal Budget  
**MEETING DATE:** May 12, 2015

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**PREAMBLE:** After the Federal Budget was announced on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015, McGill University publicly expressed gratitude for funding earmarked for the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) and other industry-focused grant programs. Little comment was made about the flattening of Tri-Council funding (CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC) for basic research. While polite and politically expedient, such responses create the impression that the University views research funding as a zero-sum game. That is, as long as funds come to the University, it does not matter for what they are intended. Given McGill's academic mission as a leading research university and its commitment to academic freedom, we would pose the following questions.

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**QUESTION:**

1. How can McGill professors (especially new hires and junior faculty) expect to develop or advance their research programs when funding for investigator-driven research continues to decline?
2. Does McGill plan to alter its tenure and promotion criteria accordingly? If so, how?
3. Can McGill do more to convince the Federal government that funneling money away from investigator-initiated grants toward industry-partnered initiatives is an open assault on both innovation and academic freedom?

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**Answer by Prof Anthony C. Masi, Provost**

I thank the Senators for their questions, minus some of the editorial comments.

The pillars of strong research support are: peer-reviewed grants, indirect cost recoveries, infrastructure support, graduate student and post-doctoral fellowship funding, and some monies for strategic initiatives and/or fleeting opportunities. Not all of these can be addressed in every budget, so we expect trade-offs and cycles in fiscal announcements coming from governments.

Now I will turn to your questions.

Let me start with the third one. McGill is an active participant at various tables and committees of the AUCC and the U15 in developing position papers, policy suggestions, and memoranda on federal budgets that support the research enterprise at Canadian institutions of higher learning. We advocate for research excellence at these tables, not the university's bottom line.

McGill is very active in bringing the case forward, but not always successful in getting what has been requested. We have always taken the opportunity to emphasize the importance of research funding through the federal granting councils.

In the university's August 2014 submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, we explicitly addressed the importance of discovery research, noting that "Canada's three federal granting agencies – the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) – as well as funding organizations such as Genome Canada and Network of Centres of Excellence (NCE), provide the funding crucial to supporting Canadian research. The importance of discovery research cannot be overestimated – it is the cornerstone of innovation" (p. 2).

Furthermore, ASAP 2012-2017 (ASAP) and the associated Strategic Research Plan (SRP) express McGill's core commitments to ideas, innovation, sustainability, collaboration and partnership, and social engagement in research. Such activities require funding from a variety of sources, notably the federal Granting Councils and CFI.

Once again, we have and do make collective and individual representations when things go in directions that are not helpful to advancing the creation and dissemination of new knowledge.

With regard to the first question, we have not seen a decline in tenure dossiers reporting success at the tri-council level, or a decline in establishing funding levels that would prevent our younger professors from being on track to tenure. We have been working to ensure that the young professors that we recruit to McGill are among the very best in the world. McGill hires professors who are extremely competitive and who generally do much better than the average in national competitions for research funding.

At the same time, we have seen increases in funding from non-governmental sources, including targeted-philanthropy for specific research endeavours. Such diversification away from single source dependence for funding is important for the stability of funding for researchers, but often does not have adequate support for indirect cost recoveries thus putting pressure on the University while protecting the freedom of academic inquiry.

I should also point out that the research councils' recent emphasis on team-based and partnership-driven research is not necessarily a bad thing. Partnerships do not necessarily have to be forged with corporate entities to meet Council expectations. Nor does the research have to be market-driven, or profit-oriented – though the implication that such a thing would be a betrayal of 'true' scholarship is itself an oversimplification. Indeed, McGill is home to several large, successful, federally-funded partnership projects that include community organizations, arts groups, and other not-for-profit entities among their 'partners'. The point is not to sell-out scholarship, but to find opportunities to do scholarship on

different platforms, with different people, for different audiences, and to different ends. It can be healthy for us as an institution, a body of scholars, and representatives of long scholarly traditions to work outside our own sandbox from time to time.

On the second question, we regularly and carefully study McGill's tenure and promotion criteria as described in the Regulations. The three academic duties – research and scholarship, teaching and supervision, and service and other contributions – allow for significant inputs at multiple levels. None of these requires monolithic performance indicators. True enough, research funding continues to be important, but it is not the exclusive input into the first element in tenure decisions – outputs are generally weighted much more than inputs in that process.

McGill's professors, at all career stages, have shown remarkable resilience and persistence in the face of stiff competition for federal research dollars, and on a per capita basis we remain one of the top three to five universities in the country in grant applications, grants won, and dollars awarded at all three federal research councils. We look even better when standardized for size.

So, we continue to monitor recruitment, reappointment, and tenure dossiers in light of shifting funding, but we have not yet seen the need to modify McGill's regulations or guidelines regarding tenure.

As I undertake my review of tenure files, this year, however, I will be particularly attentive to these matters in light of the issues raised in these questions.

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