

TO: Senate

QUESTION FROM: Senators Ger and Sobat

RESPONSE FROM: Senator Manfredi, Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic)

SUBJECT: Question and Response Regarding University Governance Best Practices

MEETING DATE: January 18, 2017

PREAMBLE: Whereas, the McGill University Board of Governors holds “final authority over the conduct of all academic, business, and financial affairs of the University,” while the Senate “exercises general control and supervision over the academic affairs of the institution;”¹

Whereas, the Senate has undergone several procedural reviews in past years, including through Ad Hoc Committees on the Recording and Transmission of Senate Meetings (2011-12); on the Enhancement of Senate Meetings (2013); to Review the Composition of Senate (2013-2014); and to Review the Livestreaming of Senate Meetings (2014);²

Whereas, at its meeting of December 1, 2016, the McGill Board of Governors approved a proposal to create “Community Sessions” at two meetings each year, which will allow community members to submit written questions on topics of interest and to interact directly with Board members;³

Whereas, the Students’ Society of McGill University (SSMU) recently released a research report, entitled *A Seat at the Table: An Analysis of the McGill University Board of Governors*, which identifies potential structural and administrative changes that could be made to improve on Board governance.⁴

QUESTION:

1. What opportunities exist for Senators, and Senate as a whole, to provide recommendations regarding governance practices to the Board of Governors?
2. Given that the cyclical review process has recently been extended to include administrative units, would the University consider implementing this model for a review of governance bodies?

¹ <http://www.mcgill.ca/boardofgovernors/board-governors>

² <http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/committeesofsenate/ad-hoc-committees>

³ https://www.mcgill.ca/boardofgovernors/files/boardofgovernors/09_gd16-18_nge_committee_report_part_ii.pdf#page=7

⁴ <http://ssmu.mcgill.ca/blog/2016/11/press-release-a-seat-at-the-table-an-analysis-of-the-mcgill-university-board-of-governors/>

RESPONSE

1. The framework set out in the Statutes explains Senate's role in relation to the Board of Governors and establishes Senate's ability to submit recommendations to the Board with respect to certain matters. As the question posed relates specifically to opportunities for Senate and Senators to make recommendations to the Board with respect to governance practices, it should be noted that it has been customary for the Board of Governors to receive recommendations from Senate in the course of the Board undergoing extensive governance reviews that implicate the academic mission of the University. In the normal course of proceedings, the Board of Governors and Senate are responsible for establishing rules and regulations governing their own meetings, practices and procedures.

Senate, as a whole, or individual Senators are welcome to provide input to the Board of Governors through formal communications addressed to the Chair of the Board of Governors or the Chair of the Nominating, Governance and Ethics Committee. Individual Senators are also able to provide feedback to any one of the eight Senators (including the Chair of Senate) who are members of the Board or through Senate representatives or members of Senate who serve on a number of Board Committees. Senators could also refer comments to the Secretary-General for referral to the Board or relevant Board Committee. Individual Senators are invited to contact the Secretary-General for further guidance in this regard.

Senators interested in exploring further the topic of governance practices are welcome to suggest it to the Board's Executive Committee and the Senate's Steering Committee as these bodies have been tasked by Senate and the Board to select, on an annual basis, the topic of the joint Board-Senate meeting. Individual Senators may also submit requests in the form of questions to the Board community sessions⁵. The first session will be held on April 27, 2017.

2. Both the academic unit review process and the more recently implemented administrative unit review process focus on the assessment of the unit's ability to meet its core objectives and priorities through a self-study exercise and site visits by an external review team. This process addresses, among other things, how well the unit is aligned with University priorities, how well it manages its resources, how well it compares to equivalent units at peer institutions, and, with respect to academic units, the scale and scope of faculty members' contribution to scholarship. This process is managed by the Cyclical Unit Review team within the Analysis, Planning and Budget area of the Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic).

⁵ <https://www.mcgill.ca/boardofgovernors/community-sessions> 16 January 2017.

The Board of Governors is the body to which all other areas of the University are ultimately answerable, as it “has final authority over the conduct of all academic, business, and financial affairs of the University.”⁶ Evaluating university governance by means of a cyclical unit review process would be ill-advised as it would create a situation in which the core units of the University – the Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic) – would set the scope and terms of a review of the bodies to which it reports, and which are charged, in other contexts, with oversight and approval of the academic and administrative objectives of the University.

The Board of Governors and the Senate are responsible for ensuring proper governance review of their functions and activities. Focused reviews are usually carried out by special purpose committees or standing committees which have been mandated by the Board or Senate. Senate has, in the recent past, established a number of special purpose committees to review various areas of Senate’s activities. On the Board side, the function of governance assessment is carried out regularly by the Board’s Nominating, Governance and Ethics Committee.

⁶ <http://www.mcgill.ca/boardofgovernors/> 16 January 2017.