PROGRESS REPORT ON STUDENT LIFE AND LEARNING AT MCGILL

Professor Morton J. Mendelson
Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning)

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The *Final Report of the Principal's Task Force*[1], which was completed in December 2006, summoned the University to action with important, far-reaching recommendations:

> *The goal is clear: to provide students with the support and opportunities they need to achieve their full potential while at McGill and to ensure that all members of the community share in this goal. McGill is only as great as what it can offer to students, to society and to the advancement of knowledge; and in that respect, the life and learning that each of our students experiences while at the University is a measure of its success.*

The *Report* proposed a definition of a student-centred, research-intensive university[2] (included in D08-41 Appendix B) and made recommendations in three broad areas: academic advising and mentoring, resources for students, and the building of a learning community. The *Final Administrative Response to the Recommendations of the Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning*[3] described approaches that would be taken to address the broad areas and included an appendix that outlined the specific recommendations in the *Report*, with a summary of the steps that would be taken to address each, as well as, where possible, an indication of the anticipated time lines and resources required. Thus, the appendix was to serve as a *Report Card* against which we, as a University, could judge our own progress in fulfilling our specific goals and in reaching our aspirations as expressed in the definition of a student-centred, research-intensive university.

In the spirit of public accountability, an on-line *Report Card*[4], based on the appendix in the *Administrative Response*, was created and is regularly updated to inform the University community of the progress being made in achieving the high goals that we have set for ourselves to enhance student life at McGill. Similarly, the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) committed to making annual presentations to Senate and the Board of Governors to highlight areas of particular interest and or concern to the academic community.

Identifying Needs and Measuring our Success

McGill has received the most recent data from the McGill National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) survey. A snapshot of the results summarized in the NSSE Pocket Guide *What Students are Saying About Their McGill Experience* (included in D08-41 Appendix D) summarizes the 2008 findings. An analysis of the results of NSSE, as well as other survey results, help us to identify areas of concern and to measure our success in improving the student experience on campus.

Highlighted Initiatives

Through the combined efforts of the McGill community, numerous efforts are being made to advance the three broad categories (see on-line *Report Card*[4]). Here, the focus is on four significant initiatives that will have a major impact in improving students' transactions with the University.

Service Excellence

McGill students are served by many dedicated administrative and support staff who work in a large number of units across campus. These employees present to students an important face of the University and are responsible for providing a range of important services. An initiative that defined service excellence in the

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[1] www.mcgill.ca/principal/focus/final/

[2] http://www.mcgill.ca/files/principal/Student-Centred-Research-Intensive.pdf

[3] http://www.mcgill.ca/files/provost/PTF_SLL_Final_Administrative_Response_27NOV07.pdf

[4] http://www.mcgill.ca/studentlife/

context of McGill has resulted in new staff-development programs for frontline staff and for their managers, to be offered through Staff Development beginning later this winter. The implementation of this program, which includes a "culture shift", has focused primarily on administrative units in Student Life and Learning at McGill, but will be extended to other administrative and academic units. We are currently recruiting trainers from among our staff, and extending invitations to staff members across campus to participate in the workshop. The pilot staff-development session launch in Student Life and Learning coincided with the development of an aspirational statement and credo which have helped us to frame and embrace our core values: Caring, Diversity, Equity, Integrity, Respect, Accountability, Continuous Improvement, Sustainability, and Transparency.

Integrated Services

The run-around inherent in seeking important information and services at McGill has been identified by many students as a serious problem, and the desire for McGill to remedy the situation was clearly voiced during consultations of the Principal's Task Force and the recent Cut the Red Tape Contest[5].

The Integrated Services Project will bring together administrative services for students currently offered at six different service counters in four buildings in a collaborative initiative designed to improve McGill students' experience. Enrolment Services, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, Student Accounts, Student Affairs (of the Faculties of Arts and Science), and the Scholarships and Student Aid Office will create one team of cross-trained employees, in a single service area, who will each have the capacity and knowledge to provide information and services on a broad range of matters that are important to students. This cohesive suite of services will be provided in a to-be-renovated facility on the street level of the McLennan Library Building, positioning the service on McTavish Street, which is consistent with recommendations in the Master Plan to create a student-services corridor there.

Improving the Online Experience

A joint project involving Student Life and Learning units, the Public Affairs Office and the Web Communications group in the Office of the CIO, is working to improve the online experience of McGill students. It began with a global review of all non-academic sites targeted to current students, with the primary goal of enhancing students' access to important information. The first fruits of this project will be revealed early 2009 with the revised CaPS website, the new Advising website hosted by the Dean of Students, and the launch of the new website for Athletics and Recreation. Of course, the introduction in 2008 of the new BSAC system has also vastly improved on-line services to students; using this new system, students access student aid information via their Financial Aid Menu in Minerva. In addition to seeing the status and amount of awards, they are able to accept or decline McGill offers of bursaries, scholarships, or loans and can even electronically "e-sign" and print their loan contracts. All of these units are to be congratulated on their accomplishments.

Cut the Red Tape Contest

The first Cut the Red Tape Contest successfully identified a number of ways to improve administrative processes on campus. The red.tape@mcgill.ca email address remains active and continues to serve as a suggestion box. While many suggestions were easily acted upon within the unit responsible for the process, others suggestions led to coordinated action across units and to deliberation by committees about changing procedures or practices. The majority of the suggestions led to improvements in many units and we recognize the efforts of so many staff on campus who made these changes happen.

Red Tape 2009 will focus on what we can do to help McGill students navigate our campus. Discussion will focus on how planned initiatives, like the Integrated Services Project, will help meet student needs, and will explore how to improve our delivery of both information and services. Members of our campus community will be invited to join our blog at: http://blogs.mcgill.ca/redtape/ between February 16th and 20th to share concerns, challenges, ideas, and best practices.

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[5] Cut the Red Tape Contest http://www.mcgill.ca/redtape/