

**FOCUS ON STUDENTS:
Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at
McGill**

Draft Report to Senate

October 2006

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MANDATE

“FOCUS ON STUDENTS: Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at McGill” was launched by the Principal during the winter term of 2005, to take place during 2005 and 2006 period. Following consultation with the four umbrella student organizations (the Students' Society of McGill University, the Post-Graduate Students' Society, the Macdonald Campus Students' Society and the McGill Association of Continuing Education Students) and with members of the administration, twenty-four individuals from the McGill community, who had broad experience of, and/or a demonstrated interest in, issues affecting student life and learning were invited to participate in the Principal's Task Force. Half of the appointed participants were students, and half faculty members or members of the administrative and support staff of the University. Each member also served on one of five working groups, two of which are chaired by students, two by faculty members, and one by a member of the administrative staff.

The Principal's Task Force was given a broad mandate to review issues affecting student life and learning at McGill, and has aimed to make a small number of substantial recommendations that will be given priority for implementation, and will have an impact across the University.

Briefly stated, the Principal's Task Force has focused on:

- ❖ The place of students in the McGill community: where and how can McGill be more supportive of the academic life of our students, including transitions into and out of the University?
- ❖ A review of the supports to personal well-being and of special supports and counselling in times of personal crisis. A review of financial assistance currently offered, the level of student need, and how we can best bridge the gap.
- ❖ Diversity among our students and the internationalization of education: how can the University administration best foster sensitivity to cultural and personal differences in the delivery of academic and other administrative supports to our students, while respecting our primary academic purposes? How can we best provide an internationally informed experience for McGill students, both in terms of experience abroad and in the content of programs based on our campuses.
- ❖ McGill University and the Québec experience: how can we enhance relations between students from Québec and students from outside Québec, and enrich the Québec experience for students coming to McGill from outside the province?
- ❖ The e-experience: what is the optimal role of e-interaction between students and the University? How effective are the various ways in which students deal with the administration electronically? What additional services and information could most effectively be provided via the web? What is the impact of electronic aids to teaching on student life and learning?

The full text of the mandate, as initially circulated to the McGill community, is appended to this report (Appendix B).

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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS AND CONSULTATIONS

By October 2005, the Task Force had received more than 150 submissions, most from students and from members of the administrative and support staff who work with students, with the balance from alumni, Deans, senior administrators and faculty members. Additional submissions have been received since that time, all of which have been distributed to members of the Task Force. Twenty-two individuals were invited to present briefs at sessions held on November 7th and 9th. Those invited included student organizations, individual students, alumni, and members of the University administration who work closely with students.

During the November, 2005 meetings with authors of submissions, a number of points were made about students' perceptions of their place at McGill University. A summary list of these points is provided below; a full account of the concerns expressed is appended to this report (Appendix D).

- ❖ While McGill students recognise the overall quality of the education they receive at this University, it is clear that many do not feel that they are fully-fledged members of the McGill community.
- ❖ Funding for graduate students is not adequate or competitive with that offered at peer institutions.
- ❖ The lack of adequate financial support for students with significant financial need may adversely impact the goal of attracting a diverse student body, and result in qualified students refusing offers of admission to McGill.
- ❖ Students expressed frustration at their inability to find the information they need, and might reasonably expect to have, on everything from program and course options, to administrative supports, to activities going on in the University.
- ❖ Space constraints are an impediment to a fulfilling experience for students generally. These include a lack of adequate work space, informal meeting space, and the excessive difficulty and cost of accessing University premises for student activities.
- ❖ Opportunities for students to broaden their horizons, arising from the diversity of the McGill student body, with its significant international student component, could be better fostered.
- ❖ Many of our students who chose McGill in part because of its location in Québec do not succeed in bridging 'divides' between students from Québec and those from outside the province, or between English-speaking and French-speaking students.

PART TWO: RE-IMAGINING THE PLACE OF STUDENTS IN THE RESEARCH-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITY

Some broad themes very quickly became salient to members of the Principal's Task Force, including a perception among students that collegial relationships within the community do not extend to them, and that University procedures have become hampered by excessive bureaucracy and red tape.

The University is a learning community: a place where knowledge is advanced and disseminated, for the benefit of humanity and the betterment of individual members of the community. As fully-fledged members of this learning community, students should be challenged not only to achieve their potential but to excel. They should learn in conditions that encourage them to remain curious, to value diversity in opinions and perspectives, to think critically and communicate effectively. Through their participation in the McGill community, students should have opportunities to develop personally and socially, and to become thoughtful and contributing members of society.

Accountability in the University context should apply to all: just as students are accountable to their professors and to members of the administrative and support staff, so too are faculty and other staff members accountable to students, as members, present and future, of the McGill community.

Members of the Principal's Task Force determined early on that the adoption of an aspirational statement on what it means for McGill to think of itself as student-centred, as well as research-intensive, would constitute a necessary step in re-imagining the place of students, and ensuring that they are treated as fully-fledged members of a learning community. All three aspects of the University mission – research, teaching and community service – are integrally related to, and have significant impacts on, student life and learning. Solving problems of bureaucracy and red tape will require both the instillation of a culture that rewards service to students, as well as other members of the University community, and the participation of those charged with delivering services in the formulation of solutions to particular problems.

THE STUDENT-CENTRED, RESEARCH-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITY

The aspirational statement below addresses what it means for McGill, Canada's most research-intensive University, to consider itself 'student-centred'. This description of the student-centred, research-intensive University was developed on the premise that students choose McGill on the basis of our academic mission. Our students are outstanding, and have the potential to achieve excellence. The University community must provide them with the academic opportunities and challenges that will enable them to excel, but must also offer other supports to learning and to challenges that may interfere with student success, so that they can take advantage of academic opportunities and meet academic challenges – and, indeed, thrive. Students, on their part, must accept their responsibilities, as members of the learning community, for taking advantage of opportunities and support offered.

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ESTABLISHMENT OF THE POSITION OF DEPUTY PROVOST (STUDENT LIFE AND LEARNING)

On July 17th, 2006, Professor Morton J. Mendelson was appointed Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning), in line with a recommendation made in the Progress Report of the Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at McGill.

The Office of the Deputy Provost should provide an institutional 'home' within the University's senior administration for ensuring the advancement of McGill as a student-centred, research-intensive University. Through his participation in the most senior levels of University administration, the Deputy Provost should champion the idea of McGill as a convivial and positive environment for student learning, encouraging ownership across the University of the goals this will involve. He should provide overarching direction and oversight needed to effectively integrate the building of a learning community into the achievement of the University's academic and research priorities. This integration of goals, considerations and directions that promote student-centredness with the University's missions of research, teaching and service to the community, is at the core our understanding of what constitutes a student-centred, research-intensive university.

The Principal's Task Force recommends that the following goals be included in the mandate of the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning):

- a. Articulating McGill's values, standards and goals with respect to student life and learning and overseeing their integration, as appropriate, into University policies, operations and procedures.
- b. Working with Deans and chairs to find means to integrate faculty members into efforts to create an academic community that is experienced as inclusive by all members.
- c. Considering the most effective configuration of positions and responsibilities for the Dean of Students, and the direction of Student Services.
- d. Supporting the Dean of Students in working closely with student organizations to ensure the highest quality of student life on our campuses, consistent with our academic missions and our identity as a research-intensive university.
- e. Supporting the establishment of mechanisms at all levels of decision-making to ensure that considerations of student-centredness are taken into account in processes of academic policy development and in administrative decision-making.
- f. Ensuring that institutional ownership is assumed for the student advising initiatives, and for those relating to the building of a learning community, proposed in this report.
- g. Exploring institutional mechanisms that might better support students in undertaking extra-curricular activities that contribute to the life and learning of their peers, particularly in relation to processes for the approval of access to University space and for establishing the fees charged for the use of that space.
- h. Encouraging and supporting the establishment, in consultation with other senior administrators in the University, including Faculty administrators, of consistent

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money, without sufficiently accounting for a negative impact on students and on other members of the McGill Community. The obstacles encountered by students are also due in part to unevenness in the service orientation of members of the University staff in their dealings with students. Finally, members of the Principal's Task Force recognize that these obstacles are exacerbated by the abundance and complexity of University regulation.

The University should continue to address issues of under-funding, as well as all elements of University administration that contribute to user-unfriendliness. Central to this undertaking is the realisation that service to students is an essential component of activities carried out in offices across the University and that all members of the University Community contribute to the creation of a learning community that welcomes students.

The University should work to enhance communications to students and to expand responsibility for communicating relevant information in a timely fashion, and should use electronic and other innovative supports, including the MyMcGill web portal, to target information to appropriate points in the cycle of the student's academic program.

Determining mechanisms and institutional standards appropriate for the implementation of the broad recommendations of the Principal's Task Force in different academic and administrative units across the University should include input from students and the individuals who work with them daily in these various contexts.

An important component of overcoming bureaucracy and red tape for McGill students is the idea of a single point of contact for students attempting to solve problems. In some cases, this will mean combining services and making them available in one physical location; in others, services can be effectively delivered to students by making the single point of contact virtual rather than actual. The underlying idea is to plan service delivery with coordination and collaboration uppermost, and to create conditions in which incentives for competition among different units are minimised. Members of the Principal's Task Force note that this notion of single point of contact reflects the position expressed by the Student Customer Services Committee in its 1993 report "Toward a Service-Oriented Culture and a User-Friendly Environment for Students". The position may be summed up by saying that the essential point is not combining services in a single physical location, but developing an attitude of service to students on the part of all members of the University community.

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- 1.8 The University should review the effectiveness of standards and mechanisms of accountability for supervisors and graduate students, and consider where implementation might be enhanced.
- 1.9 The priority attached to providing quality advising to students should be reflected in the allocation of resources, including personnel, space, equipment and the development of systems, and professional development.

ADVISING AND MENTORING: DISCUSSION

Goals

The University should ensure that students have easy access to the resources it offers in order for them to become better learners and better leaders. A system of consistent, high quality advising should facilitate this access: qualified, helpful, knowledgeable and accountable advisers are recommended for all undergraduates across the University. In addition, members of the academic staff of the University should be expected to contribute to the enhancement of student life and learning not only through their teaching and research, but also by acting as mentors for students.

Over the course of their academic career at McGill, students require access to a range of resources. Too frequently, these resources, including people, time, money, space and knowledge, are difficult for students to access. High quality advising may not generate more resources; indeed, the provision of high quality advising across the University will require that additional resources be devoted to this purpose. Members of the Principal's Task Force nevertheless regard this investment as crucial. Among other goals, such an investment should help to ensure that all types of resources needed by students are more easily available to them, and used more effectively by them.

Standards and Accountability

Departmental student-to-adviser ratios reported to the Principal's Task Force in submissions and consultations indicate that they currently range from 600 to 1100 students per Adviser. Lower ratios would provide continuity, and allow Advisers the time to establish a real connection with individual students throughout the course of their academic careers at McGill. The standard of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), that an Adviser be responsible to guide no more than 400 students, should be considered for implementation at McGill.

While Task Force members believe that there is, in many cases, a great deal of merit in the appointment of full-time Academic Advisers who are not members of the tenured or tenure-stream academic staff of the University, they also support the idea that academic staff who wish to take on the role of Academic Adviser on a part-time basis should be encouraged to do so. Academic staff should be provided the time and training to do the job appropriately, and should be held accountable to the same standards, as Advisers who are not academic staff.

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Deans and departmental chairs should encourage Academic Advisers to participate in all aspects of Faculty life where their expertise and experience with students can add value. These will include, but not be limited to, sitting on Curriculum Committees and taking a role in student information sessions.

Members of the round table on advising suggest that the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) should take responsibility on an ongoing basis for:

- ◆ identifying areas of advising and mentoring that might be enhanced at McGill;
- ◆ promoting improvements in administrative structures and student services in this area;
- ◆ promoting structures to address issues of interdisciplinary advising, and advising in the context of exchange and study abroad programs;
- ◆ supporting relevant activities of faculties—especially with respect to their need to freely explore the types of advising and mentoring that best suit them;
- ◆ ensuring the sharing of best practices and appropriate coordination of activities across units involved in academic advising and mentoring;
- ◆ ensuring a high common standard and practice of information sharing with students, both at singular points in time and sequentially over the course of their program and the cycle of their academic life at the University;
- ◆ advancing the role of academic advising as an important component of the educational process;
- ◆ reducing bureaucracy in the delivery of academic and other services to McGill students.

RESOURCES: FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR UNDERGRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

The University should take measures to secure the resources necessary to offer sufficient assistance to undergraduate and professional students over the course of their program so that no candidate offered admission to McGill need turn down that offer for lack of financial assistance. Financial assistance for which students are eligible should be made available to students in an efficient and expeditious manner.

The University has taken steps to ensure that candidates for admission to undergraduate and professional programs are encouraged to apply for need-based financial assistance at McGill as of the date of admission, and to ensure that they receive a response on eligibility, and the amount of assistance for which they are eligible, prior to the deadline for making a decision on an offer of admission.

Members of the Principal's Task Force recommend that the following steps be taken to enhance the University's ability to provide financial assistance to all qualified candidates:

- 2.8 Self-assessments collected by the University from students who apply for financial assistance should be aggregated and analysed to assist in determining the amount of the unmet financial need of our undergraduate and professional students.
- 2.9 The University should consider how resource requirements for much-improved need-based financial assistance can be met while enhancing our ability to offer an appropriate number of merit-based scholarships to exceptional applicants.

RESOURCES: STUDY AND SOCIAL SPACE FOR ALL STUDENTS

Anecdotal information on the cost of, and difficulties associated with booking, university space for activities indicates that structural issues need to be addressed.

- 2.10 The Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) and the Vice-Principal (Administration and Finance) should engage in broad-based consultations, through a round table or other appropriate mechanism, to streamline procedures and decision processes for the reservation of university space by student organizations wherever possible.
- 2.11 The University should review the principles underpinning the fee structures associated with the use of University facilities, including those applying outside of normal working hours, to determine whether they strike an appropriate balance between McGill's role as a student-centred, research-intensive University, and the financial imperatives associated with the University's resource situation.
- 2.12 In assessing the adequacy of work space for students, the University should take into account the special role the University Libraries can play in supporting individual and group working space, as well as informal social space.
- 2.13 The University should take measures to ensure that access to virtual space is easier for all students, by:
 - encouraging the development of a central policy framework that would ensure convenient access across campus regardless of Faculty;

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- ◆ supporting relevant activities of Faculties—especially with respect to their need to freely explore the types of financial support packages that best suit them;
- ◆ helping reduce bureaucracy in the delivery of funding to graduate students, and scholarship and other financial support to undergraduate and professional students;
- ◆ participating in fund-raising.

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- 3.10 Exploring with sister universities in Montreal the possibility of joint programs that would enable McGill students to take advantage of opportunities to fulfil some program requirements at a French-language institution.
- 3.11 Exploring the University's ability to provide services to candidates and students in French as well as in English, and to communicate the availability of these services effectively to French-speaking candidates and students.
- 3.12 Exploring the support available for staff members wishing to enhance second-language skills, and the options for improving this support where appropriate.

BUILDING A LEARNING COMMUNITY: DISCUSSION

The achievement of the learning community McGill aspires to be requires an institutional commitment, as well as a commitment from members, to creating an inclusive and welcoming community, one that supports the development of strong collegial bonds and mutual respect and accountability among its members: students, professors, academic and administrative staff members, alumni and friends. This learning community is one that is welcoming and easy to manoeuvre, where bureaucracy and red tape are minimised. It is one that celebrates diversity and is welcoming to its students.

Building a learning community entails unique challenges for McGill, challenges that arise out of the rich diversity of its student body. This diversity extends not only to different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, different sexual orientations and gender expressions, and students with disabilities. The University also welcomes French- as well as English-speaking students from Montreal, Quebec, Canada and abroad, and is split between campuses located in downtown Montreal and the Macdonald campus on the West Island. Without an institutional commitment to creating an inclusive and welcoming community, the tendency may be toward fragmentation, as different groups and individuals essentially go their own ways. Opportunities to make the benefits of diversity an integral part of students' learning experience are then lost.

Submissions from students, as well as information gleaned during consultations, point to the need to enhance the experience of a substantial number of students who choose McGill because of the Quebec or French-language promise, but who discover a 'walled city', and don't break through to the broader community. To this end, the Principal's Task Force has made recommendations aimed to enhance access to second-language courses for interested students and staff members and exposure to other Quebec institutions, as well as exploring mechanisms for creating points of contact between members of different communities.

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The Task Force encourages an institutional culture that includes a strong commitment to accountability on the part of all members of the McGill community. Specific measures to encourage individual initiative and greater accountability are expected in University's administrative response to the Final Report of the Task Force.

The work of the Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning, and its report, will be completed by the end of 2006. The University Administration has undertaken to prepare a response that will be delivered in two stages: a preliminary response will be submitted to the community in the winter term of 2007, with a more detailed response delivered early in the fall term of 2007.

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 with the University is a measure of its success.

CONTEXT

The Mission of McGill University is the advancement of learning through teaching, scholarship and service to society: by offering to outstanding undergraduate and graduate students the best education available; by carrying out scholarly activities judged to be excellent when measured against the highest international standards; and by providing service to society in those ways for which we are well-suited by virtue of our academic strengths.

At the core of McGill's mission is the provision of an education of excellent quality to our students. Superior levels of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, and student-faculty interaction are fundamental to the quality of a student's education. As a research-intensive university, McGill aims to provide students with an academic experience that benefits directly from the research programs and agendas of Faculty members. Formal and informal feedback indicates that we are well-positioned to achieve this part of our mission.

Our admissions standards are demanding: we are intent on attracting the best students. Our standards of accessibility should also be demanding: we should aim to ensure that all qualified students will be able to participate in student life at McGill and fulfill their program requirements irrespective of their financial means, something we cannot currently do. The achievement of this goal will require a better understanding of the resource gap that must be filled and of the concrete efforts required to bridge that gap. Further, we aim to be competitive with our peer public universities in Canada and the United States, with respect to scholarship offerings and the support we offer to graduate students. What will this entail?

The quality of a university education depends in significant part on a student's experience with peers and within the classroom; it also depends on the quality of academic and other services delivered to students. A supportive campus environment is essential for students to thrive. The atmosphere on our campuses should be open and tolerant, respecting academic freedoms and building strong accountability, both on the part of individuals and of the community. Students need access to effective advising and institutional supports in order to achieve their greatest potential. 'Life happens' while at university, so services are required to promote healthy lifestyles and well being and to assist students in times of stress and personal crisis, as well as in times of opportunity.

We must provide student services that further enhance both the academic experiences of our students and their opportunities for learning and personal growth outside the classroom. We wish to set the stage for a stimulating, enjoyable and fulfilling learning experience with services and administrative processes that are effective, efficient and, most importantly, student-oriented. We will set our goals and standards high in this regard, and assess our progress toward concrete objectives, while operating within our means.

WORKING GROUPS

In light of the nature of our campuses, the international orientation of McGill University and the very rapid transition to electronic interaction within our community, the following themes will be addressed by working groups made up of members of the Task Force. It is expected that members of the working groups will consider how best to deal with their mandate, and the topics that might be covered by each group will inevitably overlap to some extent. A list of topics that might be considered for a working group follows the statement of the themes.

- ❖ Where and how can McGill be more supportive of the academic life of our students, including transitions into and out of the University?
- ❖ What range of other services linked to student life and learning does and should the University offer students to ensure their personal well-being, as well as to assist in times of personal crisis, should these occur? What levels of financial assistance are we currently offering, what is the level of student need, how can we best bridge the gap?
- ❖ How can the University administration best foster sensitivity to cultural and personal differences in the delivery of academic and other administrative supports to our students, while respecting our primary academic purposes? How can we best provide an internationally informed experience for McGill students, both in terms of experience abroad and in the content of campus-based programs?
- ❖ How can we enhance relations between students from Quebec and students from outside Quebec and enrich the Quebec experience for students coming to McGill from outside the province?
- ❖ What is the optimal role of e-interaction between students and the University? How effective are the various ways in which students deal with the administration electronically? What additional services and information could most effectively be provided via the web? What is the impact of electronic aids to teaching on student life and learning?

Topics for Working Group A: The Place of Students in the McGill Community

- ✓ How should the administration best support the transition into the McGill community? What are the purposes of, and best vehicles for, student orientation? How should the administration and student groups best work together to provide an effective and positive orientation for students and their families?
- ✓ How might we better offer and structure academic advising across the University and in faculties and programs so as to most effectively meet the needs of our students?
- ✓ How can the University administration minimize students' experience of 'bureaucracy and red tape'?
- ✓ How, from an administrative perspective, do we best facilitate student participation in interdisciplinary and, especially, inter-faculty course offerings?

Working Group D: McGill University and the Quebec Experience

- ✓ How does, and how should, the University build on its unique place as an internationally-oriented English-language institution in a French-speaking province to broaden the experience of all students who choose to study at McGill? How can we best support students from outside Quebec in seeking a broader Quebec experience, both those from other provinces in Canada and international students?
- ✓ How do we better foster the interaction between Quebec students and students from outside Quebec?
- ✓ What are the different experiences of McGill, Montreal and Quebec among our students?
- ✓ What are our current practices in reaching out to Quebecers and to particular communities within the province? What is our capacity to deliver student services in French? How can and should we position that capacity going forward?

Working Group E: The E-experience

- ✓ Is the information provided on University and Faculty web sites accessible, accurate and up-to-date? Which specific pages work well, and which could be made more user-friendly and effective? What additional information can most effectively be conveyed to students through the web sites?
- ✓ What has been the student experience with registration using Minerva? Should additional administrative services related to programs, e.g., degree audit, be offered over the web?
- ✓ Is the policy of using e-mail for official communications with students working well? Could it be made more effective?
- ✓ Are current systems providing access to libraries, electronic collections and the full range of information resources for study and research appropriately supported? How could the support for users of these systems be improved?
- ✓ What impact have Web CT and the availability of video or audio tapes of lectures and classes had on student learning?
- ✓ Are there additional services that could optimally be offered over the web? Which interactions should remain face-to-face?

CONSULTATION AND INPUT

- ❖ An invitation to submit memoranda will be extended to the McGill community, broadly defined.
- ❖ The invitation will be posted on the University web site.
- ❖ The Task Force and/or working groups will invite selected oral representations from members of the community, including Alumni and Alumnae, on the basis of the work undertaken and of matters raised through the submissions received.
- ❖ Members of the working groups will consult available information on the issues within their mandate, including practices at McGill's peer institutions.

TIMING

- ❖ Establishment of Task Force January/February 2005

Winter term 2005

- ❖ Creation of Task Force and formation of working groups
- ❖ Establishment of web sites for working groups
- ❖ Compilation of information available within the University and elsewhere to support the work of the Task Force and working groups

Summer 2005 – Early to Mid-Fall

- ❖ Review of experience at McGill and elsewhere
- ❖ Analysis of best practices

Fall 2005 – Winter 2006

- ❖ Consultation with members of McGill community through meetings
- ❖ Reports of individual working groups for Summer 2006

Summer 2006

- ❖ Formulation of draft conclusions and recommendations

Fall 2006

- ❖ Consultation on draft recommendations
- ❖ Final report

The *Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning at McGill* aims to improve the deployment of the University's resources to enhance student life and learning. The Task Force is currently seeking written submissions from organizations and individuals across the McGill community – students, faculty members, staff, alumni, and friends – who have comments on today's conditions or suggestions for tomorrow's McGill. **The deadline for receipt of submissions is Saturday, October 15, 2005.**

McGill's mission is to provide an education of excellent quality to our students. Principal Munroe-Blum established the Task Force to assess our strengths in achieving this mission and, where needed, to make suggestions to strengthen and improve the services and support the University provides to students. It will arrive at recommendations after consultations, analysis and a review of McGill's practices and those of peer institutions. These recommendations will target issues of student life and learning of relevance across the whole McGill community.

The Task Force invites submissions on any issue of concern for its consideration, with particular emphasis on:

- ❖ **The place of students in the McGill community** – How can the University better support students in their academic pursuits? How can McGill better help its alumni use their learning upon graduation?
- ❖ **Administrative support and financial assistance** - What services should McGill offer to support the well being of students, such as financial support, the experience in residence, assistance in periods of personal crisis? What resources and programs are required for McGill to attract and retain talented students at all levels?
- ❖ **Diversity at McGill and the internationalisation of education** – How should McGill promote understanding and respect for diversity? How should McGill use its international stature to become an important center for the education of globally-minded scholars and citizens?
- ❖ **The Québec experience** – How do students from Québec and those from other parts of Canada and the world interact and advance their understanding of each other? What potential University initiatives would allow McGill to play a more valued role in its home city and province?
- ❖ **Communication and electronic support to assist student life and learning** – How can McGill best use communication methods and information technology to support the learning environment? How can we ensure that our information technology services are user-friendly, accessible, comprehensive and timely?

The Task Force will not consider anonymous submissions. Issues of a particularly sensitive nature can be raised in confidence with Victoria Meikle, Special Assistant to the Principal, who will determine whether the matter might be put before the Task Force. Ms Meikle's address is: victoria.meikle@mcgill.ca.

AN OVERVIEW OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND CONCERNS

A University that does not always make students feel welcome

While our students recognise the overall quality of the education they receive at McGill, it is clear that many do not feel that they are full-fledged members of the McGill community. These perceptions are based on their day-to-day experiences with other members of the community, and on messages communicated to them, explicitly and implicitly, about the place of students in this community. In a nutshell, our students, who are one of our two central *raison d'être* as a University, often do not feel welcome at McGill.

Several aspects of the student experience contribute to this feeling. Many undergraduate students do not make meaningful personal contact with a professor or a member of the administrative or support staff over the entire course of their program. Students generally do not feel that they have ready access to the information they need in order to make decisions on course and program choice in a timely fashion, or to participate in University activities, both academic and extra-curricular, that are of interest to them. As one contributor offered, there is a sense that collegiality at McGill extends only to professors: many students do not have any relationship that they would characterise as collegial with a member of the faculty or of the administrative and support staff of the University.

While a number of excellent advisers - both professors and members of the administrative staff - were identified, students report that, on the whole, academic advising is far from adequate, and constitutes a great weakness in the achievement of McGill's academic mission. As one upper-year undergraduate student summed it up, "I don't feel that there is anyone in the University who cares whether I am here or not".

During consultations, many students stated that they did not "know where to go" with many problems. The administrative cleavage between Student Affairs Offices, including Academic Advisors, on the one hand, and Student Services units, on the other, was cited as one source of difficulty in dealing effectively with programmatic and life problems.

Financial Support

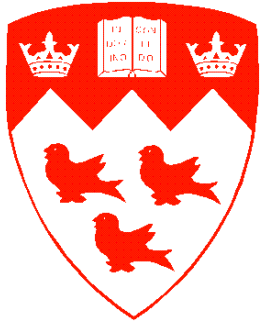
Concerns specific to the financial support of graduate students include the fact that funding is not adequate or competitive with that offered at peer institutions, and that information about total funding available may not be communicated to candidates sufficiently early to influence decisions on offers of admission.

Students stressed the need to be free of serious financial concerns in order to succeed in their programs and take full advantage of student life at McGill. The lack of adequate financial support for students with significant financial need was thought to adversely impact the goal of a diverse student body, and to result in qualified students refusing offers of admission to McGill. The University's inability, until very recently, to make financial assistance available to entering undergraduate students during the first term of studies was similarly seen as a serious obstacle for students with financial need who might wish to enrol at McGill.

The Diversity of the Student Body

There was general agreement that opportunities arising from the diversity of the McGill student body for students to broaden their horizons, potentially a great asset for students at McGill, could be better fostered. Presenters noted there is often a 'disconnect' between international, Canadian French-speaking and Canadian English-speaking students, noting that many of their peers tended to socialise within networks established prior to their arrival at McGill, or shortly thereafter. As a consequence, many did not bridge 'divides' between students from Québec and those from outside the province, or between English-speaking and French-speaking students. Obstacles may be exacerbated by the fact that Canadians from outside Québec, as well as many international students, start their studies in the Freshman program (U0), while Québec Cégep graduates start in the first year of a departmental program (U1).

It was suggested that the opportunity to improve English or French as a second language should be integrated into students' programs in order to make it feasible for them to do so. At present, there are not enough courses offered to accommodate all McGill students who may be interested in exposure to French in particular. Courses offered by the English and French Language Centre are six-credit courses, and may bridge the fall and winter semesters. For some students, the structure of their program is such that fitting in a six-credit option is not possible. Others might be more attracted to a three-credit course, rather than six, even where it is possible to fit it into their program, because of the desire to balance other course options.



Principal's Task Force: Student Life & Learning

Morton J. Mendelson
Deputy Provost
(Student Life & Learning)



Recommendations

1. Student-centred university
2. Senior administrative position
3. Academic advising & mentoring
4. Resources for students
5. Building a learning community



McGill's Mission

Advancement of learning through teaching, scholarship and service to society:

by offering to outstanding undergraduate and graduate students the best education available;

by carrying out scholarly activities judged to be excellent when measured against the highest international standards; and

by providing service to society in those ways for which we are well-suited by virtue of our academic strengths.



1. Student-Centred University

- Provision of best education possible
- Vibrant environment:
 - learning and academic progress
 - campus life
 - personal development



cont'd

○ Students...

- valued members community
- primary concern of the University
- given means and opportunities to actively pursue educational goals
- have ready access to needed information and to academic and support services
- have rights and responsibilities that are clearly articulated



cont'd

- Students' best interests are a focus of academic, administrative, and support staff
- University decisions made with due consideration to impact on students
- Students participate in governance and influence goals
- Students encouraged to participate in ongoing dialogue
- Foster students' interest in organizing their own activities



2. Deputy Provost (SLL)

- Advance McGill as student-centred
- Responsible for policies, actions and decisions to enhance SLL at McGill
- Leadership role in building a stronger sense of community at McGill
- Office will serve as a central liaison among the University's senior administration, faculties, student organizations and Senate, with a view to ensuring that impact on SLL is factored into decision-making



3. Advising & Mentoring

- High-quality academic advising
 - available for all students
 - geared to the stage of students' academic careers
- Mentoring roles for members of the academic staff



cont'd

- University accountable
 - minimizing unnecessary obstacles
 - providing informing
 - providing guidance
- Students accountable for taking steps
 - to inform themselves
 - to seek advice
 - to follow advice, as appropriate.



4. Resources for Students

- Graduate Students
 - competitive base funding for research students
 - adequate, safe work space on campus
- Undergraduate students
 - sufficient financial assistance so students offered admission can attend
 - informal meeting space for students distributed across our campuses



5. A Learning Community

- Provide students a window on the world
 - diverse student body
 - primary language of instruction is English
 - multicultural city, in a French-speaking province
- Foster an inclusive and welcoming community
 - support strong collegial bonds
 - foster mutual respect and accountability
 - reduce bureaucracy
 - celebrate diversity