



# Memorandum

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**TO:** Senate

**FROM:** Professor Morton J. Mendelson, Deputy-Provost (Student Life and Learning)

**SUBJECT:** Annual Report on Student Life and Learning

**DATE:** 23 January 2013

**DOCUMENT #:** D12-39

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

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**ISSUE:** 2011-2012 Annual Report on Student Life and Learning.

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**BACKGROUND & RATIONALE:** The Annual Report on Student Life and Learning is meant to provide Senate with an update on the activities of this important area of the University. The report focuses on a number of initiatives recently undertaken to improve services to students at McGill.

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**MOTION OR RESOLUTION FOR APPROVAL:** N/A

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**PRIOR CONSULTATION:** None

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**NEXT STEPS:** N/A

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**APPENDICES:** Appendix A: 2011-2012 Annual Report on Student Life and Learning.

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# Progress Report on Student Life and Learning (January 2013)

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The academic year of 2011-12 posed a number of challenges related to the MUNACA strike and student protests, but the University was able to provide most services to students relatively efficiently under the circumstances. Although some planned projects had to be postponed, Student Life and Learning (SLL), in accordance with the University's objective of improving the student experience, was able to initiate or continue priority projects to enhance services to students.

## Communication and Consultation

Over the past few years, students have asked the University to improve consultation with them. In an effort to better understand student needs, the University has created opportunities for students to voice their concerns and suggestions and to offer feedback on specific issues. Last year, consultation fairs, which were held in both the fall and winter, proved useful to help identify students' priorities as well as their reactions to ongoing University initiatives. Among the topics discussed were academic advising, diversity and equity, freedom of expression on campus, sustainability, campus safety, and students' rights and responsibilities. The two Consultation Fairs were successful in providing students and administrators an outlet for communication, so SLL will continue to collaborate with student associations to hold these fairs regularly.

In addition to their regular participation on University governance (viz., Senate, Board of Governors, standing committees, advisory committees, etc.) and regular consultation undertaken within faculties, schools, and departments regarding academic and non-academic issues, students also have many other opportunities to be heard on campus, including the following:

- extension of student advisory committees to all units in Student Services;
- extensive use of focus groups in Enrolments Services to measure student satisfaction with potential service enhancements;
- informal addition of a student co-chair on the Committee on Student Services
- consultation by McGill Food and Dining Services (MFDS):
  - McGill Food and Inter-Rez Advisory Committee, a joint student-administration body to offer recommendations about the meal plan;
  - McGill University Food and Dining Advisory Committee (FADAC), a broad-based body to provide input regarding dining issues across McGill's campuses.
- consultation by McGill Residences and Student Housing:
  - Inter-Residence Council
  - Hall Councils

- consultation by McGill Athletics and Recreation:
  - McGill Athletics and Recreation Advisory Board
  - Student Athletic Council
  - Varsity Council
- students are consulted formally and informally through regular meetings between student leadership and the Deputy-Provost (Student Life and Learning) .

## Advising and Mentoring

Students have indicated through consultations and by other means, such as the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE), that academic advising is still a concern. The University takes seriously that, through various mechanisms, students have poorly rated professors' availability and feedback, and we are seeking to address the problem. Currently, a workgroup concerned with McGill students' responses on the NSSE is meeting to address the issues identified on the survey where students rate McGill as consistently underperforming.

The development of meaningful advising and mentoring remains a priority for the University. Of note, the Staff-Student Mentoring Program continues to grow, with uptake by academic staff improving. In addition, the Aboriginal Student Advisor contacts admitted students to facilitate connections to the First Peoples' House and academic units, monitor student academic progress and facilitate 'early alert' advising connections. More broadly, the identification of students in academic distress is still a priority, and an Early Alert Workgroup was formed to study the issue. In the coming year, the University will be considering different strategies to help students early enough in the term to ensure that options for success are still possible.

McGill has also invested in staff training specifically focused on advising. The Leadership Development Program includes an advising stream to help advisors develop and acquire new competencies to better serve students. Through membership in advisor networks, advisors are working together to resolve issues and share best practices to improve advising across campus. Other recent initiatives include the In-residence Advising Program, which brings academic advisors into residences, and the new Aboriginal Student Advisor, who partners with academic advisors to help First Nations, Inuit, and Metis students navigate McGill's services and supports.

## Improvement to Services

**On-line Service:** Across a number of units, efforts to enhance on-line services have enabled students to access information and forms remotely. Some of these improvements, such as the new on-line court reservation system at Athletics and Recreation, add convenience to University life, but others provide essential information. For example, students who study away may now apply online rather than using paper based forms. Additionally, incoming international students are now able to view their offer of admission letters from McGill online and may print these letters for use during the immigration application process. Virtual Schedule Builder was introduced in June 2012, enabling students to develop class schedules around other important activities, such as work, participation in athletics, and volunteering, which replaces the previous paper-intensive, manual process. These services are also available to new students five weeks earlier than before, giving them the opportunity to plan their courses before beginning summer work or travel.

**Physical Space:** There have also been improvements to physical spaces. MFDS is continuing to improve locations – e.g., the establishment of rue McGill Deli in the Trottier Building and renovations to Bishop Mountain Hall to create an inviting atmosphere for students to study and dine. Athletics and Recreation refurbished the Fitness Centre, which reopened in September 2011; the new 200-square-metre mezzanine provides more space in one of the busiest places on campus.

The first major project recommended by the University Teaching Lab Working Group was completed on Macdonald Campus: The 80-seat Active Learning Physics Lab in the Macdonald Stewart building provides first-year students in Physics and Chemistry a highly interactive environment for learning Science. It is designed for interactive group learning and builds upon McGill's experience of designing Active Learning Classrooms. On the downtown campus, the Chemistry Department's new state-of-the-art teaching lab facilities were also completed over the summer.

**SKILLSETS:** Teaching and Learning Services (TLS) has continued to enhance SKILLSETS, a collaborative initiative of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and TLS, which complements the academic experience of McGill's graduate students and post-doctoral fellows. The program was expanded, by offering over 200 sessions, to more fully address the nine themes identified by the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) as important to training high quality personnel – viz., Career Development, Communication and Interpersonal Skills, Critical and Creative Thinking, Dissemination of Research and Knowledge Transfer, Integrity and Ethical Conduct, Life Skills, Research Management and Leadership, Societal and Civic Responsibility, and Teaching Competence.. The enhancements to SKILLSETS built on the success of the program, which was recently recognized with the national CAGS/ETS 2012 Award for Excellence and Innovation in Enhancing the Graduate Student Experience.

**Wellness:** The University recognizes that supporting students outside the classroom can be essential to student success, and issues related to wellness are particularly important. Last year, Mental Health Services initiated the Eating Disorder Program (EDP), which is having an important positive impact on campus. Students can access the EDP to receive the following services:

- Multidisciplinary assessments by a psychiatrist, nurse and dietician
- Custom treatment plans
- Individual psychotherapy offered by both Mental Health and Counselling Services
- Nutritional Counselling offered by a dietician
- Nursing/Medical follow-up provided by the Eating Disorder Program nurse and, as needed, the general practitioners at McGill Health Services

In addition, the EDP offers group support, including:

- Psychoeducational Groups offered for eight weeks each semester.
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Groups offered for 10 weeks each semester
- Weekly meal support to students being seen at the EDP
- Weekly open support groups available to students participating in the EDP
- Weekly groups to provide nutritional education

**Student Financial Aid:** The University continues to offer funding to students through entrance bursaries and in-course support, having committed to allocating 30 percent of net new revenues from tuition increases to student aid. In recent years, this has amounted to over \$1M dollars each year in additional financial support, bringing us closer to the goal that any student admitted to McGill will not be excluded because of financial need. However, growth of this important initiative has been stalled due to the current provincial government's retraction of tuition increases and to budget decreases to universities.

## Plans for Student Life and Learning

In the coming years, SLL plans various initiatives intended to improve services to students in a number of important areas:

- Workshops to support Aboriginal student learning and retention
- Expanding the range of international learning experiences available to our students (e.g., more formalized opportunities for undergraduates to participate in research exchanges)
- Improving the residential experience in all types of accommodations provided at McGill
- Implementation of co-curricular records, which will provide students an official document attesting to their extra-curricular activities
- Development of an Early Alert system, which will enable the University to identify students in academic distress before it is too late for them to regain their footing