

Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review the Livestreaming of Senate Meetings

March 19, 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ad Hoc Committee to Review the Livestreaming of Senate Meetings was formed as a result of the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Recording and Transmission of Senate Meetings. The latter committee in its report to Senate on November 14, 2012 recommended that Senate approve the live video transmission of open sessions of Senate meetings on a pilot basis from January to December 2013, and that at the end of the pilot, Senate should review its experience with the transmission of Senate meetings.

The Ad Hoc Committee to Review the Livestreaming of Senate Meetings (hereby “the Committee”) was therefore mandated by Senate to undertake the review, consult with Senators and the community at large, and make recommendations related to the future of livestreaming.

The Committee reviewed the statistics on the number of viewers of the live transmissions, and also solicited feedback from Senators and the community via a questionnaire. The number of responses (220) to the questionnaire was deemed high, compared to other surveys conducted by the Secretariat. This suggests a strong interest in the topic, especially as it relates to engendering broader participation in the workings and functions of Senate, as the highest academic decision-making body of McGill University. The response rate is also viewed positively as the University seeks to provide greater openness, transparency and collegiality in its academic decision-making. A vast majority of respondents felt that live streaming of the Senate meetings added value to the workings of the University. Similarly, an overwhelming majority of the respondents favoured the continuation of livestreaming of Senate meetings, and also indicated that archiving of the live transmissions would enable more viewers, since some find the time of the Senate meetings inconvenient.

In light of its deliberations and findings, the Committee hereby makes the following recommendations:

1. That livestreaming of Senate meetings continue, with a review of the process to be undertaken within the next 5 years;
2. The live transmissions be archived as a non-downloadable file for access by members of the University Community for a period lasting up to the next Senate meeting;
3. In order to increase awareness of livestreaming, the Secretariat will include regular reminders of the process on its website and make reference to the agenda and documents of each Senate meeting on its website. In addition, the Secretariat will further publicize livestreaming of Senate meetings through University electronic communications vehicles, such as “What’s new”;
4. Given the current financial constraints within the University, the Secretary-General will work with the Vice-Principal (Communications and External Relations) on the allocation of resources for livestreaming and archiving of the live transmissions.

Full Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review the Livestreaming of Senate Meetings

1. Introduction

An Ad Hoc Committee on the Recording and Transmission of Senate Meetings was formed in 2012, in response to a request by Senate to examine the recording and transmission of open sessions of Senate meetings. This request arose out of heightened interest in the Senate discussions of the issues arising out of the events of November 10, 2011, and the perception that some form of media transmission would facilitate greater engagement between Senate and the University community. In addition, Leacock 232 can only accommodate 165 people, which at times may be inadequate to hold all interested visitors to the open sessions of Senate. As well, it may not be practicable for all those interested in viewing a Senate meeting to attend in person.

The Ad Hoc Committee on the Recording and Transmission of Senate Meetings submitted a very detailed report to Senate on November 14, 2012. The recommendations of this report, which were all adopted by Senate, were as follows:

1. Senate should grant permission for the live video recording and transmission of open sessions of Senate meetings on a pilot basis from January to December, 2013;
 - 1.1 At the end of the pilot, Senate should review its procedures on the recording and transmission of Senate meetings and make necessary modifications thereto;
 - 1.2 The Senate review should take into account the number of viewers; positive and negative feedback from Senators and the McGill community; incidents arising at Senate meetings and across the campuses; and perceived changes to Senate agendas.
2. Broadcasts of Senate meetings should be transmitted exclusively to members of the University community – McGill staff, students and alumni. Spectators will have to enter their McGill ID and password to access the video.
3. Consistent with the protocols of the House of Commons and the Assemblée Nationale, the camera should only focus on the Chair or a Senator who is speaking.
4. Transmission will be live, and viewers will only have access to the recording during the Senate meetings. The recordings will not be archived or available for later use.
5. On the recommendation of the Steering Committee, Senate should hold closed or confidential sessions when personal or sensitive information, and matters of comparative advantage and budget, are discussed or when otherwise deemed appropriate. Recording would stop during these sessions.
6. For technical ease, the Principal's remarks and the closed and confidential sessions of Senate will be the first items on the agenda, during which there is no video recording and transmission.
7. Persons wishing to view the live transmission should be made aware of their privileges and responsibilities via a Statement of Rights and Responsibilities. Viewers should have to agree to this statement before being granted access to the broadcast and the statement should remain posted on their display screen throughout.
8. The Secretariat should be provided with sufficient additional resources to cover the cost of transmitting and archiving Senate proceedings.

9. The minutes prepared by the Secretary and approved by Senate should remain the only official record of Senate decisions.

In light of recommendations 1.1 and 1.2 above, an Ad Hoc Committee to Review the Livestreaming of Senate Meetings was approved by Senate on November 21, 2013. The Committee was tasked with reviewing the experience of livestreaming of Senate meetings during the pilot project for the period January 1, to December 31, 2013. In accordance with its terms of reference (below), the Committee was expected to:

1. Undertake a review of the livestreaming of Senate meetings taking into account, but not limited to, the following considerations:
 - a. the experience and outcomes of livestreaming since January 1, 2013;
 - b. the perceived benefits and limitations of livestreaming;
 - c. the cost of livestreaming;
 - d. the possible continuation of live streaming or alternate forms of transmission;
2. Consult with Senators and members of the McGill community as it considers appropriate;
3. At the conclusion of its review, report to Senate in writing by February 2014, including any recommendations related to future live streaming.

The membership of the Ad Hoc Committee was as follows: Professor Chandra Madramootoo (Chair); Professor Ashraf Ali, Mr. Adam Bouchard, Miss Haley Dinel, Ms. Antonia Di Paola, Mr. Marc Richard, Mr. Jean-Guy Tremblay (Technical Advisor). The Secretary-General and the Senate Governance Officer provided administrative support to the Committee.

2. Process and Methodology

In order to proceed with its mandate, the Committee first reviewed the statistics on the number of viewers of Senate meetings via livestreaming, for the January 1 to December 31, 2013 reference period. This is shown in Table 1. The Committee further requested data from Network and Communication Services on the cost of livestreaming; this is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of viewers and cost of livestreaming, January-December 2013.

Date of Senate meeting	Number of viewers	Cost \$	Equipment
2013/01/13	50	755	2 cameras/3 staff
2013/02/19	26	755	2 cameras/3 staff
2013/03/20	30	755	2 cameras/3 staff
2013/04/17	44	755	2 cameras/3 staff
2013/05/15	32	755	2 cameras/3 staff
2013/09/18	22	474	1 camera/1 staff
2013/10/16	17	474	1 camera/1 staff
2013/11/20	45	474	1 camera/1 staff
2013/12/04	21	474	1 camera/1 staff

In order to obtain formal feedback from Senators and the community at large, a questionnaire was developed and circulated to the community.

3. Review of Findings

The Secretariat confirmed that there were no written or verbal comments from either Senators or the community in 2013 about the adequacy or shortcomings of the livestreaming process.

3.1. Viewer statistics and costs of livestreaming

As seen from Table 1, the number of viewers fluctuated between 17 and 50 per meeting. It is believed that the peak viewing on January 23 was perhaps due to the discussion about the future of the Royal Victoria Hospital. The higher number on April 17 could be due to the budget presentation by the Provost, while the November 20 meeting coincided with discussions on class scheduling parameters.

3.2. Community feedback via questionnaire

A summary of the responses to the questionnaire, by respondent category, is given in Table 2. There were 220 respondents which is regarded as high, considering previous questionnaire responses to a variety of subjects. This is perhaps a strong indication of interest by the community in the subject. There was approximately the same number of responses in each respondent category.

1. Demographic info (please select one)	2. If you answered "Senator" above, has the livestreaming of Senate meetings had any inhibiting effects on your participation in Senate meetings?	3. Since January 1, 2013, have you viewed any livestreamed broadcasts of Senate meetings, or any parts thereof?	If you answered yes above, please indicate the number of livestreamed broadcasts of Senate meetings which you have logged onto	5. If you answered yes above, did you find the livestreaming of Senate meetings helpful or worthwhile?	6. If you did not view a livestream broadcast of a Senate meeting, was it because (please select one)	7. Would you likely view a recording of a Senate meeting at another time if the recording was archived and available for a period after the Senate meeting?	8. Livestreaming of Senate meetings requires an allocation of University resources. Would you support a continuing allocation of these resources for this purpose?	9. Do you believe the livestreaming of Senate meetings is of value to the University Community?	10. Would you recommend that livestreaming of Senate meetings continue on a permanent basis?
SENATORS= 41	YES=3 NO=38	YES=8 NO=33	1x=5 2x's=3	YES=6 NO=2	Not Interested=8 Not Available=4 Other=23	YES=20 NO=21	YES=21 NO=20	YES=24 NO=17	YES=21 NO=20
Academic staff member (non-Senator) = 43	N/A	YES=9 NO=34	1x=3 2x'S=3 3x's=1 4x's=1	YES=9 NO=0	Not Interested=4 Not Available=12 Other=17	YES=32 NO=11	YES=30 NO=13	YES=36 NO=7	YES=34 NO=9
Administrative and support staff (non- Senator) = 69	N/A	YES=29 NO=40	0=1 1x=9 2x's=8 3x's=5 4x's=2 6x's=3	YES=28 NO=2	Not Interested=8 Not Available=26 Other=15	YES=56 NO=13	YES=43 NO=26	YES=55 NO=14	YES=52 NO=17
Other (non-Senator) = 4	N/A	YES=0 NO=4		N/A	Not Interested=1 Not Available=1 Other=2	YES=3 NO=1	YES=2 NO=2	YES=3 NO=1	YES=3 NO=1
Student (non-Senator) = 63	N/A	YES=9 NO=54	1x=5 2x's=2 3x's=1 4x's=1	YES=9 NO=2	Not Interested=15 Not Available=16 Other=23	YES=48 NO=15	YES=46 NO=17	YES=52 NO=11	YES=47 NO=16
TOTAL #RESPONSES=220	YES=3 NO=38	YES =55 NO= 165	1x=22 2x's=16 3x's=7 4x's=4 6x's=3	YES =52 NO= 6	Not Interested=37 Not Available=59 Other=80	YES =159 NO= 61	YES =142 NO= 78	YES =170 NO= 50	YES =157 NO= 63

The overwhelming majority of Senators indicated that livestreaming had no inhibiting effects on their participation or discussions at Senate meetings. The largest group of respondents who viewed the livestreaming of Senate meetings was the administrative and support staff. Approximately 25% of respondents viewed at least one livestream; the same proportion of respondents found it to be worthwhile. Of those respondents who did not view a livestream broadcast, approximately 35% indicated that they were unavailable to view the transmissions. The largest community group that was unavailable for the live transmissions was the administrative and support staff.

The overwhelming majority of respondents favoured a continuation of livestreaming of Senate meetings, and an equally large percentage indicated that they would view Senate meetings, if the transmissions were archived for a period after each meeting. In addition, some 77% of the respondents believed that livestreaming of Senate meetings is of value to the University Community. Similarly, a strong majority supported an allocation of resources to enable livestreaming. However, in the written comments on the questionnaire, while many favoured livestreaming, they were clear that this should not be at any cost. Therefore, cost should be borne in mind when considering livestreaming and archiving of transmissions.

4. Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review the Livestreaming of Senate Meetings

McGill University places considerable value on openness and transparency in deliberations on academic decision making. Senate is the locus for governance and oversight of these matters, and based on feedback from the community at large, there is a very strong feeling that engagement with the community, via livestreaming of Senate meetings, fosters a more transparent and collegial governance environment at McGill. The Committee was pleased to see the high rate of response to the questionnaires, and the overwhelming view that livestreaming of Senate meetings ought to continue, and that consideration ought to be given to archiving of the transmissions, for those who are unable to view the live transmissions.

In line with the feedback received from the community, the Committee agreed that livestreamed meetings should be archived as a non-downloadable file for a specific period. The Committee concluded that archiving a livestreamed meeting until the next meeting of Senate, at which the previous meeting's minutes are approved, is sufficient and would correspond to predicted interest in the preceding Senate meeting. The Committee decided that since minutes are the meeting's official record, it would be inappropriate to archive livestreamed meetings beyond the point when minutes are approved.

Furthermore, the Committee determined that archiving livestreamed meetings for extended periods would present a number of logistical challenges that would require additional University resources. Archiving during the period when interest in viewing is highest meets the goal of access while avoiding unduly complex and costly administrative systems. The Committee also agreed that archiving a livestreamed meeting for an extended period increases the risk of disseminating it beyond the University community and for use besides what is intended.

The recommendations below will lead to stronger interest in and participation with the academic life of the University, and will foster a deeper understanding – by staff, students and alumni – of the wide range of academic issues that are under the consideration of Senate and its committees. Moreover, the live transmission of Senate meetings is consistent with the fact that – with rare exceptions – Senate and its committees hold their meetings in open session and are accessible to visitors.

Based on the above considerations, the Committee recommends the following:

1. That livestreaming of Senate meetings continue, with a review of the process to be undertaken within the next 5 years;
2. The live transmissions be archived as a non-downloadable file for access by members of the University Community for a period lasting up to the next Senate meeting;
3. In order to increase awareness of livestreaming, the Secretariat will include regular reminders of the process on its website and make reference to the agenda and documents of each Senate meeting on its website. In addition, the Secretariat will further publicize livestreaming of Senate meetings in University electronic communications vehicles, such as “What’s new”;
4. Given the current financial constraints within the University, the Secretary-General will work with the Vice-Principal (Communications and External Relations) on the allocation of resources for livestreaming and archiving of the live transmissions.

The Committee wishes to reaffirm the following conditions, which were presented in the November 2013 report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Recording and Transmission of Senate Meetings:

1. The minutes prepared by the Secretary-General and approved by Senate remain the only official recording of Senate decisions.
2. There is no recording and transmission of the closed and confidential sessions of Senate;
3. On the recommendation of the Steering Committee, Senate should hold closed or confidential sessions when personal or sensitive information, and matters of comparative advantage and budget, are discussed or when otherwise deemed appropriate. Recording would stop during these sessions;
4. Broadcasts of Senate meetings should be transmitted exclusively to members of the University community – McGill staff, students and alumni. Spectators will have to enter their McGill ID and password to access the livestreaming or archived transmission;
5. Consistent with the protocols of the House of Commons and the Assemblée Nationale, the camera should only focus on the Chair or a Senator who is speaking;
6. Persons wishing to view the live transmission should be made aware of their privileges and responsibilities via a Statement of Rights and Responsibilities. Viewers should have to agree to this statement before being granted access to the broadcast and the statement should remain posted on their display screen throughout.