McGILL UNIVERSITY **SENATE**

McGill

Memorandum

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TO:	Senate
FROM:	Professor Christina Wolfson, Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Enhancement of Senate Meetings
SUBJECT:	Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Enhancement of Senate Meetings
DATE:	April 23, 2013
DOCUMENT #:	D13-58
ACTION REQUIRED:	☐ INFORMATION ☒ APPROVAL/DECISION

ISSUE:	The Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Enhancement of Senate Meetings contains recommendations for Senate's approval.
BACKGROUND & RATIONALE:	On October 16, 2013, Senate held an open discussion on "Making Senate meetings more meaningful: Enhancing discussion and engagement." One outcome of this discussion was the establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Enhancement of Senate Meetings (hereby, "the Committee"). In accordance with its terms of reference, the Committee was mandated to review current practices for the conduct of Senate meetings and to identify ways to increase engagement of Senators and to enhance discussion/debate at Senate meetings. Recommendations contained in the report were developed based on feedback received from Senators.
MOTION OR RESOLUTION FOR APPROVAL:	*Be it resolved that Senate approve the* Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Enhancement of Senate Meetings *and agree to implement the Committee's recommendations.*
PRIOR CONSULTATION:	Consultation with Senators
NEXT STEPS:	Implementation of the Committee's recommendations
APPENDICES:	Appendix A: Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Enhancement of Senate Meetings

Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Enhancement of Senate Meetings

April 23, 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On October 16, 2013, Senate held an open discussion on "Making Senate meetings more meaningful: Enhancing discussion and engagement." One outcome of this discussion was the establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Enhancement of Senate Meetings (hereby, "the Committee").

In accordance with its terms of reference, the Committee was mandated to review current practices for the conduct of Senate meetings and to identify ways to increase engagement of Senators and to enhance discussion/debate at Senate meetings.

In light of its deliberations and based on feedback received from Senators, the Committee recommends the following (see the main report for the full explanation of the recommendations):

1. The Principal should step out of her role as Chair more often to allow her to address Senate in her capacity as Principal.

2. A "Business Arising" section should be included on Senate agendas which would allow for the inclusion of updates on items presented at previous meetings of Senate; this should clarify Senate's role in the decision-making process.

3. Senators should be more involved in the management and direction of Senate business
    a. Regarding the Calendar of Business (CoB), Senate should be consulted on its contents and should have the ability to influence the calendar by proposing items it would like to include on the next governance year's agendas. To do this, the CoB could either be circulated in the spring (either the April or May Senate meeting) for Senators to provide feedback to the Secretariat, or an open discussion could be scheduled at Senate's May meeting to discuss the CoB for the upcoming governance year. In either case, the Steering Committee would consider Senate's feedback and its decisions on proposed agenda items would be documented in its report to Senate in September. The Committee recommends a pilot be established for May 2014.

4. Changes to the format of Senate meetings implemented since September 2013 should continue. These include:

    a. Where possible, responses to questions should be circulated in advance of the meeting;
    b. Presentation of reports should not repeat what Senators will have read in the reports. Slide packs should be circulated in advance of the meeting and presenters should deliver brief Powerpoint presentations with a maximum of a few slides, if

necessary; to allow time for more discussion, presenters should highlight only important points and then ask Senate for input on salient issues.

    c. Open discussions should be scheduled on a regular basis. In developing topics for future open discussions, one option is to consider open discussion topics at the end of the governance year to provide an opportunity to create working groups of Senators which would work on preparing for the discussion. Senators would be asked to sign up for the topics that most interest them.

5. The Senate Nominating Committee should undertake a review of the Academic Policy Committee's and Steering Committee's terms of reference. This review should focus on if/how Senate should be more engaged in particular aspects of the Academic Policy Committee's work. The review of the Steering Committee's terms of reference should examine how its mandate may be expanded to allow it to serve as more of a "sounding board" for Senators.

6. Senate orientation sessions should cover additional topics (i.e. how the budget works, how decisions are made, what is the structure of the University) and should be archived and accessible by Senators online for review over the year as needed.

7. Senate should continue to meet on Wednesdays, but meetings should begin at 1:30 p.m. rather than 2:30 p.m.

8. Senate should hold its meetings in the Moot Court (New Chancellor Day Hall). A pilot is scheduled for the May 14, 2014 Senate meeting.

9. Secretariat should distribute Senate dates to student societies, student clubs and athletic groups to provide them an opportunity to set up bake sales/fundraising at the entrance of the Senate meeting. Secretariat should continue to provide coffee/tea.

Full Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Enhancement of Senate Meetings

1. Introduction

On October 16, 2013, Senate held an open discussion on "Making Senate meetings more meaningful: Enhancing discussion and engagement." One outcome of this discussion was the establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Enhancement of Senate Meetings (hereby, "the Committee").

The Committee's terms of reference indicate that it is a special purpose committee of Senate with a mandate to review current practices for the conduct of Senate meetings and to identify ways to increase engagement of Senators and to enhance discussion/debate at Senate meetings. In accordance with its terms of reference (below), the Committee was expected to:

1. Consider strategies and mechanisms to foster the exchange of ideas, enhance discussion and increase engagement at Senate meetings; such strategies and mechanisms will take into account the suggestions made at the October 16, 2013 open discussion, and include:

   a. Potential changes to the order of Senate agendas;

   b. Review of the items of Senate's business included in the annual Calendar of Business;

   c. Appropriate guidelines for presentations to Senate (including both information and approval items);

   d. Provisions to allow for regular opportunities for open discussion or debate at Senate meetings;

   e. Potential ways to better integrate and communicate the work of Committees with Senate;

   f. Additional opportunities for input from individual Senators on planning agendas and preparations for meetings, and for providing comment and feedback on Senate meetings and Senate processes;

   g. Possible changes/additions to the Senate orientation program;

   h. A possible alternate location for Senate meetings;

2. Consult with Senators and members of the McGill community as it considers appropriate;

3. At the conclusion of its review, report to Senate by March 2014, in writing, including any recommendations on next steps and actions concerning Senate meetings.

2. Process and Methodology

To proceed with its mandate, the Committee's discussions focussed on the engagement of Senators. Committee members noted that a number of positive changes have already been introduced during the 2013-2014 academic year, which have helped to re-engage Senators. The Committee agreed to define engagement as follows: 1) Senators' willingness and ability to

participate in/contribute to Senate deliberations, and 2) Senators' perception of the potential to have an impact on Senate deliberations. Based on this definition, the Committee developed and distributed an email request to Senators for input on the issue of engagement. The email asked that respondents provide input on the following two questions:

1)   What are the barriers to engagement at Senate meetings?

2)   What can be done to encourage and support greater engagement of Senators?

The questions were deliberately formulated to be open-ended to allow Senators to provide input in their own words and to avoid providing pre-determined options for response.

3.   Review of Findings

Emails were sent to all 107 Senators. Approximately 30 responses were received; identifying information was removed and the responses were then collated for review by the Committee. The total number of respondents is unknown since some of the responses were sent on behalf of several Senators. The table of collated responses was reviewed by the members of the Committee and discussed in detail. The nature of the responses (open-text) did not allow for a quantitative analysis; nevertheless, there were clear themes that emerged from the responses to each of the questions and there were some consistent observations/comments by respondents (see below).

A number of Senators commented that in the past few years they have felt that their input had little influence. Several Senators, however, reported that they had observed an improvement since September 2013 with the addition of more open discussions, less reading of reports at the meetings and shorter Senate meetings. There was an overall sense that Senate business is being dealt with more efficiently rather than being bogged down by secondary issues. Senators also expressed a desire to have the Principal participate more fully in discussions, requiring that she step out of the Chair more often. The Committee considered how to enhance the engagement of Senators in the development of topics for future open discussions. One option is to consider open discussion topics at the end of the governance year to provide an opportunity to create working groups of Senators which would work on preparing for the discussion in the upcoming governance year (September to May). Senators would be asked to sign up for the topics that most interest them.

Senators reported that they were not fully aware of the status of issues which had been presented, discussed or approved at previous sessions. To address this issue, the Committee felt that including a "Business Arising" section on Senate agendas would allow for the inclusion of updates on items presented at previous meetings of Senate; this should clarify Senate's role in the decision-making process.

While attendance remains high at each meeting, a number of respondents stated that they felt somewhat disengaged. There was a concern that it was difficult to comment on the work of a standing and/or ad hoc committee based only on a short report, and some felt uncomfortable critiquing the hard work done by a committee after only a short discussion.

Senators also provided suggestions concerning standing committees of Senate. For example, some respondents felt that new programs considered by the Academic Policy Committee (APC) should be brought to Senate for discussion and feedback prior to the major discussion by APC; the issue would then be sent back to the APC, which would present a recommendation (including Senate's input) to Senate. This would engage Senators in the new program approval process prior to the completion of APC deliberations. Committee members noted that the mandate of the APC appears to have expanded over the past several years, in a way that has reduced the engagement of Senators.

Based on the feedback received from Senators, the Committee agreed that the mandate of the Senate Steering Committee is too narrow. Therefore, the Steering Committee's terms of reference should be revised to expand its mandate, allowing it to serve as more of a "sounding board" for Senators. To achieve this, the Committee's structure/membership should be revised to include representation of Senate's major constituencies, and suggested agenda items and topics for discussion should be made to the Steering Committee directly from Senators.

Several respondents mentioned the Senate orientation session and provided feedback on how to increase its usefulness. The Committee suggests future orientation sessions cover additional topics (i.e. how the budget works, how decisions are made, what is the administrative structure of the University) and that the sessions be archived and accessible by Senators online for review over the year as needed.

The Committee also received feedback on questions to Senate. The Committee believed that, often, the most effective questions were those posed through collaborations across Senate constituencies (e.g. student-faculty member, support staff-faculty member) and that these collaborations should be encouraged.

A common theme throughout the responses was that the current physical layout and poor acoustics of the Senate chamber were important barriers to engagement. In addition, the timing of the Senate meetings (late in the afternoon) was also considered problematic when meetings, particularly for those who have caregiving responsibilities. It was noted that the structure of Senate agendas is presented in the Standing Rules of Procedure and that these should be examined with a view to establish greater flexibility in the order of the agenda.

4.   Recommendations Ad Hoc Committee on the Enhancement of Senate Meetings

In light of its deliberations and based on feedback received from Senators, the Committee recommends the following:

1. The Principal should step out of her role as Chair more often to allow her to address Senate in her capacity as Principal.

2. A "Business Arising" section should be included on Senate agendas which would allow for the inclusion of updates on items presented at previous meetings of Senate; this should clarify Senate's role in the decision-making process.

3. Senators should be more involved in the management and direction of Senate business
    a. Regarding the Calendar of Business (CoB), Senate should be consulted on its contents and should have the ability to influence the calendar by proposing items it would like to include on the next governance year's agendas. To do this, the CoB could either be circulated in the spring (either the April or May Senate meeting) for Senators to provide feedback to the Secretariat, or an open discussion could be scheduled at Senate's May meeting to discuss the CoB for the upcoming governance year. In either case, the Steering Committee would consider Senate's feedback and its decisions on proposed agenda items would be documented in its report to Senate in September. The Committee recommends a pilot be established for May 2014, if possible.

4. Changes to the format of Senate meetings implemented since September 2013 should continue. These include:
    a. Where possible, responses to questions should be circulated in advance of the meeting;
    b. Presentation of reports should not repeat what Senators will have read in the reports. Slide packs should be circulated in advance of the meeting and presenters should deliver brief Powerpoint presentations with a maximum of a few slides, if necessary; to allow time for more discussion, presenters should highlight only important points and then ask Senate for input on salient issues.
    c. Open discussions should be scheduled on a regular basis. In developing topics for future open discussions, one option is to consider open discussion topics at the end of the governance year to provide an opportunity to create working groups of Senators which would work on preparing for the discussion. Senators would be asked to sign up for the topics that most interest them.

5. The Senate Nominating Committee should undertake a review of the Academic Policy Committee's and Steering Committee's terms of reference. This review should focus on if/how Senate should be more engaged in particular aspects of the Academic Policy Committee's work. The review of the Steering Committee's terms of reference should examine how its mandate may be expanded to allow it to serve as more of a "sounding board" for Senators.

6. Senate orientation sessions should cover additional topics (i.e. how the budget works, how decisions are made, what is the structure of the University) and should be archived and accessible by Senators online for review over the year as needed.

7. Senate should continue to meet on Wednesdays, but meetings should begin at 1:30 p.m. rather than 2:30 p.m.

8. Senate should hold its meetings in the Moot Court (New Chancellor Day Hall). A pilot is scheduled for the May 14, 2014 Senate meeting.

9. Secretariat should distribute Senate dates to student societies, student clubs and athletic groups to provide them an opportunity to set up bake sales/fundraising at the entrance of the Senate meeting. Secretariat should continue to provide coffee/tea as before.