
TO: Senate

FROM: Senator Hebert

SUBJECT: Question regarding the Methods for identifying University Advancement Priorities

MEETING DATE: April 19, 2023

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University Advancement (UA) is tasked with helping find donors to fund areas that McGill University and its students, staff and faculty identify as critical needs to advance its mission. UA defines its mission as follows:

UA “promotes McGill to its global community and to the public, engaging alumni, volunteers and friends of the University, and building on McGill’s record of fundraising success in support of University priorities.”

The key point for me is “in support of university priorities”. My questions relate to this mission and how UA identifies such priorities. My understanding is that from the donors they identify and form relationships with, they receive commissions from each donation actually given rather than a salary from the university. I worry that this model may lead them to follow the desires of what donors want done at McGill, rather than want McGill actually needs.

QUESTION:

- 1) How does UA determine the needs critical for McGill University?
 - 2) If a particular donation to be obtained requires McGill University to invest its own resources in a project that it does not itself identify as critical, does this draw money away from McGill’s own priorities?
 - 3) Does the funding model for UA personnel serve the interests of donors more than the interests and needs of the university?
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**Please refer to the [Guidelines for the Review of Questions and Motions by the Senate Steering Committee](#) for more information on this process.*

The following answer was provided by Senator Manfredi and Senator Weinstein in advance of the meeting.

Thank you for your question, Senator Hebert. We would like to start with a point of clarification. University Advancement staff members do not receive commission in lieu of salary. No employee receives any portion of a philanthropic gift as compensation for efforts in fundraising. Fundraising staff in University Advancement are paid an annual salary in line with the salary scales established for the University's management and professional staff. Some may be eligible for an annual incentive-based payment in addition to their base salary, based on their performance across several key metrics that support UA's overall philanthropic commitment. The generous philanthropic support of donors to McGill – at all levels – has been and will continue to be an important component of the pursuit of academic priorities, as it is at most Universities. Such support is much appreciated and our relationships with our donors, many of whom are alumni, are important. At the same time, institutional and academic autonomy remain essential guiding principles; donor support must enable or enhance scholarly pursuit and should not define it.

University Advancement is mandated to pursue philanthropic support of priority initiatives as identified by University leadership – by the Principal, the Provost, and the Deans, in particular. The University's core academic priorities are articulated in, for example, the Strategic Academic Plan, and in Faculty-level strategic plans developed by the Deans. Commitments made in the McGill University Master Plan, the Strategic Research Plan, and in various other planning documents reviewed by Senate and the Board of Governors reflect the core academic priorities of the University. As always, excellence in research and teaching and support of student accessibility and the student experience are central. Colleagues in UA seek to align donor interest with opportunities that reflect and support these priorities.

No philanthropic gift is accepted from a donor without the agreement of the senior member of the unit of the University which would benefit from and be responsible for such a gift. In practice, that is most frequently the Dean of a Faculty, as most fundraising efforts support Faculty-based priorities. Any donation of a value greater than \$1 million must be reviewed and approved by the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic) regardless of its intended purpose. In certain instances, McGill will agree to invest University resources in a project or initiative for which philanthropic support is offered. Such investment can be made in a variety of ways including, for example, physical space to house research and/or teaching activity, financial contribution to salaries of academic or support staff, or contribution to the development of new infrastructure. As no gift would be accepted that has not been determined to address an institutional priority and to be in the best interest of the University, it would never be the case that such investment would not be in pursuit of McGill's core needs and aspirations.