

TO: Senate

FROM: Senator Wei and Senator Wright

SUBJECT: Question regarding the Quality of Student Life for First-Year Students

MEETING DATE: November 13, 2024

DOCUMENT #: D24-19

PREAMBLE: First-year students are a vulnerable group in the undergraduate cohort. Most are new to the city, nearly one-third are new to the country, and many have little experience living independently. Given these unique challenges, it is crucial that special attention and support be provided to first-year students at McGill University.

Recent decisions and proposals by the McGill administration will adversely affect the student life and academics of first-year undergraduate students. On February 14th 2024, McGill Student Housing and Hospitality Services announced the removal of Floor Fellows from first-year residences beginning in the 2024-2025 academic year. This decision removed a key source of on-site social and academic support for first-year students. Floor fellows served as the primary point of contact for urgent matters, mental health crises, and general issues. While Residence Life Managers and Residence Life Facilitators have been tasked to engage with students and offer support, these positions cannot replace the immediate in-residence support and personal contacts that Floor Fellows invaluablely provided.

Additionally, the McGill administration is considering delaying the move-in date for first-year residences by one week in the 2025-2026 academic year. If implemented, this decision would limit and potentially eliminate both academic and non-academic orientation events, due to insufficient time between the revised move-in date and the first day of classes for such events to take place. Orientation events provide first-year students with essential information about starting at McGill, allow them to settle into their new living spaces, and help them forge social connections in an unfamiliar environment. Without these opportunities, first-year students may feel more anxious and unprepared for their upcoming university experience.

QUESTIONS:

1. How does the administration ensure that the quality of student life for first-year students are considered and upheld when making decisions regarding academics, operations, and support services?
 2. In light of the decisions outlined in the preamble that will adversely affect first-year students, how will the administration protect the student life of this vulnerable group going forward?
 3. Does the administration directly consult first-year students regarding decisions that affect their student life and wellbeing?
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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 response was provided by Professor Angela Campbell, Interim Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning).

Thank you for your questions, Senators Wei and Wright.

Consideration Through Consultation

McGill Student Life and Learning (SLL) regularly engages in consultations with students, including first-year students, to ensure decisions are rooted in evidence-based research and aligned with students' realities.

SLL consults with students in several ways, such as by including student representation on advisory committees and in the Student Services Campus Life & Engagement Orientation Planning Group, by holding regular meetings with student societies, and by conducting surveys. Below are some examples of SLL's ongoing engagement efforts:

Advisory committees

An example of a decision made in consultation with students is the implementation of a Fall Reading Break. Extensive stakeholder consultations were held to gather considerations that ultimately shaped the decision. The proposal was approved by Senate on May 13, 2020 (please see the [Fall Reading Break proposal](#) for details). To make room in the fall term for the reading break, adjustments were made to the Calendar of Academic Dates for 2023-24 with revisions proposed and approved for the 2021-22 and 2022-23 terms as well (see the [proposal](#) for details).

Through extensive discussion with the administration, PGSS, MACES, and the Subcommittee on Fall Reading Break (which included representation from SSMU and MCSS), SLL recommended amendments to the Guidelines Regarding the Setting of the University Calendar of Academic Dates.

This allowed for the Fall term to begin in August, prior to Labour Day to accommodate a reading break in October. During these consultations, the issue of a shorter orientation period was discussed, and student representatives deemed this compromise acceptable to gain the benefit of a reading break, notably from a wellness perspective.

Orientation Planning Group

Each year, the SLL Student Services, Campus Life & Engagement team hosts an Orientation Planning Group that includes student representatives. This group collaborates to create programs that meet the academic, social and student-life needs of all participants.

Post-orientation Week Survey for Undergraduate Students

For the past twelve years, SLL has conducted the Post-orientation Week Survey for Undergraduate Students. Through the Orientation Planning Group, we ensure that relevant questions are included, and the collected data are taken into account when making decisions about programming.

Upcoming opportunities for consultation

In our recent consultation regarding adjusting the residence move-in date from August 15 to August 22 and 23, 2025, student representatives expressed concerns over the shortened timeframe for orientation activities. While the recommendation to adjust the move-in date was approved, the Office of the Deputy Provost (SLL) has committed to working closely with student groups to address challenges they may face while planning orientation activities for 2025 and to look at ways to offset any adverse financial consequences for student societies. A follow-up meeting is scheduled for November 18, 2024 involving representatives from the Office of the Deputy Provost (SLL), Student Services, the Office of the Dean of Students, the SSMU, and several student associations.

I am also exploring the potential for a “First Year Students’ Council” to serve as a sounding board for the administration on issues unique to undergraduate students starting in their first year at McGill. I welcome undergraduate students’ perspectives on this idea.

Protecting the Student Life of First-year Students

The University remains committed to delivering and promoting resources that support students’ personal, social, and academic flourishing. Services include those provided by the Wellness Hub, telehealth applications like the GuardMe Student Support Program, and on-campus recreational programs and events. We will continue to offer direct support services through Student Services and the Office of the Dean of Students.

Finally, for further context and in response to your questions, please refer to the [Question regarding the Elimination of Floor Fellows](#), presented to the Senate meeting of March 20, 2024.