

To: Senate

From: Myriam Bouchentouf

Subject: Classroom Sizes

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Senate Meeting Date: 2006-11-15

Background:

McGill University is known for large classrooms and an impersonal learning experience, as exemplified in the 2007 Princeton review, where we ranked 3rd in the "Rare Classroom Discussion" category, and the Globe and Mail's giving us a C+ in class sizes. Despite the dimension of our undergraduate population, there are some programs that do succeed in providing students with core classes of more reasonable size. The Bachelor of Commerce Program has been able to claim to incoming students that "throughout [their] undergraduate years at McGill, [they would] be part of a highly motivated, closely-knit class", a claim dependant on the programs structure of medium small classes (50-75) throughout the program. Students support this advantage, appreciating relatively small classes which allow them to better understand the subject matter through close contact with professors and class participation.

Last year, a question was brought to Senate concerning one class threatened with drastic changes in structure that would result in one 360 person class. In the Dean of Management's response, he explained that the changes proposed were "part of a broader effort within the Faculty and across the University to ensure that we are using our instructional and faculty resources in the best possible way to meet the needs of students within the context of the resource constraints that we face at the University." In discussions about cost savings with Associate Dean Academic Jan Jorgenson at the Undergraduate Program Committee last year, it was stated that cost savings from increased class sizes are negligible. In the winter 2006 B. Com. Program redesign taskforce report, it was agreed that increasing class sizes was not necessary, nor desirable, given their impact on students' learning experience.

Since then, some classes in the core program have seen significant changes in their section offerings and class sizes, going from many classes of 50 students to fewer sections of 300 students, to the shock and chagrin of the undergraduate population.

Question:

- 1) Given the importance of class sizes in the current curriculum, what is the Desautels Faculty of Management's long term vision for the Bachelors of Commerce, and how do these changes improve the formation of B Com graduates?
- 2) How can the Faculty ensure that an increase in class sizes will not hinder the quality of the learning experience? Specifically, what changes will be implemented to prevent further student disengagement?
- 3) If resource constraints are the principal motivators for these changes, then quite simply: where is the money going?
- 4) Given our reputation, is the University's policy to protect our current opportunities for class participation, or are we resigned to continuing the trend of the impersonal classroom experience?