

Question

TO: Senate

QUESTION FROM: Senators Kpeglo-Hennessy and Sobat

RESPONSE FROM: Senator Dyens (Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning))

SUBJECT: Question and Response Regarding Course Outlines

MEETING DATE: February 17, 2016

PREAMBLE: Whereas for the majority of students, initial registration for an academic year falls in early April;¹

Whereas the Charter of Student Rights only requires that course outlines be made available to students within the first week of classes in each respective term;²

Whereas the McGill eCalendar contains short descriptions of course *content*, but not methods of evaluation;

Whereas for many reasons, such as variation in instructors, past course outlines (where available) may be inaccurate;

Whereas MyCourses opens access to course materials on the first day of classes and only to those registered or on the wait-list of a class;

Whereas even tentative course outlines would provide more information than is currently available to many students.

QUESTION:

1. With the existing system of the eCalendar in place, could methods of course evaluation be added to course descriptions, given that this already occurs elsewhere at McGill?³
2. What other procedures and practices exist, centralized or decentralized, across the university regarding when syllabi must be completed or posted?
3. Is the university willing to ask for tentative course outlines, subject to change, that include basic information such as a breakdown of assignments in order to facilitate student course registration?

¹ <https://www.mcgill.ca/students/courses/add/when>

² https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/charter-of-students-rights_0.pdf

³ For example, on the Department of English website: <https://www.mcgill.ca/english/undergrad/2015-16-undergraduate-courses/200-level-introductory-courses>

RESPONSE:

Dear Senators Kpeglo-Hennessy and Sobat,

Thank you for your questions. Let me answer them in order:

1-The undergraduate portion of the eCalendar is finalized in late January –early February each year. Having course syllabi and methods of evaluation included in the eCalendar would prove difficult and also counter productive in some instances. We expect professors to be at the forefront of research in their discipline and asking for definite course syllabi 9-12 months in advance of the start of the course would not allow most of them to include the most up to date research in their courses. Please also remember that some courses do not yet have instructors by the time the eCalendar goes into production. Further, some departments and Faculties already have very regulated assessment processes (Law, Dentistry, and Medicine, for example) which are usually known in advance by all concerned.

Professors often use the summer months to redesign their courses based on feedback from students, discussions with colleagues, and newly available pedagogic strategies and tools. Producing a course outline for the next year before the current year has concluded would significantly limit opportunity for revision based on feedback and new developments. It may also cause unintended confusion if the final syllabus distributed at the start of the course differs from the tentative one produced for the eCalendar.

2-McGill's rules and regulations state the following:

10.2 Every instructor shall provide students during the first week of lectures with a written course outline. This information should include, where appropriate: (a) A description of the topics to be considered in the course, (b) A list of required and recommended readings and other materials, (c) A description of the means of evaluation to be used in the course, (d) A statement regarding the right of every student to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded (not applicable to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives). (e) The instructor's office hours for students, office location and telephone number for office appointments.
<http://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/charter-of-students-rights.pdf>

3- Departments are free to make course outlines available as soon as possible and some departments have adopted the practice of making them available to students ahead of the start of term, but ultimately I believe this remains a decision best made at the departmental level.

Thank you

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Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning)