

Question

TO: Senate

FROM: Question from Senator Benjamin Brunot
Response from Senator Ollivier Dyens

SUBJECT: Question and Response Regarding the Current Refugee Crisis

MEETING DATE: October 21, 2015

PREAMBLE: Whereas McGill University announced on September 25th, that it is “considering a number of ways in which it can assist in the [current refugee crisis]”, including tripling the number of refugees that it accepts as students¹,

Whereas, since 1987, McGill has accepted 36 students through the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) Student Refugee Program, i.e. an average of 1.2 refugee intake per year, funded by McGill students’ contributions²,

Whereas current students’ contributions allow to offer funding to two new refugee students every year³,

Whereas McGill redirected \$140,000 from existing bursaries budget to that specific program, allowing to triple that number and to welcome six new refugee students next year instead of two⁴,

Whereas the education programs targeting people able to reach host countries with valid documentation, such as WUSC, are essential components of our daily commitment to solidarity on our campuses,

Whereas those programs, however, do not address the higher education needs of the vast majority of victims of such conflicts⁵,

Whereas responding to this crisis requires to be aware of a complex network of facts and dynamics, a number of which are summarized in the attached fact sheet,

Whereas “keeping higher education opportunities available is crucial because skilled workers and universities play an important role in rebuilding countries after conflict”⁶,

QUESTION:

1. Was McGill's contribution to the Student Refugee Program this year a one-off occurrence or is McGill planning to maintain this level of funding for upcoming years or even to increase it? And in case of insufficient financial resources, what would be McGill's priorities with regard to this program?
2. What is McGill doing or planning to do in order to facilitate access to higher education for those students who are fleeing war or persecution? In particular, what is being done to address the barriers these students face:
 - a) In matters of admission procedures (for instance, when students are unable to provide official academic records) and admission requirements (e.g. offering of conditional admission with prerequisite courses or language courses)?
 - b) In matters of enrolment and student records, will McGill lobby the Quebec Ministry of Higher Education to accommodate registration of students who are meritorious of receiving quality higher education, but are unable to provide valid immigration documentation?
 - c) In matters of academic programming and support (e.g. participating to for-credits off-shore or distance education initiatives for war victims until they can pursue their education at McGill or at other institutions)

APPENDIX:

Appendix A: Fact Sheet

RESPONSE:

Dear Senator Brunot:

This is a very important and critical issue. As you know, McGill has a number of ongoing initiatives that attempt to address this issue.

Thanks to University Advancement, the Kharusi Family International Science Bursary, which supports MSc students born or residing in regions of political, social or religious turmoil, is now part of our financial commitment. We also have allocated \$130,000 this year to increase the number of student refugees through the WUSC program. I cannot state with certainty that this funding will be maintained next year as our financial aid package is dependent on enrolment, increases to tuition, and the ability of University Advancement to raise funds. I think we can say that tripling our capacity not only requires a monetary investment but also careful monitoring to ensure the necessary support and services are in place. Supporting student refugees is not only a matter of increased financial aid, but also of long term support. This is a pilot year and we are strongly considering an increased intake, especially if

our funding situation remains stable. The MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program, with its focus on allowing students from challenged regions of Africa to attend McGill, also plays a role in addressing the situation you have highlighted. We currently welcome 39 MasterCard Foundation Scholars and we will bring 100 scholars over the program's 10 year commitment. Finally, please note that the Office of the Provost is currently working with at least one faculty to accommodate a scholar who has been awarded a special "scholar rescue" fellowship from an international NGO.

What we can do :

- Work closely with SSMU and PGSS to seek increased support by a new referendum.
- Continue our tuition set-aside formula program, which helps not only more student refugees but also attends to the financial needs of our traditional student body.
- Engage University Advancement to grow this initiative. Please note however that raising funds is challenging and that supporting refugee students in a thorough fashion demands a very large financial commitment.

As for admission criteria : In 2010-11, the Committee on Enrolment and Student Affairs, a Senate Committee, approved conditional acceptances for international students who already meet all of the academic qualifications for a given program of study except for their level of proficiency in English. Provisionally accepted students would be enrolled in the McGill Certificate of Proficiency in English Language and Culture; completion of which would permit them to enroll directly into their degree program.

Exceptionally, the University considers for admission those students who present documentation explaining extenuating circumstances that impede their ability to meet the usual requirements for admission.

Students who apply for admission and who, due to catastrophic circumstances such as war or natural disaster, are not able to present formal, official documentation to substantiate their prior academic studies, are considered on a case by case basis. Such applicants may be asked to provide sworn affidavits or other similar documentation regarding their prior studies.

As for lobbying the government : We actively lobby the government on many different issues that are critical to McGill and to its community. Immigration issues are complex, involving both the Provincial and the Federal governments. Quebec has been quite vocal in its desire to increase the number of Syrian refugees coming to the Province; however,

the Federal government is more reserved in its desire to speed up the process.

Our ability to allow more people from around the world to access our institution is closely linked to our MOOCs initiative. McGill has been a leader in the development of MOOCs and is now looking at developing a more fully online presence.

Thank you
Ollivier Dyens, Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning)

¹ [“McGill to increase refugee-student placements”](#), *McGill Reporter*, Sep. 25, 2015

² *idem*

³ *idem*

⁴ *idem*

⁵ Elizabeth Redden, [“The Refugee Crisis and Higher Ed”](#), *Inside Higher Ed*, Sep. 25, 2015

⁶ Koen Lamberts, Vice-chancellor, University of York (UK), in Helen Lock and Zofia Niemtus, [« 'We want to be part of the solution': universities reach out to refugees »](#), *The Guardian*, Oct. 2, 2015

Fact Sheet

Re: Question Regarding the Current Refugee Crisis (Senator Brunot, Oct. 21, 2015)

When looking at the question mentioned above, the Senate is invited to consider the following elements:

- The total number of displaced Syrians as a result of the current civil war is estimated to **over 11 million**¹,
- Out of the 4 million Syrian refugees registered at UNHCR facilities in the Middle East and North Africa, 450,000 are 18 to 22 years old, and **90,000 to 110,000 of those this age are qualified for university**²,
- In May 2013, a joint report of the Institute of International Education and University of California in Davis already warned that “[t]he dual impact of institutional collapse [of higher education in the country] and worsening security means that **Syria faces the loss of a generation of university graduates**. [...] They are the human capital that will be critical to the re-building of Syrian society after the conflict has ended, and they will have an even more crucial role to play as a modern and moderating force in confronting the religious intolerance and ethnic hatred that increasingly defines the war in their homeland.”³
- In 2015, **Canada had processed only 8,886 asylum requests** (including 277 from Syrians) by the end of June, **and had only welcomed 1,074 formerly accepted Syrian refugees** on its soil by the end of August⁴.
- The **province of Quebec is home to more than half of the 2,374 Syrian refugees** who came to Canada between January 2014 and August 2015⁵.
- Current Canadian immigration and refugee policies highly restrict who may come apply for asylum in Canada and otherwise prevent to reach Canada legally and safely to seek asylum, namely through imposing heavy fines on airlines and carriers transporting passengers whose entry in Canada is refused at the port of entry. Airlines and carriers check-in agents are thus allowed to refuse passengers without proper analysis of their case by a Canadian immigration agent, **making it impossible as a matter of fact for asylum seekers to escape quickly from war or persecution on board of a regular, safe and affordable commercial flight or ship to Canada**⁶.
- **Prof. François Crépeau (Faculty of Law)**, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants and holder of the Oppenheimer Chair in Public International Law, **points out that migrants entering illegally to safer host countries shall not be refused access to education**, since irregular migration is only an administrative noncompliance but in no way a criminal offence⁷, a view that the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council respectively followed in adopting resolutions on the protection of migrants and on the protection of migrants in transit⁸.
- The right to education is entrenched in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates that **“higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit”**⁹.
- **Quebec Ministry of Education imposes to refuse undocumented students at postsecondary institutions**¹⁰, even if their academic merit should dictate otherwise,

while Quebec School Boards are now obliged to accept them at primary and secondary levels without any documentation or academic merit condition, since the Quebec Ombudsman denounced this infringement of basic human right in November 2014¹¹.

- Some academic initiatives are already being launched around the world to grant access to higher education to the youth actually fleeing conflicts in their home countries¹²:
 - In Germany, university/MOOC-provider partnerships are being designed to **allow asylum seekers, without regard to their status or place of stay, to attend free online courses before settlement and then transfer to traditional university setting, obtaining an official degree at the end of their curriculum**¹³.
 - In France and Switzerland, **Panthéon-Sorbonne University (Paris I), Swiss Federal Institute of Technology of Lausanne (EPFL) and France National Center for Distance Education (CNED)** have partnered with the UNHCR and Swiss NGO SIHO to **deliver full-degree programs to refugees at UniRef in Burundi**, the first university to ever open in a refugee camp; their first classes started a few weeks ago, September 28, 2015¹⁴.

¹ [“2015 UNHCR country operations profile - Syrian Arab Republic”](#), UN High Commission for Refugees

² *idem*

³ K. D. Watenpaugh, A. L. Fricke and T. Siegel, « [Uncounted and Unacknowledged: Syria’s Refugee University Students and Academics in Jordan](#) », Institute of International Education, May 2013.

⁴ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada Statistics, in Daniel Schwartz, “[Canada's refugees by the numbers: the data](#)”, *CBC News*, Oct 04, 2015

⁵ Laura Hanrahan, “[Understanding Quebec’s Role In The Syrian Refugee Crisis](#)”, *The McGill Tribune*, Sep. 29, 2015

⁶ Tilman Rodenhäuser, “[Another Brick in the Wall: Carrier Sanctions and the Privatization of Immigration Control](#)”, *International Journal of Refugee Law* (2014) 26 (2): 223-247

⁷ François Crépeau, [Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants](#), UN General Assembly, Aug. 11, 2014, and Anil Dawar, “[Give illegals free access to schools, NHS and housing' says UN Human Rights tsar](#)”, *The Daily*, Feb 6, 2015

⁸ [Resolution 68/179 adopted by the UN General Assembly on Dec. 18, 2013](#), and [Resolution 29/2 adopted by the UN Human Rights Council on July 2, 2015](#)

⁹ [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), art. 26, adopted by the UN General Assembly on Dec. 10, 1948

¹⁰ Ministère de l’Éducation, de l’Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche du Québec, “[Mandat d'application de procédures d'audit spécifiées sur l'effectif universitaire](#)”, juin 2015

¹¹ Katherine Wilderton, “[Quebec plans to allow undocumented children to get free schooling](#)”, *Montreal Gazette*, Aug. 25, 2015

¹² Ellie Bothwell, « [News blog: are universities doing enough in response to the refugee crisis?](#) », *Times Higher Education*, Sep. 10, 2015.

¹³ Ellie Bothwell, “[University for refugees launches crowdfunding campaign](#)”, *Times Higher Education*, Sep. 7, 2015

¹⁴ [UniRef Press Pack](#) and Benoît Floc'h, « [Première mondiale au Burundi : une université dans un camp de réfugiés](#) », *Le Monde*, March 15, 2015