

Question

TO: Senate

FROM: Claire Stewart-Kanigan, Arts Student Senator (SSMU)
Cameron Butler, Student Senator (MCSS)

SUBJECT: Question Regarding Research Ethics and Partnerships Policy Development

MEETING DATE: **April 23, 2014**

PREAMBLE: Whereas, at the Principal’s Address on March 28th, 2014, in response to a question regarding research ethics, Principal Fortier stated that “it is important for us to look at [research] partnerships and see and assess for ourselves if indeed they meet our principles and our values ... One of the things that we have already started is to design a process that will allow us to ask questions before doing the final signature on the contract regarding ... the ethical question and make sure that with the collaborations we participate in, we know that we are meeting our own values and principles... I know that the team in Research [Office of the Vice-Principal (Research and International Relations)] is already working on designing that process;”

Whereas, it is unclear what research ethics policy development process was being referenced, and upon contacting the Office of the Vice-Principal (Research and International Relations), further information was not made available;

QUESTION: What is the research ethics policy development process referred to in the above statement, and under whom is it being conducted?

What is the timeline for its completion?

What channels are available for students to become involved in contributing to the development of said policy?

Response:

Thank you, Senators, for these questions.

At the Principal's Address on March 28, 2014, Professor Fortier stated, "one of the things we've already started is a process that will allow us to ask questions before the final signature on the contract regarding ethical questions, and make sure that the collaborations we participate in...[that] we are meeting our own values and principles. This is something that will happen and I know the team in Research is already designing this process."

I would like to take this opportunity to outline the actions the Vice-Principal (Research and International Relations) is taking to review McGill's policies regarding the conduct of research, with the aim of ensuring they are of the highest quality and reflect our own values and principles. I would also like to share the timeline for this work and to discuss how students and the University community can contribute to this process.

It bears repeating at the outset that McGill is involved in research with many partners, including governmental, community, non-profit, and industrial partners, and that our researchers conduct their work with integrity and adhere to the highest ethical standards.

As per the University's *Regulation on the Conduct of Research* [.pdf], McGill researchers acknowledge that with academic freedom comes the responsibility to ensure that all research and scholarship:

- Is informed by the principles of honesty, integrity, trust, accountability and collegiality;
- Meets high scientific and ethical standards;
- Is conducted with honest and thoughtful inquiry, rigorous analysis, and accountability for the use of professional standards; and
- Seeks to increase knowledge in ways that do not harm but which benefit society.

I believe that a statement regarding McGill's values and principles would be an important addition to the *Policy on the Conduct of Research*. Moreover, it should be aligned with McGill's *Strategic Research Plan*, which includes five "Core Commitments" to research that supports: Ideas, Innovation, Sustainability, Collaboration and Partnership, and Social Engagement.

The *Regulations on the Conduct of Research* are set to receive its triennial review in 2014 under the leadership of the Vice-Principal (Research and International Relations). Among the objectives is to update the Regulations according to the highest international standards. Ethical values in partnership-driven research will be specifically addressed in the revised policy. It will propose language, if necessary, that will both provide clear guidelines for McGill researchers and students who wish to collaborate with external partners while maintaining our commitment to our values and principles and academic freedom.

The first step of the review will be to identify individuals from the McGill community to participate in a working group. This group will include faculty members, students, and staff with interests in this area. As per the current Regulations, three members of the working group will be appointed by the Vice-Principal (Research and International Relations), the Provost, and the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies; three members of the academic staff will be nominated by the Senate Nominating Committee; and two students will be nominated by the PGSS and SSMU.

McGill's leading ethicists will be specifically targeted for membership on the working group. Moreover, the review process includes consultation with the wider McGill community. We anticipate the review process to take approximately one year. I will report back to Senate on the progress and recommendations from the working group at the end of the 2015 academic year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Rosie Goldstein, Vice-Principal (Research and International Relations)