

Question

McGILL UNIVERSITY **SENATE**

**TO:** Senate

**FROM:** Alvin Kuate Defo, Science Student Senator

 Yasmeen Gholmieh, Arts Student Senator

 Claire Stewart-Kanigan, Arts Student Senator

 Guillaume Blais, Law Student Senator

 Natalie Hiles, Nursing Student Senator

**SUBJECT:** Question Regarding the *University Student Assessment Policy*

**MEETING DATE:** February 19, 2014

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| **PREAMBLE:** | Whereas, the *University Student Assessment Policy* includes “all the disparate policies with regard to all types of Student Assessments . . . [and] is meant to protect the students from excessive workloads, and to ensure that all students are treated equally,”1Whereas, this policy applies to undergraduate and graduate courses offered by the University that are evaluated by any form of assessment. Except where otherwise indicated, this policy applies to all faculties, including those which administer their own examinations,Whereas, the Policy was approved by Senate on February 16th, 2011,Whereas, over the past two years, the SSMU has come to learn of an increasing number of situations in which professors have not followed the *University Student Assessment Policy* in creating their course outlines,Whereas, a lack of response by Program Directors to student complaints regarding inconsistent Policy adherence has been noted,”Whereas, the Student Society of McGill University recently voted in favour of a motion supporting the inclusion of sections of the *Assessment Policy* on all course outlines (see Appendix 1),1. McGill University, *University Student Assessment* Policy, <http://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/sites/mcgill.ca.secretariat/files/university_student_assessment_policy_0.pdf> |
| **QUESTION:** | What steps are the University taking to promote awareness of and compliance to the *University Student Assessment Policy* to 1) students and 2) academic staff?How is the McGill community ensuring that the *University Student Assessment Policy* is being respected and followed?What criteria are currently used to measure the adoption and success of the *University Student Assessment Policy*?Do exemptions from the *University Student Assessment Policy* exist outside of the Faculty assessments mentioned in the policy (clinical evaluations in the Faculty of Medicine, and single-assessment courses in the Faculty of Law)? If so, by what criteria are exemptions granted, and how are these exemptions communicated to students, staff and Faculty?Would the University consider instituting a policy that would require references to the *University Student Assessment Policy* to be present in all course outlines? |

Appendix 1. Motion Regarding Inclusion of Academic Assessment Rights on Course Outlines

*Passed at the February 5th, 2014 SSMU General Assembly*

**Motion Regarding Inclusion of Academic Assessment Rights on Course Outlines**

Whereas, the University Student Assessment Policy guarantees that:

“6.1.3 The maximum weight of a final examination in a regularly scheduled Course shall be no more than 75% of the Course Grade. Exceptions shall be made where students have been offered the choice in advance to write a final examination worth more than 75% of the Course grade.

6.1.4 Should written examinations in a regularly scheduled Course contribute 50% or more to the Course grade, one of the examinations shall be held during the final examination period, except for the Faculties of Medicine and Dentistry.” (emphasis added)

Whereas, student testimony indicates that this policy is not consistently adhered to,

Whereas, guidelines exist within the Student Handbook regarding information that must be included on course outlines, such as the right to submit work in English or French (see Appendix 1),

Whereas, increased visibility of the rights outlined in Sections 6.1.3 and 6.1.4 to both professors and students may support compliance with said rights,

Resolved, that the SSMU support the inclusion of an abbreviated outline of student academic rights with an emphasis on Sections 6.1.3 and 6.1.4 of the University Student Assessment Policy on course outlines.

Resolved, that the SSMU support the amendment of section 10.2 of the Student Handbook to include a sub-point suggesting the inclusion of an abbreviated outline of student academic rights with an emphasis on Sections 6.1.3 and 6.1.4 of the University Student Assessment Policy.

Moved by:

Claire Stewart-Kanigan, Arts Senator

Yasmeen Gholmieh, Arts Senator

Alvin Kuate Defo, Science Senator

Katie Larson, President

Joey Shea, VP University A!airs

Appendix 1.

“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.”

See http://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/sites/mcgill.ca.secretariat/files/student-handbook-2010-english.pdf for full document

**Answer:**

Thank you, Senators, for these questions.

It is already the policy of McGill University that evaluation methods must be described fully in course outlines. This should permit students the opportunity to have sufficient information to make informed decisions about the courses in which they are registered.

The University’s assessment policy states that, normally, there “should” be more than one evaluation for a course. However, as long as the evaluation is fair and reasonable, one single evaluation for a course is permitted (it can also be permitted in the case of a deferred exam).

With regard to the specific question concerning exceptions to the policy, besides those recognized for courses in Law and Medicine, justifiable exceptions are already built into the policy; as long as students have been informed well ahead of time, usually prior to the end of the drop-add period, a final exam worth more than 75% of the final grade is permitted and can be scheduled.

In evaluating students, professors must follow the assessment policy and the general practice is that no one assignment should count for more than 75% of the final grade. As noted above, professors can propose exceptions through their Chairs, Directors and Deans, who will ensure that the proposed method of assessment is consistent with the goals of the assessment policy, specifically that grading practices be fair and reasonable. These processes do not, in and of themselves, represent a violation of the Charter of Student Rights.

McGill’s *University Student Assessment Policy* has been developed over years and on the basis of consultation, both internally to our own practices and externally to the best practices of peer institutions. The University, of course, wants all of its policies and procedures to be both well-known and scrupulously followed. It is possible that compliance with the goals of *Assessment Policy* might not be perfect. We also realize that clear understanding of the policy is not universal.

I have asked Professor André Costopoulos, Dean of Students, to examine the historic trends of cases in which there have been complaints regarding failure to follow the policy and protocols, and to determine the most appropriate way to raise awareness; thus, ensuring better compliance.

Once we have understood the situation, Dean Costopoulos and I will report findings and recommendations back to Senate through the Academic Policy Committee.

Ollivier Dyens

Deputy-Provost (Student Life and Learning)