

Question

TO: Senate

FROM: Claire Stewart-Kanigan, SSMU Senator
Kareem Ibrahim, SSMU Senator
Jacob Greenspon, SSMU Senator

SUBJECT: Question Regarding McGill's Approach to Community Engagement

MEETING DATE: November 19th, 2014

PREAMBLE: Whereas, the 2014-15 Joint Board-Senate Meeting on November 4th focused on "Strengthening McGill's Engagement with the External Community Through Research and Innovation,"

Whereas, 'Engagement' and 'Research' are presented as separate items in the Principal's Plans,

Whereas, community engagement can take many forms which facilitate "society achiev[ing] greater benefit from the intersection of [universities'] expertise and knowledge," including innovation but also "engag[ing] external partners locally, nationally and globally by increasing McGill's visibility as a welcoming, open place,"

Whereas, McGill's Social Equity and Diversity Education Office (SEDE) runs many programs advancing community engagement, such as its annual Community Engagement Day where over 550 McGill students and staff volunteered with over 50 local charities and community organizations, took part in community-led workshops in over 54 Community engagement Projects, and were linked to volunteer opportunities with local community groups, as well as its Homework Zone program, which pairs McGill students with elementary students in Montreal's sud-ouest to mentor and tutor; however, this office consistently and currently faces existential threats to its funding and was not included in the program of the Meeting,

Whereas, reaching out to and working with communities to allow them to bring their needs and priorities to the University first was consistently stressed as the first step to research-based engagement by participants at the recent Joint Board-Senate Meeting,

Whereas, building trust and relationships between external communities and the University requires long-term time and resource commitments, and investing in activities that do not directly benefit McGill but rather less privileged communities as a part of McGill's commitment to "service to society,"

QUESTION:

What role does engagement through strategies other than research and innovation play in the University's external engagement strategy?

How do University strategies ensure that community engagement also encompasses involvement with local Montreal community members and organizations outside of the business and industry community?

Response from Prof. Suzanne Fortier, Principal and Vice-Chancellor:

Thank you, Senators, for these questions.

McGill is a student-centred, research-intensive university with an enduring sense of public purpose. Teaching, research, and service to society are at the core of our mission and many initiatives we undertake involve a combination of these elements. Indeed, the University's external engagements are taking place primarily through its teaching and research functions.

As a recent articulation of McGill's commitment to community engagement, some of the priorities I discussed with the University in March 2014 are focused on enhancing community partnerships and outreach. These priorities are deepening our connection to communities both locally and globally by providing meaningful opportunities for interactions and collaborations while furthering our teaching and research excellence.

In particular, the "McGill commitment" and the initiatives related to innovation draw on all three elements of our mission. The "McGill commitment" offers students a greater opportunity to challenge themselves through experiential learning, whether through an internship, co-op placement, international exchange, or undergraduate research experience. The innovation initiatives provide both faculty members and students opportunities to pursue entrepreneurship and for using their knowledge and expertise to the benefit of society through social, cultural, scientific, and technical innovation.

The few examples given below serve as an illustration of the breadth and depth of McGill's community engagement:

- Nearly all of our Faculties and Schools offer some form of research internships for undergraduate students. The Faculties offer more than 2,300 "outside the classroom" opportunities for undergraduate students across all disciplines, with expansive programs in the Faculties of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Arts, Engineering, Law, Medicine and Science. Specific examples of our work with external partners include:
 - The Arts Internship Program offering numerous placements within local and global organizations, which range from Migrant International in Montreal to the Kibale Mobile Clinic Health and Conservation Project in Uganda;
 - The Macdonald Campus Internship Office organizing placements within a wide range of local farms and eco-organizations;

- Science and Engineering's close collaborations with the NSERC-Undergraduate Science Research Awards (USRA);
- Desautels's Social Economy Initiative and its Impact Internships Program that enables students to gain first-hand experience working in non-profit organizations within the Quartier de l'Innovation;
- Operating the Jim Lund Dental Clinic at the Welcome Hall Mission (WHM) to provide free, basic dental care to the homeless, low-income families, the elderly, the disabled, and recent immigrants and refugees;
- Building a network of opportunities for students to connect with alumni mentors in fields that interest them, including public service as well as social and community work of all kinds;
- Operating a free legal clinic with a mandate to provide legal information, referral, and community services to the McGill and Montreal communities;
- The leading role played by our Faculty of Religious Studies in the Tony Blair Faith Foundation's Faith and Globalization Initiative;
- The Quartier de l'Innovation (QI) – officially launched in May 2013 by École de technologie supérieure (ÉTS) and McGill – creating an innovative ecosystem at the heart of Montréal which aims to foster the creative potential of the metropolis and promoting the complementary strengths and resources of its founding institutions as well as its numerous partners in research, training, innovation, and entrepreneurship.
- The McGill University Business Engagement Centre (MUBEC) serving as a single point of entry for corporations interested in taking a comprehensive approach to engaging with McGill's world-class research community and core technologies, as well as its full range of educational services;
- The Dobson Centre for Entrepreneurship in the Desautels Faculty of Management offering entrepreneurial education and providing resources that support and develop entrepreneurs.

In closing, there are two important points to note: First, engagement with the community has long been an integral part of the teaching and research across McGill. Second, the contributions of McGillians to their community extend well beyond their University activities and responsibilities and are expressed through a variety of ways, including volunteer work and philanthropic activities. We are extremely proud of all the ways our students, faculty, staff and alumni give back.