

Question

TO: Senate

FROM: Chloe Rourke, SSMU Senator
David Benrimoh, SSMU Senator
Claire Stewart-Kanigan, SSMU Senator

SUBJECT: Question Regarding a Pan-University Approach to Student Mental Health

MEETING DATE: February 18, 2015

PREAMBLE: Whereas, mental health is priority for students, as evidenced by recent data on student mental health at McGill and the many student-led initiatives including SSMU's new Mental Health Policy and Mental Health Awareness Week, the Students in Mind conference, and the creation of the Peer Support Network, and for staff and faculty, as evidenced by the 2013-14 Joint Board-Senate Meeting's theme of Mental Health,

Whereas, the Mental Health Working Group (MHWG) was struck under Student Services in response to the 2013 Joint-Board Senate Meeting on Mental Health, and the implementation of the recommendations from the MHWG has currently been tasked to Student Services,

Whereas, the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) stated in response to a Senate Question in September 2014 "the terms of reference for such an endeavour [implementing the recommendation of the MHWG through a University-wide strategy for mental health promotion] are currently being drafted, and we anticipate awarding a two-year contract to a consultant commencing in January 2015 to work with stakeholders across the University" and to report to Student Services,

Whereas, student mental health and wellness is a complex issue influenced by factors not limited to access to support services, but also including the stigma of support and accommodation-seeking, and the level of accommodation and support for student mental health offered by academic policies and practices,

Whereas, addressing student mental health is therefore beyond the scope of Student Services alone and requires the coordination and commitment of multiple units within the University, including Faculties,

Whereas, this complexity is addressed by nationally recognized pan-university mental health strategies, such as the *Post-Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach* (PSSMH) developed by the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Canadian Association of

College and University Student Services (CACUSS), and over 70 participating Canadian post-secondary institutions,

Whereas, recommendations of the PSSMH include the development of “campus policies and practices that address the role of faculty and mental health services in academic accommodation with regards to mental health difficulties and documentation required,” “established processes for program evaluation and continuous improvement of offices, departments, services and resources that include criteria related to fostering student well-being,” and “built in accountabilities for staff and faculty to support student mental health,”

QUESTION: What commitments will the University make to ensure that the recommendations of the Mental Health Working Group are implemented beyond Student Services?

Will the university commit to a review and possible restructuring of academic policies at the University and Faculty levels to better support student mental health?

Would McGill consider adopting a nationally recognized pan-university strategy for mental health such as the *Post-Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach* developed by the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS)?

Response submitted by

Prof Anthony C. Masi, Provost
Prof Ollivier Dyens, Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning)

We would like to thank Fellows Rourke, Benrimoh, and Stewart-Kanigan for their questions.

The mental health of every member of our community is as important to us as their physical well-being. McGill is committed to providing a sound and supportive environment for our students, faculty members, and staff.

The mental health working group recommendations are being implemented in the following categories:

- a) graduate student and post doc wellness
- b) wellness support from first year through to graduation
- c) competitive academic environment
- d) inclusive and safe spaces
- e) stigma of treatment
- f) lack of information about services
- g) access to Services
- h) regular and equitable external reviews
- i) professional service training for members of the McGill community

One of the objectives of good governance is to ensure that McGill has policies that are appropriate to our mission, principles, and values. There is always room for improvement, but in general we submit that McGill is on the right track in this regard. Whether by the University Administration, including Student Life and Learning, or within the Faculties and Administrative Units we expect that all of us, to the best of our abilities, will work to ensure that our rules and regulations are fair, that they provide an appropriate framework for ensuring success in a healthy and supportive campus environment, and that we are open and ready for change when and where appropriate. .

With regard to student matters, some successful achievements include: the recently adopted semester withdrawal policy, ongoing work on the assessment policy, recent changes to course evaluations, ongoing discussions with partner universities to create an advisor's network, and the implementation of an 'early alert' option in MyCourses. These initiatives show our commitment to develop a healthy and fruitful experience for all students. Our numerous governance bodies (the APC, its Subcommittee on Teaching and Learning, the Enrolment and Student Affairs Advisory Committee (ESAAC), the Committee on Enrolment and Student Affairs (CESA), and Senate itself) are all part of this ongoing discussion. Furthermore, continuous evaluations of student outcomes are an integral part of policy adjustments and changes. Academic rigour, a commitment to excellence, and a sense of competitiveness must all be tempered by an active engagement with mental and physical health issues.

As noted above, McGill is continually ready to adapt. With regard to the Post-Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach, we must first undertake a careful and complete evaluation and assessment of this guide, in light of McGill's special circumstances and constraints.

In addition to support provided to students, the University provides an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for faculty and staff through Human Resources. The EAP offers confidential, short-term counselling on a range of issues (from workplace stress to relationship and parenting strategies) through affiliation with Longpré. The same service can also facilitate referrals to private counsellors where necessary.

EAP services are free to eligible employees and their families; longer-term counselling may incur a fee but is often subsidized by the employee benefits plan. Any request for counselling as well as the nature of counselling sessions is kept in strict confidence. Full details are on the HR website: <http://www.mcgill.ca/hr/bp/benefits/eap>.

The University offers a Health and Wellbeing Program for faculty and staff. The objective of the program is to establish a culture of health and wellness at the University by creating awareness of the benefits of healthy living. The program offers a variety of lunchtime events and presentations on physical and mental health related topics; for example, some of our recent sessions have included such topics as managing stress, mindfulness, depression and burnout.

The website also provides online health and wellness resources, which includes a section on Managing Your Mental Health. All of this information is available on the HR website at the following link: <http://www.mcgill.ca/hr/bp/health-and-wellbeing>.

We must also realise that it is important to show respect for, and be supportive of, colleagues dealing with mental health issues. Mental health concerns must be treated with the same dignity as concerns for physical health. Our policies support this approach, but in implementation it might not always be clear. Once again, there is always room for improvement.