



TO: Senate
FROM: Richard Janda and Richard Gold
SUBJECT: Question Regarding Revised Thesis Review Procedures
MEETING DATE: October 6, 2011

PREAMBLE: As of September 1, 2011, the Graduate Studies Office implemented a new procedure for selecting and contacting external reviewers for doctoral and masters theses. Among the changes is the requirement that thesis supervisors directly contact potential external referees to encourage them to review their students' theses. While the Graduate Studies Office did undertake some consultation with Graduate Offices on campus, no direct consultation process was undertaken with supervising faculty.

The outcome of the new procedures is to create an environment in which there is likely to appear a conflict-of-interest between the supervisor and the external reviewer despite the conflict of interest checklist provided. The new procedure opens up the perception that the supervisor has had to trade something with the external reviewer especially given that the supervisor and external reviewer are likely to either know or know of the other, work on similar topics and attend similar workshops and conferences. Such trade-offs may be a reciprocal agreement to conduct an external review for the reviewer, agreement to participate in the reviewer's grant or workshop or an agreement to submit an article or book chapter. Such arrangements would not run afoul of the conflicts of interest checklist. Whether such trade-offs actually occur or are just perceived to occur, the academic integrity of McGill's graduate programme will be in question. Further, the policy may disadvantage more junior faculty who will have more limited networks upon which to draw for external reviewers. Given Senate's ultimate responsibility for the academic integrity of McGill's programmes, this policy is one that directly invokes the jurisdiction of Senate.

QUESTION: Will the Graduate Studies Office agree to suspend the policy until Senate has reviewed and passed the policy?

MOTION: *Be it resolved that the new procedure on contacting external reviewers for Master's and Doctoral theses be suspended until Senate has reviewed and adopted the policy.*
