

# Question

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**TO:** Senate

**QUESTION FROM:** Senator Victor M. Frankel, PGSS Secretary General

**RESPONSE FROM:** Senator Manfredi, Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic) and  
Senator Goldstein, Vice-Principal (Research and Innovation)

**SUBJECT:** Question and Response Regarding Educational Activities and Research on  
Climate Change

**MEETING DATE:** September 21, 2016

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**PREAMBLE:** In March 17, 2016, McGill’s Board of Governors adopted recommendations from its Committee to Advise on Matters of Social Responsibility (CAMSR) to create a comprehensive climate action plan that expands initiatives consistent with the McGill mission, including

“Sustainability research and education across all fields of study, efforts to advance understanding of climate change and promote innovative mitigation and adaptation solutions<sup>1</sup>”

Currently, climate change is the focus of both education and research in several faculties, representing the breadth of physical, natural, social, economic and political issues associated with 1) the causes and consequences of climate change and 2) adaptation and mitigation strategies in Canada and around the world.

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**QUESTION:**

1. What activities are currently being undertaken by McGill University to implement the recommendations provided by the Board of Governors regarding sustainability research and education and what can we look forward to in the coming school year?
2. With the understanding that the McGill Senate’s mandate is to provide governance for academic and educational operations at McGill University, to what extent should the Senate provide a platform for launching a network, ad hoc committee or taskforce whose mandate is to integrate, synthesize and advance the activities of students, faculty and researchers in education, research and innovation on climate change among and across faculties at McGill University?

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<sup>1</sup> Report to the Board on Divest McGill Submission of February 2015, March 17, 2016

## RESPONSE

Thank you Senator Frankel, for your question concerning the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee to Advise on Matters of Social Responsibility (CAMSR).

With respect to your first question, [ASAP 2012](#), and the [Strategic Research Plan](#), both of which were approved by Senate and the Board of Governors, each affirms the University's commitment to sustainable practices and to the support of sustainability research and teaching. In May 2016, following the endorsement of the recommendations of the CAMSR report by the Board of Governors, and at the request of the Board, Principal Fortier submitted an [Overview of Current Sustainability and Climate-Related Activities](#), noting a range of degree programs and individual courses available to McGill students, \$270M in research funding for faculty over 5 years, contributing to more than 4000 peer-reviewed publications, \$5.4M in support for more than 150 projects through the Sustainability Projects Fund, and numerous initiatives to ensure sustainability in University operations. An Advisory Council on Sustainability has also been established. It will be co-chaired by the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), Christopher Manfredi, and the Interim Vice-Principal (Administration and Finance), Morty Yalovsky, with its first meeting scheduled for 7 November 2016.

Following a further commitment by Principal Fortier "to continue the community's dialogue on sustainability and the CAMSR report recommendations", the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), Christopher Manfredi, mandated Professor Frédéric Bachand to chair a series of Open Forum meetings with the University community to explore ways of implementing the key recommendation of the report. In particular, the Open Forum will seek input on two key matters:

- creating a "comprehensive climate action plan" to reduce measurably McGill's own carbon footprint while expanding initiatives in sustainability research and education; and
- developing concrete measure to ensure our investments comply with recognized Environmental, Social and Governance principles.

Full details on the Open Forum, the first meeting of which will take place 23 September, are available on the [Open Forums website](#). Prof. Bachand will submit a written report on the outcomes of the sessions to the Provost by 31 October 2016. The final report will also be shared with Senate and the Board of Governors.

In response to your second question, we maintain that academic initiatives should be developed from the ground up, respecting our commitment to academic freedom and our belief that our faculty members are best positioned to determine what areas of research and teaching to pursue, and how best to pursue them. The upcoming launch of the McGill Sustainability Sciences and Technologies Initiative (SSTI) as a priority research area is an example of this approach. Led by the

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Faculties of Science, Engineering, and Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, the project has received \$10 million over five years in central funding to support a large-scale seed funding program targeting highly integrated projects that address sustainability Grand Challenges. The program was developed largely in response to the priorities of McGill researchers and students.

Senate plays an important role in ensuring institutional viability of certain new academic endeavours (such as new degree programs and academic centres and institutes), but should not adopt a top-down approach to academic planning or direction. That said, there may be opportunity for faculty and students with a particular interest in sustainability research and education to establish the sort of interdisciplinary network you suggest and we would be pleased to see such an initiative develop.

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