

Question

TO: Senate

QUESTION FROM: Senator Saroyan

RESPONSE FROM: Senator Manfredi, Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic)

SUBJECT: Question Regarding Opportunities and Mechanisms for the Employment of Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Trainees

MEETING DATE: April 20, 2016

PREAMBLE: Whereas McGill has recently signed the first collective agreement with McGill Course Lecturers and Instructors Union (MCLIU);

Whereas this collective agreement specifies that MCLIU members are second in line after “Regular Academics and Visiting Professors” for being assigned courses;

Whereas article 15.03 of this collective agreement specifies that, “A Hiring Unit may choose not to post Courses when it hires students registered in post-graduate programs at the University, Post-Doctoral fellows, retired Professors, Adjunct Professors, Managers or Professionals. The number of Courses not posted in one Academic year and for the whole University may not exceed fifteen percent (15%) of the total of Courses not allocated to Regular Professors.”;

Whereas with decreasing budgets for part time instructors, overall, fewer courses are available for part-time instructors;

Whereas teaching is considered part of the academic training of graduate students and postdoctoral trainees and an important step in making our graduates competitive in landing academic positions;

Whereas many programs take into account remuneration from teaching courses as part of the funding package they offer to graduate students;

Whereas graduate students and postdoctoral trainees are not likely to compile sufficient points to compete with part time instructors who have a long standing history of teaching at McGill;

QUESTIONS:

1. What opportunities and mechanisms are in place to ensure that our graduate students and postdoctoral trainees aspiring for academic careers will gain the experience of preparing and teaching at least one full course during their studies and meet standard expectations for academic positions?
2. How will the fifteen percent of courses that are exempt from posting be distributed across Faculties, Departments, and other teaching units?

RESPONSE:

Thank you for your question, Senator Saroyan.

To address your first question, graduate students and postdoctoral trainees do regularly have opportunities to teach undergraduates either as primary course instructors, and teaching assistantships are offered in many programs across the University. Additionally, the Skillsets program, offered jointly by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and Teaching and Learning Services, offers a variety of workshops designed to help develop teaching competencies to prepare participants for teaching at McGill and in future academic appointments at other institutions. However, the University is not in a position to ensure that students and trainees who might wish to teach a course during their studies may have the opportunity to do so. Teaching assignments are made at the department level (or at the Faculty level where there are no departments), and are determined by the needs of the unit and budget availability, both of which may vary from year to year.

With respect to your second question, the MCLIU agreement allows that fifteen percent of courses not taught by ranked academic staff may be exempted from the posting process required by the agreement. The University administration is working with the Faculties to determine the best way to distribute these exemptions across the University with individual course assignments remaining the responsibility of the hiring department or Faculty. It should be noted that graduate students and postdoctoral trainees are eligible to apply for positions posted through the regular process.

Professor Christopher Manfredi, Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic)
