

Question

TO: Senate

QUESTION FROM: Senator Nicholas Dunn

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

SUBJECT: Question Regarding Graduate Student Teaching at McGill

MEETING DATE: February 15, 2017

PREAMBLE: A majority of PhD students aspire to an academic job as their primary career goal, and teaching is a fundamental aspect of an academic career. Moreover, teaching should be considered as part of academic training. Senate took up the broad question of the future of PhD programs at McGill at its Open Discussion in November 2016, though the issue of graduate student teaching was not addressed.

The 2016-2017 academic year is the first in which the Collective Agreement between McGill and the Course Lecturers & Instructors Union (MCLIU) has been implemented—in particular, its course exclusion provision, which allows the University to reserve up to 15% of courses not allocated to ranked academic staff in order to offer them to graduate students (article 15.03). The University should allocate these courses on the basis of need—that is, on the basis of which Faculties have historically assigned course lecturer positions to graduate students.

Given the perception by some that this did not happen, this process could benefit from further clarification.

The lack of opportunities for graduate students to be the primary instructor for a course threatens the ability of McGill's graduate programs to recruit top graduate students, to fund their graduate programs, and to prepare their graduates to be competitive on the job market.

QUESTION:

1. What is the University doing to ensure a better distribution of courses for graduate students for the upcoming academic year compared to last year?
2. Is the University willing to guarantee at least one teaching opportunity for all incoming PhD students?

RESPONSE Thank you for your question, Senator Dunn.

The preamble to your question suggests that article 15.03 of the MCLIU collective agreement “allows the University to reserve up to 15% of courses not allocated to ranked academic staff in order to offer them to graduate students.” In fact, article 15.03 allows the University to use this

15% “reserve” to assign courses without posting to a range of categories of individuals, among which graduate students are included.

The distribution of the reserve clause courses is determined in consultation with each Faculty and according to the need expressed by each. This distribution is recalibrated on an annual basis. Some Faculties regularly employ graduate students as instructors while others do not, according to established teaching practices, program structure, and disciplinary convention. While teaching units may assign courses to graduate students through article 15.03, graduate students are also free to apply for Course Lecturer positions posted through the established process.

We agree that teaching experience can be a valuable component of a PhD student’s experience at McGill, but the University cannot guarantee employment as an instructor to each doctoral student. Teaching assignments are made at the Department (or Faculty) level, and assignments to non-ranked academics are made according to budget availability and the year-to-year needs of the unit.
