



**McGill**

**Student Services** | **Services aux étudiants**

# **Administrative Response to the Cyclical Review of Student Services**

**McGill Student Services, February 2016**

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with input and support from Student Services Directors and staff, and students

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*“The larger picture is still being painted, and we will paint it together.”*

*- Student Services Staff Town Hall Address (February 17, 2016)*

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## **Introduction**

The cyclical review process presented Student Services with a valuable opportunity for self-reflection and allowed us to listen with intent to the voices of staff (in and outside of Student Services), students, and faculty. We were encouraged to see that the report spoke to the value of our services and, most notably, to appreciation for the dedication and care shown by our staff. We also understood that there are serious environmental and structural challenges for our staff and students, which impede our ability to fulfill our mission to support student success and well-being. We are committed to tackling and resolving those challenges in a collaborative, evidence-based, and consultative manner. Making strategic, empowering, student-centred changes and improvements on an ongoing basis will continue to be a top priority for Student Services.

## **Actions to Date**

In order to explore and develop a response to the Review Team Report, the Directors and staff at Student Services have engaged in a series of critical thinking, consultation, and reporting exercises.

## **Directors’ Retreat**

Student Services Directors convened for a two-day retreat on January 28 and 29, 2016. Items on the agenda included:

- Overview and update on Student Services strategic direction
- Reflections on the cyclical review process
- Change leadership and change management
- Shared visioning

During the retreat, the exercises and discussions led to the emergence of a number of principles that would guide our work moving forward. Key among these principles was one that speaks to the important shift that is required for Student Services. We intend to position ourselves as community builders and developers at McGill, with Student Services playing a key role in facilitating and modelling the development required for McGill to become a healthy learning environment. We acknowledge that we are not and should not present ourselves as simply a collection of discrete service delivery units. We will work to reframe and rebuild our work, continuing our current move away from a transactional approach and reactive services towards a transformational approach to student development, proactive education, and community building. We will do this through continued, expanding, and new collaborations and partnerships – both within Student Services and with students, staff, and faculty across campus. We will consider community development and building both in relation to the greater McGill community as well as its diverse subcommunities (e.g., graduate, first-year, international, off-campus, Indigenous, etc.), always considering their unique and evolving needs and interests. Many

services and staff already adhere to this approach, but it should more strongly permeate across Student Services and the University. This shift in thinking and culture has far-reaching impact on our recommended actions to the report's recommendations, from our staff capacity to our brand to our programs and beyond.

## **Task Teams**

During the retreat discussion about the report and our vision, we uncovered different overarching themes. Three Task Teams, made up of three to five Directors, formed groups according to interest and expertise around the following themes:

1. Transformation/Planning/Engagement/Communication
2. Wellness
3. Collaboration/Work Environment

The report's thirteen recommendations were distributed to each Task Team, based on each recommendation's relevance to the team's theme(s). After the retreat, the Task Teams engaged in wide and collaborative consultation, reaching out to staff (in and outside of Student Services), faculty, and students for further input, as we laid out an ambitious change plan for Student Services. In addition, a consultation specifically with student leaders was held on February 16 and included participation from undergraduate and graduate student associations from both campuses. Consultations were also held at meetings with the Committee on Student Services, the Enrolment and Student Affairs Advisory Committee, and the SLL Executive Team.

## **Staff Town Hall and All-Staff Retreat**

The Directors group designed and developed a Student Services Town Hall, with support from McGill's Director of Organizational Development. The Town Hall was held on February 17, with invitations sent out to all Student Services staff. At the Town Hall, staff attendees were presented with key messages related to the cyclical review process, report, and work done to date by the Directors group. Following this short presentation, the Town Hall featured a session designed using an Open Space Technology (OST) approach. Each recommendation was posted in a different break-out space. Staff were then encouraged to move freely between recommendations/break-out spaces. Each Director facilitated discussion and recorded notes at each break-out space, and then reported back to the attendee group at large after the OST session. The resulting staff input was used to enhance our responses to the recommendations where applicable. A follow-up email was sent out to all Student Services staff encouraging them to continue the conversation among each other and with any of the Directors or Task Teams. A Student Services all-staff retreat is being planned for May. At the retreat, a complete overview of the recommendations and responses will be presented, and staff will be encouraged to explore further ideas and actions through collaborative processes.

## Our Response

### Reporting process

Directors synthesized feedback from the various consultations into response reports for each of the 13 recommendations. For each recommendation, Directors reported:

1. Our understanding of the recommendation
2. Missing context and clarifications needed
3. Recommended actions
4. General comments

The following pages are a brief synthesis of those 13 reports.

### Recommended actions

Our responses are influenced by a great desire to do better, meet student needs, and improve student experiences, and a commitment to demonstrate that we will do so. Our recommended actions are implementable and at times aspirational. We have set out some key objectives to address the review's recommendations that were within our span of control. We will commit to working with Human Resources and with the Deputy Provost to explore possible solutions outside of Student Services. We will also consider barriers and limitations (e.g., staff, space, finances) that may impact our ability to implement certain recommendations. However, we will commit to looking at all possible options to overcome those barriers and will not lose sight of our goals.

We will further develop our recommended actions through Directors meetings and the formation of emergent cross-functional working groups. These working groups will provide a chance for us to actively engage many Student Services staff in the change process, as well as offer an immediate staff development opportunity.

We do not mention specific timelines in our response. We will need to do further preliminary investigation before creating any strict timelines. A project manager will be hired to ensure the many concurrent projects are coordinated and meeting set deadlines.

We appreciate the broad consultation that took place during the review process as well as the Review Team's compassion, commitment and clear display of hard work. The report does at times include quite specific recommendations and examples about individual services and projects. At this time, we do not believe it opportune or appropriate to respond in turn to each of these examples. We certainly took them into consideration and they influence our overall responses. Part of our forthcoming action plan will include, in part, taking action related to specific examples noted in the report.

Lastly, it should be noted that the words "health" and "wellness" were used often in the report, specifically in reference to four units. We will move forward on changes involving these four units and see the critical role they place in campus health. However, we approach Student Services' work with health and wellness in a more holistic manner. We recognize and intend to explore further how *all* our services and functions can and should support and model wellness at McGill – be it physical, emotional, spiritual, mental, financial, social, academic, occupational, or environmental wellness.

# Responses to Individual Recommendations

Our individual responses include a salient excerpt from the Review Team Report, our understanding of the recommendation, and our recommended actions.

## Recommendation # 1: Leadership

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*“There is a need for a visionary and experienced leader for Student Services – an individual with deep experience in Student Services”*

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The cyclical review calls for a deeper commitment to visionary leadership that is experienced, connected, and able to inspire. Concern is raised over a presumed lack of oversight over individual leaders. It is perceived by some staff in Student Services that their work is undervalued and not properly understood by senior members of the institution. Finally, the change of title from Executive Director to Senior Director reinforced this negative view.

In preparation of a new search for a senior leader, under interim leadership since late fall 2015, long overdue projects and initiatives have been launched to act on recommendations from previous reviews to address issues related to budget management and service delivery and to establish a solid foundation upon which Student Services can continue to flourish and grow.

### Recommended Actions:

1. The change in title from executive to senior director reflects limits placed by the University on the use of the word “executive” in response to a provincial government edict. The change in title in no way represents an institutional devaluing of the senior director of Student Services or the role this position plays in campus life. The new title may, however, be misinterpreted by external candidates and could negatively impact our ability to recruit strong external candidates. The Deputy Provost should explain the genesis of the title change to Student Services staff and students.
2. A definition of collaborative leadership (ability to work across unit and divisional boundaries to achieve a shared vision of enhancing the student experience) will be included in leadership job descriptions and Student Services will actively recruit individuals who exhibit and practice this style of leadership.
3. There has been considerable turnover in leadership in Student Services; in fact, no Director has held their position for more than five years and six of the eleven current Directors assumed their roles since 2013. As is the practice, unit reviews will be conducted when there is a changeover of Director.
4. In response to the concerns raised regarding leadership skills and staff recognition, the Directors and senior managers in Student Services will be encouraged, through staff development plans, to participate in the Student Life & Learning (SLL) Leadership Program, or other leadership or coaching training.

## Recommendation # 2: Re-organization

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*“A key finding is that at a local level, the functioning of Student Services is often very strong. However, the overall structure of Student Services requires immediate attention.”*

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In part, this recommendation aligns with, supports, and complements our service area objectives and workflows. The reviewers ask us to consider whether some units should be moved from Student Services to other SLL units, without offering concrete reasons why such moves would be beneficial. Student Services will take the information under consideration as we move forward with the following actions.

### Recommended Actions:

1. Work is under way to align services delivered in Health, Mental Health, Counseling Services, and the Office for Students with Disabilities through a single intake and triage area, and to implement a common Electronic Medical Record. The Health and Wellness Steering Group will continue their work together to improve case management, early alert, and crisis management systems and to move to a more seamless, stepped-care model for service delivery.
2. A working group will be formed to consider a realignment of services along student-centred/student-facing lines to recognize interdependence and to support our diverse student population more effectively. The working group will review functions, programming, interests, and themes (e.g. communications, assessment, international student/community development, etc.) that permeate across all Student Services and the University, to take stock of synergies, opportunities, and actions that can be taken to support this recommendation.
3. Student Services will engage in comprehensive visioning and planning to re-align services and programs in consultation with key stakeholders in SLL, across campus and within our professional communities. Through mapping of collaborations and other exercises stemming from this review, Student Services will recognize interdependencies and celebrate collaboration.

## Recommendation # 3: Effective Collaboration

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*“Collaboration among Student Services units needs to be strengthened significantly.”*

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The recommendation aligns with our plans to make collaborations explicit. Our objective is to engage our services and partners in the creation a supportive community. This community will be one where students receive the necessary care or services when and where they need them,

based on the student life cycle and other considerations, and where informal collaborations flourish when no formal network may exist. If staff in every unit are sensitized and educated about the operations of the other units, they will be able to trace how units can come together in particular cases to provide optimal services for a student.

### **Recommended Actions:**

1. Establish cross-unit working group to establish a framework around collaboration, cooperation, and partnership as well as work with key partners on campus to develop guiding principles for collaboration. An annual mapping update will be one important agenda item for the annual all-staff Student Services retreat to encourage reflection on our strengths, weaknesses, and aspirations.
2. Increase opportunities for cross-unit sharing and staff development for all levels of staff (e.g. front-line staff “Services Update”, Administrative Coordinator Network, attending other teams' meetings, joint onboarding/orientation, grand rounds for staff on topics of shared interest such as data privacy).
3. Inform our budget process based on the mapped intersections of Student Services and partner units and cross-functional projects. Ensure that cross-functional projects that demonstrate collaboration are incentivized and recognized. Successful collaborative efforts can be modeled and used to develop future initiatives.
4. Create formal case management system and protocols to increase efficiency, derive maximum benefit from software (EMR and Case Management), and build upon multidisciplinary meetings and rounds (Crisis Management/Early Alert/Embedded Wellness Coordinator).
5. Leverage opportunities in the (forthcoming) Strategic Communications Plan to recognize, celebrate, and communicate existing collaboration and aspirations within Student Services, Student Life and Learning, across campus and within our professional communities.

### **Recommendation #4: Human Resources**

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*“Human resources and human resource management in Student Services require immediate attention, particularly with respect to the work environment and budget structure and funding for staff.”*

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This recommendation identifies our most urgent need: to create a healthy work environment where our staff are supported and can reach their full potential. It is a testament to our staff’s dedication and commitment to students that, despite the current climate, staff continue to be recognized for their achievements.

Limitations stemming from budget austerity measures, including Human Resources policies such



as the recent hiring freeze, and the absence of systematic staff planning have resulted in a heavy reliance on temporary (term or casual) contracts resulting in employment uncertainty for many staff. This is a key contributor to low staff engagement and poor morale. This unstable core staff complement also makes long-term planning and service improvement difficult.

We plan to use every opportunity afforded to us, whether through more effective use of IT resources, organizational efficiencies, or through philanthropic support of our activities, to improve working conditions and the working environment for our staff. This aligns with the broadening of McGill's emergent Wellness Strategy to include all members of our community: students, faculty and staff.

### **Recommended Actions:**

1. Develop Student Services unit and overall staffing plan (review position descriptions, succession planning, encourage and support staff development).
2. Review use of temporary contracts and establish with central HR a protocol to regularize Term positions that have been renewed year over year, and where fiscally possible, create regular positions to replace reliance on casual staff.
3. Re-evaluate onboarding/orientation/training protocols for staff from the perspective of services to students.
4. Create a task force/working group to engage staff in the development of staff appreciation, professional development, and self-care guidelines and programming, as well as to reward individual staff and team efforts to provide the best support for our students.
5. Create a staff appreciation development fund.
6. Establish benchmarks to evaluate actions.

## **Recommendation #5: Macdonald Campus**

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*“The equality and approach to Student Services at Macdonald Campus is not aligned with Student Services on the downtown campus and this needs to be remedied.”*

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The recommendation raises inequitable access to some services for students at Macdonald Campus and asserts that Macdonald student wellbeing and paths to success are compromised. A thorough review of the model employed for planning and service delivery at Macdonald Campus is long overdue.

### **Recommended Actions:**

1. Complete recruitment of a nurse practitioner who is able to prescribe medications, as a

core service provider for both health and mental health needs.

2. Create a cross functional working group to conduct a full analysis of service availability (including health and mental health services and need for crisis management) to the student population at Macdonald Campus, as well as an assessment exercise (e.g. student survey) to determine precisely where inequities exist between students on the Downtown and Macdonald campuses. Develop action plan by Fall 2016 to address both immediate needs and longer term planning.
3. With service audit in hand, conduct a space audit to ensure the correct mix of private offices and common space, and then engage leadership at Macdonald Campus to explore relocation of Student Services offices.
4. Health and Wellness Steering Group to assign staff member to partner with the Macdonald Campus Freshman program to incorporate wellness and prevention programming beginning with Orientation Fall 2016. With this as a proof of concept, consider how to best reach the separate cohort of Bachelor students admitted from CEGEP as well as the Farm Management Technology (FMT) college-level first-year students.

## Recommendation #6: Academic Support Services

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*“To better ensure that students have holistic support for success, the services currently offered by Tutorial Services should be enhanced to enable students to develop or enhance their skills to achieve academic success.”*

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At the core of this recommendation is the need to provide key academic support services that McGill students require to successfully complete their studies, to create a healthy and sustainable learning environment for students from diverse perspectives at all levels of their academic journey, and to undertake a collective approach and pathway for students to learn about and access these supports.

### Recommended Actions:

1. Create a student academic support working group that includes key players who are currently supporting student academic success (e.g., Tutorial Service, Teaching and Learning Services, Office for Student with Disabilities, Academic Advising, International Student Services, Library, McGill Writing Centre) as well as potential Faculty or department units, and students. Maintain the working group:
  - i. to lead these cross-functional services in a collaborative and cohesive manner;
  - ii. to identify key components of student success programming - e.g. tutoring, workshops, learning resources, one-on-one advising for at-risk students
  - iii. to create a Faculty Learning Community around Universal Design for Learning, supporting the incorporation and development of inclusive teaching practices and

- iv. pedagogical change (potentially lead by TLS);  
to create a student success strategy, aligned with the wellness strategy, to support a healthy learning environment and the principles of Universal Design for Learning;
  - v. as an ongoing dialogue with students regarding their lived experience.
2. Ensure the Student Services Strategic Communications Plan includes proposals for a digital/web Learning Commons where students can investigate supports and find links to all related services.

## Recommendation #7: Information Technology

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*“IT resources and infrastructure across Student Services require significant attention.”*

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The recommendations cites the lack of (or outdated) information technology support, record management infrastructure, and software, which further exasperates stress on resources. An IT inventory needs analysis was conducted in Fall 2015, and a prioritized list of needs is in development. Efficiencies gained through improved access and workflows, or realized through more effective use of technology, will allow our to staff fill more rewarding positions and improve service delivery for our students.

### Recommended Actions:

1. Use temporary funds to embed an IT Project Manager dedicated to Student Services for FY17 and FY18 to navigate central IT processes and drive the adoption of IT solutions for Student Services.
2. Complete the prioritization of IT needs.
3. Continue the rigorous pursuit of IT solutions, including Electronic Medical Record and Case Management software, which are pivotal in the implementation of recommendations related to the Wellness Hub.
4. Complete Strategic Communications Plan and related website improvements to communicate more effectively to students and other campus and community stakeholders.

## Recommendation #8: Budget Clarity and Transparency

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*“Student Services needs to work more closely with the Deputy Provost’s Office to improve clarity and transparency on financial matters, and to rethink the budgetary processes currently used within Student Services.”*

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The reviewers call for greater clarity concerning Student Services’ budget, and how student services are funded through contributions from student fees, government, and the University. Key stakeholders, including the Committee on Student Services (CSS) and Student Services staff, should better understand the process for developing the annual Student Services operating budget and how external decisions impact the Student Services budget. Demonstrating good stewardship of all funding sources encourages reinvestment and new investment.

### **Recommended Actions:**

1. The Co-Chairs of CSS and the Senior Director will establish an annual reporting schedule and report templates to inform CSS members of student fees and other revenue, e.g. Government and University, which contributes to the overall Student Services budget, and for the Senior Director to seek advice from CSS on the Student Services budget.
2. Orientation for new CSS members will include information on finances to prepare members to fulfill their committee roles and responsibilities.
3. The Senior Director will request that the Deputy Provost provide an annual update on the budget to Student Services staff.
4. Financial roles and responsibilities for staff in the Student Service units should be rationalized and redefined to ensure segregation of duties and to realize efficiencies in purchasing and in processing.
5. The Finance Manager will establish a comprehensive review of all unit level expenses before the FY18 budget cycle.
6. A temporary budget will be established in FY17 and FY18 for IT solutions (Project Management and Software) and Staff Development. System-wide permanent budgets for communications, programming and funds to encourage innovation will be part of the FY18 planning cycle to meet emerging student needs.
7. To carry out the extensive work of acting on the recommendations from the Cyclical Review, a Project Manager will be hired for FY17 and FY18.

## Recommendation #9: Brown Building

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*“The physical layout of the Brown Building is sub-optimal; there is clearly not enough space for some units, resulting in line-ups, and a lack of privacy. There may be opportunities to rethink the configuration and/or the use of space within this building.”*

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This recommendation aligns with the improvements to our space launched in FY16 with Operation Brown Building<sup>1</sup>. A Wellness Hub project is also underway to address the need to destigmatize service access and to improve student access to Health and Wellness services.

### Recommended Actions:

1. In planning for future services and collaborations, the Brown Building must model a healthy learning and working environment, and will be promoted as a community space where students see and build wellness and are supported proactively.
2. Student Services Directors will be asked to articulate how services and supports extend throughout the Brown Building and into the community, through systematic liaisons and, where appropriate, embedded services within academic units and other common spaces for the purposes of education/prevention.
3. Student Services should continue the consultative, evidence-based, universal, and intentional design for Brown, continuing the good work of Operation Brown Building to maintain multiple pathways for the vulnerable, under-represented, marginalized, and minority communities in order to be equitable and accessible to all.

## Recommendation #10: The Student Voice

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*“The voices and concerns of the students (undergraduate and graduate) need to be heard more directly across all of Student Services.”*

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Student Services should be more systematic about ensuring that diverse student voices are heard, across all units. Being student-centred means drawing out not only voices of graduate and undergraduate student government, but also other student groups and associations, the broader student body, and the under-represented.

### Recommended Actions:

1. Each Director will ensure that each Student Service unit has a highly functioning Advisory Board in place, which includes both student association representatives and students at large.

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<sup>1</sup> See [mcgill.ca/student-services/brown-building/redesign](http://mcgill.ca/student-services/brown-building/redesign) for more information on “Operation Brown Building.”

2. In keeping with the Strategic Communications Plan, communications will ensure students know their voices are heard through a variety of pathways and see assessment evidence. Students are integral members of our teams.
3. Each Director will be encouraged to reach outside of their service or area to bring education and care into the University community.
4. A review of partnerships with Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and related graduate student bodies will be added to our collaboration mapping exercise. (See Recommendation #3.)
5. Assessment outcomes will be added to measure program and service effectiveness specifically relating to graduate students.
6. Directors and staff will value responding to the student voice as part of staff assessment and recognition.

## Recommendation #11: Collaboration and Partnerships across McGill

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*“Student Services is encouraged to work more closely with other Student Life and Learning Units, to help avoid duplication of services, and collaborate more closely on projects that might share similar goals.”*

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This recommendation raises a perception that Student Services could work more closely with other SLL units, and Faculties. It also implies that there are programming overlaps with other SLL units. It makes reference to Student services being perceived as working in a silo (“inward looking”).

### Recommended Actions:

1. See Recommendation #3 for plans to map current campus-wide collaborative efforts to celebrate our partnerships at an annual Student Services event.
2. Strengthen relationships with Faculties and services; engage colleagues from other SLL units, services, and Faculties to join Student Services events and trainings and reciprocate; seize opportunities for cross-campus discussion where new areas to collaborate can emerge.

## Recommendation #12: Rebranding

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*“Student Services is encouraged to ‘rebrand’ itself and to change the way it presents itself to the undergraduate and graduate student communities, and how it presents itself to other academic and non-academic units at McGill.”*

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This rebranding aligns with the need to present Student Services as a community rather than a collection of services. The rebranding will go beyond a marketing exercise; our investment of time and energy will fuel a transformative shift toward a wellness-modelling community.

### **Recommended Actions:**

1. Launch the Student Services Strategic Communications Plan with concrete actions to promote Student Services as a community, an integral partner of the academic mission of the University.
2. Following mapping, consider Student Services, SLL, and other McGill units that provide “student services” and conduct a holistic and comprehensive rebrand for students and other communities.
3. Eliminate redundant websites and social media channels, and use the bare minimum of digital (and only when needed, print) platforms to communicate the Student Services mission; emphasize how we integrate/support/facilitate student learning and development opportunities, and are not only support services.
4. Delineate between different levels of strategic communications (e.g. communication within Student Services, student-facing communications, external/media relations communications), and assign staff functions accordingly.

## **Recommendation #13: Review of the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) Office and other SLL Units**

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*“The Review Team recommends that this report be used during the cyclical review of the Office of the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning).”*

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The external review committee recommends that this report be included /shared as part of the DPSLL Office's cyclical review.

### **Recommended Actions:**

1. The DPSLL Office review was held on February 1 and 2, 2016.
2. This report could also inform other SLL unit reviews. It is suggested that we examine how SLL units are connected and structured in relation to each other as there are opportunities to change/enhance our organizational structures, collaborations, and shared services.