

Advisory Council on Sustainability
McGill University, in person
October 5, 2022 (3:00 PM – 4:30 PM)

Present: F. Miller, Y. Beauchamp, F. Labeau, D. Mondou, J. Nicell, B. Harvey, G. MacDonald, C. Aubrac, L. Buckley, R. Wright, P. Cigana, A. Porlier, L. Rathmell, K. Houser, B. Zsigovics

Absent with regrets: D. Dutton, B. Lennox, N. Volland, A. DeSousa

Guests: Jerome Conraud, Director, Utilities & Energy Management, Facilities Management & Ancillary Services; Jessica Latus, Sustainability Officer and Divya Sharma, Climate Officer, Office of Sustainability

1. Welcome Remarks, Welcome new members and roundtable introductions

F. Miller welcomes the group to the 1st meeting of 4 for 2022-2023. F. Miller introduces the newest members of the council: F. Labeau, G. MacDonald, C. Aubrac, L. Buckley, with a round of introductions.

2. Approval of Minutes from the Last Meeting and Today's Agenda

F. Miller asks for approval of the minutes from the last meeting. The Council approves. There are no additions to today's agenda.

3. Latest News Related to Sustainability

K. Houser presents recent sustainability news, including:

- The Sustainable Futures Festival took place on campus from September 12 to 16 and included a free plant distribution, the Catalyst Awards, and a Sustainability Soirée.
- Sustainability Projects Fund (SPF) is up for a five-year renewal this year. A visual communications campaign has started, including banners along the main road and at the Arts Building.
- In July 2022, the University signed on to the United Nations-supported Principles for Responsible Investment, a global network for investors who are committed to integrating environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations into their investment practices and policies.
- McGill won the CAUBO Quality and Productivity Award for its Sustainable Workplace Certification, which was redesigned to accommodate remote and hybrid work models.
- The online sustainability module for students is nearing completion. We have a soft launch scheduled for November and a full launch in January.
- The Climate Crisis & Climate Actions course available to all undergraduates was launched.

4. Sustainability Education Fellows

J. Latus and B. Harvey shared about the Sustainability Education Fellows (SEF), a new program designed to help integrate sustainability into courses. The SEF program has been codesigned by the Office of Sustainability, Teaching & Learning Services, the McGill Sustainability Systems Initiative, and the Department of Integrated Studies in Education. With support from the SPF, 10 Faculty Fellows will be provided with training, tools and support from experts in sustainability, teaching, and learning. Additionally, Student Fellows will be trained on sustainability pedagogies and will be available to the Faculty Fellows to aid them in their course (re)design. Throughout the year, Faculty are expected to modify at least one syllabus to include sustainability content or develop a new sustainability course and share their insights with the 2022-23 SEF cohort. By developing a strong communications, monitoring, and outreach plan for this initiative from the outset, the SEF program will ensure that there is widespread awareness on the program and its impacts, and ideally create a platform to scale over time.

Members suggested:

- A similar initiative was done in engineering 3 years ago. The way they were able to secure the faculty members was to ensure that their most important interests and goals were addressed. The money that we provided also gave incentive to the professors to be fully involved, which provided students with excellent learning opportunities.
- In the first year it is good to catch the low-hanging fruit; however, remember to address those areas that are harder to reach because they would be good to have as examples for the 2nd year.
- Try to focus in on specific topics related to the different departments. You may also want to talk to program advisors – so that they are in the know and can pass on the information.
- As you roll out the testimonials, it might be a good idea to reach out to Associate Deans – as they are usually the ones who organize most of the programming.
- Two or more instructors or students working on the same thing may be beneficial.
- At Polytechnique Montreal, a workshop format was used: a professor would send out a course outline to the groups to review and give feedback on said courses. These can be very useful.
- Will need to make sure that the distinction between sustainability courses and embedding sustainability within the course of interest is clear.

5. The impact of COVID-19 on McGill's GHG emissions

D. Sharma and J. Conrad joined the meeting to present the impact of COVID-19 on McGill's greenhouse gas emissions and discuss the post-pandemic strategy towards carbon neutrality. From 2019-2021, the share of energy emissions rose from 59% to 70% (Scope 1), and air travel and commuting emissions fell from 26% to 9% (Scope 3). Air travel and commuting fell to near-zero in 2020 and stayed at very low levels in 2021. McGill reduced some natural gas consumption due to lower occupancy on campus; however, delays in the construction market slowed down key energy management initiatives, and increased building ventilation to limit COVID transmission upon the return to campus led to emission increases. One initiative, the conversion of the boiler to electricity from natural gas, is now due to be completed in 2023, and will reduce emissions substantially. These reductions will be almost equal to the reductions due to the pandemic. To maintain progress towards carbon neutrality, returning to pre-pandemic levels of commuting and air travel must be avoided by maintaining and encouraging positive behaviour change. Several key initiatives are planned: a sustainable commuting program, virtual conferencing infrastructure, improved EV infrastructure, and flexible work arrangements.

Members suggested/asked:

- Should calculations consider GHG emissions from more people working from home (e.g., heating)? D. Sharma noted that they did these calculations, and they were not significant in the context of the overall emission reductions from commuting.
- Students and faculty HAVE to travel. McGill may want require faculty to include carbon offsets in travel budgets. However, there may be negative feedback since research budgets are limited.
- McGill should experiment with new conference models that require less travel. B. Harvey's lab is working with Ouranos to design their 2023 Adaptation Futures Conference in Montreal and has created a bank of conference models that could feed into the design of future McGill-hosted conferences. Infrastructure, but also support, know-how and incentives will be key.
- A student project could map out perverse incentives that institutionalize air travel (e.g., not being able to have conference expenses reimbursed if you didn't travel).

6. Next steps & closing remarks

F. Miller thanks the guest presenters for their contributions and reminds everyone that the next Advisory Council meeting will take place November 30, 2022 on Zoom.