

Final report: SP0132 – ASR video

The idea for an informational video about applied student research (ASR) was born at a meeting of the McGill Food Systems Project (MFSP), when discussing the challenges associated with explaining the complex process of ASR to new club members and potentially interested students, professors or community stakeholders. In January 2014, two members from the MFSP, Kendra Pomerantz (Internal coordinator at the time) and myself (Naomi Hill, Community outreach coordinator), submitted an application to the Sustainability Projects Fund in order to fund a videographer to create a short informational video about ASR to aid in our outreach efforts.

By creating an informational video about ASR, we hoped to explain the process of ASR in a simple and accessible manner. Through past outreach efforts, we found that the ASR process can seem complicated and daunting to many students who would be prime candidates to complete a project, and that explaining the ASR process to each potentially interested student and new member represents a significant time commitment during our weekly meetings. A short informational video that would succinctly and clearly describe the ASR process would thus aid in captivating interested students and in facilitating outreach. While the idea was first intended to support the MFSP's outreach and ASR coordination efforts, we soon realized that this sort of video would be useful to a variety of stakeholders at McGill, and thus chose to make our video as broad as possible to allow it to be relevant in various contexts. The main stakeholders we had in mind were the other MxP groups, including the McGill Energy Project (MEP), the McGill Spaces Project (MSP), and the now-inactive McGill Waste Project (MWP). In addition, we saw the McGill Office of Sustainability (MOOS) as a relevant stakeholder for various reasons: expanding ASR projects related to sustainability is a concrete objective of Vision 2020, MOOS has an education intern dedicated to promoting such ASR projects, and the Office serves as an important facilitator to aid students and other members of the McGill community in realizing projects to encourage sustainability.

We submitted our SPF application in mid-January of 2014 and received notification that we had been approved for funding in late March of 2014. This was very exciting news; however, the timing of our notification complicated our initial plan. In our application, we stated that the project would be completed within eight weeks of obtaining funding. Our intended method of finding a videographer relied primarily on posting announcements on student listservs across multiple departments and faculties. Unfortunately, once we contacted various student listservs in early April to advertise our search for a videographer, we were told that all listservs had finished operating for the semester. As both prospective student videographers and we were heading into final paper and exam season, we were unable to find a videographer within our original time frame. Furthermore, since the MFSP no longer held weekly meetings during the summer as most members were out of town, the process of script writing was lengthier than planned, largely due to differences in availabilities and travel plans. These timing issues represented our largest challenge on the project: when we conceptualized the project, we were basing our predictions on a school semester timeline, and found that we had to significantly adapt our predicted time frames during exam season and summer break.

Kendra and I finished our draft of the video script in June and circulated it to other stakeholders (including the other members of the MFSP, other MxP groups, and staff members at MOOS including May Le, Kim McGrath and Jameson Jones-Doyle) for input. We were offered a great deal of useful feedback from these other sources, and would identify this collaborative process as one of the main successes of the project. Once the script had been reviewed and commented on by these groups and individuals, we felt the project could accurately serve all the intended stakeholders.

Once the script was finalized, we began looking for a videographer. Although in our application we stated that we would find a videographer before writing the script, we realized that this revised order was more logical. The process of finding a videographer was largely complicated by the fact that no student listservs operate in the summer, so we chose to proceed by posting an advertisement message through the MFSP Facebook page and our own personal Facebook pages to spread the word. We sent this message to Kim McGrath who also had it posted on the Office of Sustainability's social media outlets. Throughout July and August, we exchanged conversations with a few interested participants, and eventually found a videographer whose availability and expertise matched what we were looking for in late August. Kendra found our videographer, Irene Toro, through word of mouth and her personal social media outreach.

Irene worked quickly to create the project and delivered a video that we feel reflects our initial idea in a creative way. By August 27, Irene had finished a prototype of the video, which Kendra circulated to Kim, Jameson, and Julia Solomon at the Office of Sustainability for feedback, and the video was finished in September.

In terms of promotion, the completed video was posted on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOEKmOXMpFU#t=158>) and shared with the Office of Sustainability education intern May, posted on the MFSP Facebook page, and shared with the other MxP groups to promote. National non-profit Meal Exchange, which is linked to student groups similar to the MFSP across Canada, also posted the video on their Facebook page. The video was used by the MFSP in our promotional efforts, but unfortunately we are unable to speak to its use by other MxP groups. The video has been viewed over 90 times on YouTube. While this is substantially under our initial goals of 150 views in the first week and 1000 in the fall semester, we faced some challenges with the promotional stage of the process (mostly due to student turnover), which help explain this discrepancy. Our webmaster was no longer involved in the Fall semester, and I was out of the country from early August 2014-January 2015 on exchange and unable to contribute to the promotion efforts for the ASR video. However, we believe there is still significant potential to increase its impact. We will be posting the ASR video on our website (www.mcgill.ca/mfsp) since we now have another certified webmaster, along with re-posting the video on our Facebook page.

This semester, the MFSP has used the video in meetings and at promotional tabling events to explain the concept of ASR to interested students and to new members. We plan to continue using the ASR video in this way and to share the link on any

informational fliers we create to hand out at future tabling events. The video will continue to be used by the MFSP for years to come; both at the beginning of the semester during outreach efforts to find new members and throughout the semester when ASR projects are being set up. We also envisage the video continuing to be useful to all of the MxP groups as a tool for outreach (and will remind them of this at the next MxP meeting) and for MOOS in explaining ASR to any interested individuals on campus.

The MFSP would like to thank the Sustainability Projects Fund for providing the funds to make our video project possible. We were able to stay on budget based on the project proposal, and although we encountered some challenges along the way, we are quite pleased with the final product of this project. The main difficulties stemmed from the timing and from our own turnover, and the main successes were the collaborative process used to create the video and the usefulness of the final product as a resource. If possible, expediting the SPF application process for smaller projects such as this one so as to reduce the amount of time between submission of an application and decision could help address these challenges, by ensuring that the group members who submit an application are present and have the resources (such as student listservs, other group members, etc.) to complete their project as initially proposed. In turn, the MFSP has learned from this experience that projects can take longer than planned, and that we have under-advertised our project. Consequently, we will be improving our promotion of the video during the rest of this semester and ensuring that the MFSP retains ownership over the project in the coming years by making it an integral part of our outreach efforts and of the welcoming of new members. We will encourage the other MxPs to do the same, and encourage the Office of Sustainability to use the video as widely as they see fit. This video has the potential to be an essential tool in catalyzing the process of applied student research, and thus the improvement of sustainability efforts, at McGill.