

SSMU Equity Policy (Complaints Process) Report 2013-2014

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Introduction

The following report does a comparative review of equity policies and their respective complaint process at various student associations of a similar caliber to the Student Society of McGill University. Further, this report reviews non-profit equity policy development and use.

Statement of Problem

SSMU has commissioned a report to evaluate its equity policy comparatively to other schools of a similar nature.

Research Questions

1. Is SSMU and McGill's structure of making visible the equity complaints process and dealing with such complaints effective?
2. How do other undergraduate student societies operate to promote visibility of and address equity complaints processes in their universities?
3. How can SSMU promote both the informal and formal collectivization of complaints to keep a record of equity infractions?
4. In what way does the resolution process of Equity in McGill and other universities allow for building a culture of equity, as opposed to simply resolving one complaint in a way

that isolates it from addressing the wider culture that permits inequitable practices at the University?

5. Based on the comparison, how can we improve both the visibility of and the effectiveness of the equity complaints process at SSMU and McGill?

Significance of the Problem

In recognizing a history of inequality, social equity practices are necessary to move towards equality and provide avenues for addressing times in which equality is infringed upon. Equity recognizes that identities that have been historically marginalized require different and greater support services to achieve equality than those who have been historically privileged. To support marginalized identities there must be practices in place to ensure that these individuals are supported especially in instances in which oppression has been actualized. A complaints process within an equity policy is an effective way of supporting this.

Description of Research Design and Procedures Used

Six schools were selected to evaluate and compare to SSMU in terms of equity. Each school was selected because of a specific property that resembled that of McGill; in cases in which there were multiple schools that fit the given requirement, a preliminary overview of the schools were done, and the school that was selected appeared to have the strongest equity practices based on this evaluation. For each school selected, the executive responsible for equity practices was identified and contacted. However, none of the schools selected had an independent equity policy unique from that of their affiliated university. Therefore, the report is not as complete as desired. Further investigation into non-profits that design and evaluate equity policy was done a supplementary work.

School Profiles

McGill University: Student Society of McGill University (SSMU)

McGill University Equity Policy & Complaints Procedure

<http://agsem-aedem.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Equity-Policy-and-Internal-Complaint-Procedure.pdf>

SSMU Equity Policy & Complaints Procedure

<http://ssmu.mcgill.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/SSMU-Equity-Policy-New.pdf>

The Differences

The primary difference here is in comprehensiveness and scope, although the SSMU equity policy is more comprehensive, however the McGill policy has wider a scope and capacity - there is a greater population considered, and greater possibility in terms of consequence. This said, policy has considered only 35 complaints in 2012. There is a variation in number of complaints from one year to another, and due to natural of complaints being largely with regards to sexual harassment it is not surprising that this seems to be a focus in the policy.

Complaints Made:

McGill number of complaints in 2012: 35

SSMU number of complaints in 2012: 1

Such a low number can really mean one of three things.

Hypotheses

1. McGill students overlook the SSMU policy either because it does not apply to them. In this scenario, they might be going directly to the McGill administrative policy because it is more applicable (given its wider scope). The SSMU policy is only applicable in very particular instances involving a smaller group of people.
2. McGill students do not know the policy exists. Without polling (which is certainly a possibility) it's impossible to know whether or not this is the case, but either way a visibility campaign might be a useful avenue. Perhaps we could consider employing the same method as SACCOMS or the Nightline - stickers/posters etc.
3. Students choose to use the McGill administrative route because of its greater capacity to exact punishment, or, as it is not administered by fellow students, because of a perceived neutrality. This could be determined through polling.

In any case, a move towards greater visibility would be an adequate first step.

A note on language:

Given McGill's multicultural status and strong French community, it seems problematic that this policy in its entirety is only available in English. Given McGill's highly multicultural population and strong French language community it is definitely worth considering translating the policy into other languages.

University of Toronto Students' Union (UTSU)

If there is a specific UTSU (University of Toronto Student Union) policy it is not obvious, this said, there is an equity commission and there are five active campaigns, two of which are explained on their website. There is a "racialized students" campaign that led to a study and the implementation of new policy, there is a multi-faith space campaign as well as a campaign focused on the improvement of mental health.

<http://utsu.ca/section/1415>

University of Toronto - Human Resources and Equity

<http://www.hrandequity.utoronto.ca/Assets/HR+Digital+Assets/Miscellaneous/Guidelines+for+Employees+on+Concerns+and+Complaints+Regarding+Prohibited+Discrimination+and+Discriminatory+Harassment.pdf>

- Does not include definitions as McGill does, this leaves room for flexibility but also misinterpretation/ this might be a strength of McGill's policy
- Worded with questions and contains graph for complainant: user friendly format?

Alma Mater Society of University of British Columbia (AMS)

No information found.

UBC

<http://equity.ubc.ca/discrimination/>

- Set up on a website with clickable links as well as a policy PDF
- Like McGill's policy it includes categorization and definitions, as well as clarification of scope etc

Concordia Student Union (CSU)

Website/department centred around preservation and promotion of advocacy:

<http://advocacy.csu.qc.ca/>

This said, it is clearly stated in the CSU FAQ's that they cannot process complaints made against the CSU. They can file complaints, presumably to Concordia departments, on behalf of students anonymously, and can attend meetings with regards to personnel issues as an accompaniment to students.

http://advocacy.csu.qc.ca/modules.php?op=modload&name=FAQ&file=index&myfaq=yes&id_cat=6&categories=Advocacy&parent_id=0#q16

Association Students University of California (Berkeley)

<http://diversity.berkeley.edu/uc-berkeley-strategic-plan-equity-inclusion-and-diversity>

Non-discrimination policy: <http://students.berkeley.edu/uga/grievance.stm>

“UNIVERSITY GRIEVANCES

If you have been discriminated against by any entity within the University, you may file a grievance with the [Office of Student Affairs](#). This procedure specifically applies to acts of discrimination on the basis of color, race, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, medical condition, ancestry, marital status, citizenship, sexual orientation, or veteran status.

If you believe you have been discriminated against:

- (1) Visit <http://students.berkeley.edu/uga/grievance.stm>. Read over the grievance procedure to understand what steps are involved.
- (2) You should attempt to resolve the complaint informally. You may seek support from the Student Advocate's Office or from the University Ombudsperson.
- (3) Document your situation. Be sure to collect any evidence that will support your claim.
- (4) Fill out the grievance form, located at the bottom of the grievance procedure website. Submit the form to the department in which the violation occurred, within sixty days of the date of the incident.

(5) If you are unsatisfied with the department's decision regarding your complaint, you may file a formal student grievance to the Office of Student Affairs."

From: <http://students.berkeley.edu/uga/grievance.stm>

Complaints are processed through the university "grievances" procedure, which is a formal administrative process - ie the student union here functions as a support for students, as an advocate, as opposed to administering their own policy.

University of Virginia Student Council

UVa has an office for diversity with a series of initiatives:

<http://www.uvastudentcouncil.com/about/cabinet/diversity-initiatives/#>

From student council by-laws:

<http://www.uvastudentcouncil.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/UVA-Student-Council-By-Laws-1.pdf>

Students are meant to enforce a student code of conduct with regards to council but this doesn't seem to be publicly accessible unless they're referring to the "honor code". This policy seems somewhat ambiguous.

Cornell University Student Association

Committee: Student Assembly Committee on Inclusion and Diversity Initiatives: deals with issues of diversity, ie diversity initiatives and proactive monitoring on campus.

<http://assembly.cornell.edu/SAInclusion/Home> This is there only student related initiative regarding diversity. Cornell's student union does not have policy independent of the university administration, and hence they do not have student based/student oversight with regards to policy on equity.

Diversity inclusion statement: <https://www.hr.cornell.edu/diversity/eeeeo/statement.html>

Diversity complaints are run through a series of email addresses that, one would assume, are answered by a person or a group of people who they themselves determine the appropriate course of action. <https://www.hr.cornell.edu/diversity/reporting/>

This PDF on their website outlines the basic procedure for complaint resolution:

<https://www.hr.cornell.edu/diversity/reporting/reporting.pdf>. It follows in the same vein as

McGill's but appears to be less formalized.

Nonprofits

SSMU's policy was developed based on the equity policy used by the Sistering Board - a not-for-profit in Toronto focused on women's equity. Given SSMU's status as an almost independent body of McGill University, there are important lessons to be learned from these kinds of organizations. The policy used at Sistering Board was developed with reference to a toolkit published by an Ontario community organization network, the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition -

<http://www.ohcc-ccso.ca/en/inclusive-community-organizations-a-tool-kit>. This toolkit was

re-designed in 2004 - http://www.ohcc-ccso.ca/en/webfm_send/180, http://www.ohcc-ccso.ca/en/webfm_send/180, http://www.ohcc-ccso.ca/en/webfm_send/182, http://www.ohcc-ccso.ca/en/webfm_send/182. There are other not-for-profit toolkits designed not only for developed equity practices but also reviewing equity policy - <http://www.oaith.ca/assets/files/Publications/Intersectionality/integrated-tool-for-policy.pdf> This toolkit is developed for community organizations by Springtide Resources, a not-for-profit charity organization that fights against violence against women and children.

OAITH

“An Integrated Anti-Oppression Framework for Reviewing and Developing Policy”

key points:

- model focuses on “anti-oppression” as a tool to bring about changes/ improvements to existing inequality within a system
- accessibility:
 - “To make policies accessible, you should aim to:
 - Keep the policies in a place where anyone who wants to read them can access them without barriers. Is our policy easily accessible? Should it be accessible offline as well?
 - Make sure that the policies can be, and are, translated into different and appropriate language and cultural interpretations as well as physical formats. Translation into French is definitely necessary, are other languages necessary? Use language that is clear and direct, rather than full of jargon. Use wording that makes the policy intentions easy to understand.
 - Have a clear statement about who the policy applies to and who is responsible for putting it into practice.
 - Being flexible in the policy to allow for different cultural beliefs and values, unless there are legal reasons to limit your flexibility.”

The policy also argues that a policy review should consider:

- “How does this policy affect different people?”
 - This policy is designed to be inclusive of all people no matter race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, gender identification, age, mental or physical disability, language, sexual orientation or social class.

The only obvious issue is language - this text should be translated

“Policy gaps and what we can do”

How accessible is this policy? The issue of accessibility is definitely an issue of language, but what about accessibility of this policy offline?

Ontario Health Community Organizations

- this document is focused around a model of diversity and inclusion based on:
 - ethno-racial background,
 - financial status,

- education level,
- physical or mental ability,
- religious and faith-based beliefs,
- gender,
- sexual orientation,
- age,
- all of these things are included within our current policy
- this toolkit focuses on addresses the “how” and “why” for developing policy - and is thus not as useful