



University Affairs Portfolio End-of-Year Report 2015-2016

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Change within McGill is most often defined by incremental progress rather than over-night transformations. During the 2015-2016 academic year, SSMU University Affairs has successfully pushed forward numerous projects to address critical mental health, equity and academic issues facing undergraduate students. This report highlights some of these achievements.

Academic Affairs

Improved participation and institutional memory for 40+ [University & Senate Committees](#). End-of-year reports are being compiled from all Committee members and will be released in May. Submitted a number of questions to Senate including the following:

- [Question Regarding McGill's Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Report](#) (September, 2015)
- [Question Regarding Physical Accessibility on Campus](#) (September, 2015)
- [Question Regarding International Tuition Deregulation](#) (November, 2015)
- [Question Regarding Course Outlines](#) (February, 2016)
- [Question Regarding Resolution of Student Grievances](#) (April 2016)
- [Question Regarding Universal Design for Learning, Mental Health and Neurodiversity](#) (April, 2016)

An [Open Discussion on Employment Equity](#) was held due to concerns raised by Student Senators at the May 2015 Senate meeting. Revisions were also made to the [University Student Assessment Policy](#). All Senate documents, including responses to the above questions and other reports, can be found [here](#).

Hosted the first-ever Student Academic Summit in September to share knowledge and foster collaborations between departmental and faculty association VP Academics and Senators. Advocated and mobilized for a [Fall Reading Break proposal](#) after a survey showed strong student support. It is being considered by the Committee on Enrollment and Student Affairs.

A SSMU [Know Your Academic Rights](#) website was also launched to better communicate University policy.

The Library Improvement Fund Committee increased outreach efforts and received a record number of proposals submitted by students. Funding for a research project to investigate the potential applications of Open Education Resources (e.g. open source textbooks) was approved. SSMU adopted a stance in [support of Open Educational Resources](#) for their pedagogical advantages and the potential collective cost-savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars for students. The 2015-16 Library Improvement Fund Report can be found [here](#).

Possible revisions to McGill's current policy on requiring medical notes were discussed at Enrollment and Student Affairs Advisory Committee. Despite repeated urging from student



Senators, the majority of Associate Deans were resistant to changing current practices. However Engineering, Science and Arts have agreed to a “freebie” policy for students who go to Service Point requesting their first final exam deferral. This policy, which already existed for Arts and Science students, will now be advertised widely to students beginning in the Fall 2016 term.

Applied Student Research

SSMU released comprehensive research report titled [Equity in the Hiring of McGill Academic Staff: An Investigation](#). This report demonstrated that marginalized groups are severely underrepresented within McGill’s academic staff. In response to these concerning facts, we hosted the [Diversity in Academia](#) panel event and released a [statement](#) calling for the University to take meaningful action on this critical issue. As well, earlier this semester SSMU released an Indigenizing the Academy research report, which will be submitted to the soon-to-be-struck Provost’s Taskforce on Indigenous Education. Research was also commissioned on Frais Institutionnel Obligatoire (FIO) regulations and Service Point deferrals.

Hosted first-ever [Student Research Competition](#) to support applied student research that could be used for future advocacy. Two projects were selected focusing on first generation students and barriers to education, specifically for students of colour.

Mental Health

Participated in a comprehensive review of Student Services and the Office of the Deputy Provost (Student Life & Learning). Recommendations to improve the units were developed after extensive research and student consultations was completed. Student Services has published their [response](#) to the recommendations.

As the co-chair of the Committee on Student Services, I developed close working relationships with all Directors of Student Services to facilitate ongoing communications and encourage applications to the [Student Services Innovation Fund](#). Past projects include the [Wellness Recovery Action Plan \(WRAP\)](#), group therapy to develop “wellness tools”.

Passed a SSMU Mental Health Fee, part of which will go towards a Mental Health Fund to ensure funding for student-run mental health initiatives across campus. [SSMU Mental Health](#) also hosted the 2nd annual [Mental Health Awareness Week](#) in the fall, organized a Mental Health Open Forum including a [Q&A with Services Directors](#) and substantially increased outreach initiatives through social media and tabling around campus to promote awareness and resources (including the [McGill Mental Health Hub](#)). SSMU has also developed a strong working relationship with Mental Health Services, Healthy McGill, Counselling Services, Peer Support Centre and a number of other mental health-related student groups. As a result of these partnerships, SSMU and Mental Health Services launched a popular [Happy Lights Lending Program](#), which allows undergraduate students to rent out Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) lamps for up to 2 weeks.



After significant community consultation including a survey and plebiscite question, a [Smoking on Campus Policy](#) was approved. SSMU Mental Health is working with relevant McGill Services to increase promotion and accessibility of cessation resources for smokers wishing to quit.

Equity

Established [SSMU Indigenous Affairs](#) as a department of SSMU including the hiring of SSMU's first Indigenous Affairs Commissioner, launching an [Indigeneity & Allyship](#) event series and institutionalizing support and advocacy for Indigenous students by passing a [SSMU Indigenous Solidarity Policy](#). Consultation with Indigenous staff and students has highlighted issues of racism as being of concern on campus. SSMU will be releasing a report in early May summarizing some of these issues.

Worked with the [Sexual Assault Policy \(SAP\) working group](#) to develop an accessible, pro-survivor, intersectional sexual assault policy in consultation with community groups. When negotiations with the administration broke down, we released an [open letter](#) and mobilized support to demand the University take greater action to support survivors. Thus far, the administration has committed to passing a sexual assault policy by the end of 2016 as well as to allocate greater resources towards addressing this issue.

Collaborated with VP External to host the [SSMU Speaker Series: rupi kaur](#) event. The spoken word performance was free and open to the community and explored themes of love, grief, abuse and sexual violence.

Developed and passed the [SSMU Accessibility Policy](#) in collaboration with VP Clubs & Services to institutionalize support for students with disabilities and ensure continued advocacy in support of the principles of Universal Design for Learning.

Thank you to the 12 other Undergraduate Student Senators, the 8 student staff within the University Affairs portfolio and countless committee volunteers for all their hard work, without which none of these accomplishments would be possible!