

**TO:** Senate

**FROM:** Question from Senator Chloe Rourke and Senator Erin Sobat  
Response from Senator Dyens and Senator Costopoulos

**SUBJECT:** Question and Response Regarding McGill's Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Report

**MEETING DATE:** September 24, 2015

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**PREAMBLE:** Whereas, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada recently released a report on "Calls to Action" regarding the legacies of the residential school system for Indigenous people in Canada;

Whereas, recommendations of the report include calls for the federal government "to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians" (Article 7), and "to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education" (Article 11);

Whereas, realizing these recommendations must necessarily occur in collaboration with Canadian post-secondary institutions;

Whereas, many Canadian Universities have developed comprehensive, measurable strategies to improve Indigenous enrolment on their campuses, including but not limited to the University of British Columbia's 2009 Aboriginal Strategic Plan<sup>2</sup>;

Whereas, the McGill Aboriginal Affairs Work Group (AAWG) has developed a suite of programs to improve educational access and enrolment for Indigenous students<sup>3</sup>, however McGill currently lacks a university-wide strategic plan;

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<sup>1</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action  
[http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan. <http://aboriginal.ubc.ca/files/2013/01/ASP-FinalComplete.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Aboriginal Affairs Work Group. <https://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/aboriginaloutreach>.

Whereas the University of British Columbia's Aboriginal Strategic Plan extends beyond increasing enrolment and seeks to foster closer relations between local Indigenous communities and the University<sup>4</sup>;

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**QUESTION:**

How can McGill work with the federal government and Indigenous groups to increase access to education for Indigenous students?

Specifically, what concrete steps can be taken to increase the enrolment and retention of Indigenous students?

Will McGill consider adopting a university-wide strategic plan on Indigenous education in response to the Truth and Reconciliation report?

What efforts is McGill undertaking to build relationships with local Indigenous communities?

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**RESPONSE:**

[provided by  
Senator Dyens, DP  
Student Life &  
Learning, and  
Senator  
Costopoulos, Dean  
of Students]

McGill recognizes the importance of the Call to Action and the need to 'develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.' In addition to the many current initiatives at McGill (please refer to the response to a January 2015 Senate question reproduced in the annex below), and the progress made in recent years (Aboriginal applicants to McGill roughly doubled in number from 152 in 2009, to 302 in 2014. However, the number who actually registered only increased by 9 students, from 40 in 2009, to 49 in 2014). In response, McGill is drafting a plan to increase its numbers by addressing access issues First Nations students may need to overcome to attend post-secondary education. This plan, called 'Portage', follows on the Principal's Taskforce on Diversity, Excellence and Community engagement, and is aimed at actively reaching out to Aboriginal students. **Portage McGill** is a new process to help these applicants and potentially other under-represented groups gain admission to McGill.

Once implemented, **Portage McGill** applicants will enrol in the Bachelor of Arts degree program all starting at U0 level (freshman) and will take 18-24 credits over two semesters. Course offerings will include existing 100 and 200 level courses (such as, Effective Writing, Freshman Level Math and Sciences, Social Science and Humanities, Indigenous Studies, etc.). On-line credit courses may comprise part of the program in the future but the preference will be to complete coursework on campus in close proximity to other students and all support services.

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<sup>4</sup> UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan. <http://aboriginal.ubc.ca/files/2013/01/ASP-FinalComplete.pdf>.

The committee members in charge of developing the plan (Kakwiranó:ron Cook, Aboriginal Outreach Administrator, André Costopoulos, Dean of Students, Kathleen Massey, Registrar and Executive Director, Enrolment Services and Kim Bartlett, Director of Admissions, Enrolment Services) will work closely with the Faculties to bring the plan for approval by Senate within this academic year.

Provost Manfredi will also address Senate on this topic.

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**APPENDICES:**

Appendix A: Question Regarding Support of Indigenous Access McGill  
(submitted by Senator Stewart-Kanigan at the January  
2014 Senate meeting)

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**Senator Stewart-Kanigan submitted the following question:**

How does McGill intend to build its institutional commitment to creating a welcoming and supportive campus environment for current and prospective Indigenous students?

How does McGill plan to support the continued operation and growth of Indigenous Access McGill, and would internal funding be considered?

**Senators Dyens and Costopoulos provided the following response:**

In 2005, the Work Group on Aboriginal Affairs was established to review McGill's services and programs for First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. Since then, the University has been committed to outreach, access and support for Aboriginal students and to the development of initiatives that address the current and future needs of Aboriginal students.

In February 2013, the Office of the Vice-Principal (Research and International Relations) published the *Strategic Research Plan 2013-17*, which details the commitment to support the goals outlined in the Increased University Access Project. More specifically:

“We support the participation of diverse voices and are committed to include and promote Indigenous knowledge. This stems from a sincere and historical acknowledgement that Aboriginal issues are global issues, and Indigenous perspectives are relevant to all fields of study.”

Three key staff positions were created in the Office of the Dean of Students as part of a pilot project and made permanent last year to help develop and further Aboriginal initiatives: the Aboriginal Outreach Administrator, the Aboriginal Student Advisor and the Aboriginal/Indigenous Education Associate. Together, they work with University committees, units and faculties and with Aboriginal community groups to create awareness and generate dialogue about Aboriginal issues and to help realize outreach and recruitment goals and on-campus support and programming. These efforts also contribute to widening access for other under-represented communities at McGill.

**Ongoing Aboriginal Access Initiatives**

**Outreach/Recruitment**

- Identification of potentially eligible secondary school students via outreach to Aboriginal communities and participation in community/regional career fairs.
- Identification of potentially eligible CEGEP students via outreach to CEGEPS and events such as the annual Pow-Wow on campus.
- Orientation for McGill for first-year Aboriginal students and for youth through the Eagle Spirit High Performance Camp, which was established in 2006.
- A new application form that now allows First Nations, Inuit and Métis students to self-identify.
- Development of the Aboriginal Admissions Protocol.

- Creation of a bridge year to assure academic preparedness via the Aboriginal Pathways Program (under development with the School for Continuing Studies).
- Dedicated funds for Aboriginal student recruitment.

### **On-Campus Support/Programming**

- First Peoples' House (established in 1997). The First Peoples' House serves as a residence, gathering place and resource centre where activities such as the annual Pow-Wow, community dinners, social activities, weekly soup and bannock lunches and guest speaker presentations take place. The First Peoples' House also offers psycho-social supports such as adjustment to campus life, Indigenous spiritual support, social networking, celebrating achievement and sustaining a sense of community.
- Early orientation for Aboriginal students to facilitate the transition to Montreal and to McGill. One-on-one academic advising (through the Aboriginal Student Associate).
- Adoption of the symbolic graduation scarves now worn by Aboriginal graduates at convocation.
- Elder Program (launched in 2012). The Elder participates in First People's House activities, Aboriginal Affairs Work Group Meetings and ceremonial occasions such as the graduation scarf ceremony.

### **Ongoing Dialogue/Policies**

- The Subcommittee on Equity for First Peoples annually reviews the recruitment and status of under-represented First Nation and Inuit groups at McGill and its mission is to build equity for Indigenous peoples at the University.
- The Aboriginal Affairs Work Group (established in 2005), chaired by the Dean of Students, coordinates pan-University collaboration and communications concerning Aboriginal matters. It also reports student Aboriginal needs to the University administration and serves as the discussion forum on important Aboriginal issues including student recruitment and retention.
- The Aboriginal Focus Group meetings with community representatives (held in 2007, 2009 and 2012) facilitate communications and provide a forum for suggestions and feedback.

### **Pending Projects Related to Indigenous Access**

- The Office of the Dean of Students submitted an application for the renewal of MERST funding for outreach, recruitment and transition (response from MERST pending).
- First Peoples' House transformation to a Living Learning Community model.
- Launch of the Indigenous Studies Program minor in September 2014.
- Increasing visibility of Indigenous heritage of the land on which McGill sits through the relocation of the Hochelaga Rock and other related projects. The Aboriginal Affairs Work Group and Campus and Space Planning are collaborating on this project.

### **Faculty Initiatives**

Indigenous Access McGill (IAM) housed in the School of Social Work, is one of several programs within Faculties that work with the Office of the Dean of Students to reach out to Aboriginal communities and support our Aboriginal students once they are at McGill. The Faculties of Medicine and Education, for example, have similar programs. IAM and similar programs are important for helping Aboriginal communities build local capacity in fields such as social work, medicine, and education. These local initiatives also make a critical contribution to the intellectual diversity of the University by bringing excellent students from under-represented groups to McGill.

This being said, the financial climate for higher education in Quebec remains difficult. The allocation of permanent funding to Aboriginal Affairs in 2013-14 clearly demonstrates McGill's very strong commitment to outreach, access and support for Aboriginal students.