



SSMU UNIVERSITY AFFAIRS – 2016-2017 FINAL REPORT

MAY 31, 2017

Change at McGill University is most often defined by incremental progress rather than overnight transformation. However, during the 2016-2017 year, the SSMU University Affairs portfolio has successfully pushed forward numerous initiatives to address critical academic, equity, and student support issues facing undergraduate students. This report highlights some of these collective achievements.

ADVOCACY

Played a leading role in the [open letter](#) released by the McGill Students' Mental Health Working Group, which gathered over 1000 student signatures. The [response](#) from the Executive Director of Student Services outlines commitments to improve consultation, communication, and funding for mental health and disability services. This includes hiring more therapists, directing grant money to the Office for Students with Disabilities, and \$2 million in new donor funding for health projects.

Advocated for the creation of a long-fought-for [Policy against Sexual Violence](#) and new [Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support & Education](#) through press releases, media interviews, and an extensive [consultation report](#). Two [advisory committees](#) have been struck for the implementation of the policy as well as a review of existing disciplinary and reporting procedures.

Launched an expanded [Student Rights website](#) as an intuitive resource for understanding academic policies, requesting accommodations, and addressing violations. Associated Add-Drop “Know Your Rights” campaigns included cross-campus posters, flyers, tabling, social media promotion, and more.

Compiled investigation for the Advisory Council on the Charter of Student Rights regarding discriminatory accommodation practices. Supported more equitable accommodations through a “first-time free” [exam deferral pilot](#); expanding centrally-administered accommodation requests to Management; and consulting on revised accommodation guidelines for students with dependents.

Participated in the Ad-Hoc Committee to Review the Charter of Students' Rights. Conducted community-wide consultation and presented a [revised draft](#) to Senate for approval in Fall 2017.

Supported mobilization against student fees through a [feature article on Student Services](#), proposed [Policy against Ancillary Fee Increases](#), and successful campaign to defeat an Athletics fee increase.

Worked with the Associate Vice-Principal (Innovation & Partnerships) to develop a plan for adopting humanitarian licensing principles at McGill, as per the SSMU [Global Access to Medicines Policy](#).

Allocated the \$700 000 [Library Improvement Fund](#) to student employment, extended branch hours, seating additions, and technology upgrades such as charging stations. Investigated proposals for inter-faith prayer space, family-friendly zones, Black History Month celebrations and accessibility initiatives.



RESEARCH

Analyzed legal context and established criteria for evaluating **unpaid internship opportunities**.
Developed a **framework for sustained advocacy** through a new SSMU [Policy against Unpaid Internships](#).

Released reports on [first generation students](#) and [students from foster care](#). Researchers advocated for improved **consultation**, **data tracking**, and **support** for these groups, including successful creation of a **minimum guaranteed bursary** for students from foster care and plans for a **policy hack-a-thon** in 2018.

Supported an extensive study on [Open Educational Resources](#) (i.e. **open access textbooks**) through the Library Improvement Fund. SSMU is working with the Libraries to implement its recommendations.

Produced **recommendations for reform** to the [McGill Board of Governors](#) and [SSMU internal governance](#). Worked with the McGill Communities Council and various SSMU committees to further these proposals.

Hired a **Harmful Military Technology Researcher** to review thousands of documents from McGill laboratories obtained through Access to Information requests. This analysis will inform future campaigns.

Launched [Alternative McGill Histories project](#) aimed at centering **marginalized community experiences**.

REPRESENTATION

Recruited, trained, and supported **over 100 student representatives** on more than **50 university committees**. Collected mid-year and [year-end committee reports](#) on their activities.

Worked with student senators to submit various **formal questions and motions** to Senate, including:

- [Question Regarding Relocation of the McGill Bookstore](#) (October 2016)
- [Question Regarding Campus Accessibility During Construction Periods](#) (November 2016)
- [Question Regarding University Regulation of Unpaid Internships](#) (November 2016)
- [Question Regarding Faculty Internship Programs](#) (December 2016)
- [Question Regarding University Governance Best Practices](#) (January 2017)
- [Motion Regarding the Annual Celebration of Black History Month](#) (February 2017)
- [Question Regarding Student Diversity Initiatives](#) (April 2017)
- [Question Regarding Senate Composition](#) (May 2017)

Other Senate business included revisions to the [Intellectual Property](#) and [Harassment](#) policies and reports on [employment equity](#) and [systemic discrimination among faculty members](#). All Senate documents, including written responses to the above questions, can be found on the [McGill website](#).

Worked with the McGill Communities Council to further SSMU [calls for reform](#) of the McGill Board of Governors, including meeting with the Chair of the Board. The Board produced a [report](#) with limited recommendations for **enhanced community input into member-at-large nominations**.



Conducted consultation and participated on committees for cyclical unit reviews of **Human Resources** and **Enrolment Services**. The latter has released their [response](#) to the review recommendations. Attended **all five congresses** of the provincial [Association for the Voice of Education in Quebec](#) (AVEQ). Supported research and advocacy on issues such as [international student health insurance](#), tuition deregulation, impacts of austerity cuts, university sexual violence legislation, and more. Passed a [motion](#) for SSMU to **continue observing** at AVEQ and to bring forward an **affiliation referendum** in Fall 2017.

EQUITY

Organized closed campus conversations on topics such as [Race in the Academy](#) and packed the Ballroom for a [social justice comedy night](#) with Hari Kondabalu. Hosted panel events with Consent McGill on [sexual violence and university power dynamics](#) and with PGSS Equity on [emotional labour and emotional abuse](#).

Supported SSMU Indigenous Affairs in programming, advocacy, and consultation, including organization and promotion for the second annual [Indigeneity and Solidarity Week](#).

Passed revisions to the [Equity Policy](#) in order to improve clarity and accessibility of **complaints** and to the [Indigenous Solidarity Policy](#) in order to improve **consultation protocols** and sensitivity.

Drafted framework for a formal SSMU Equitable Hiring Policy. Implemented **equity hiring training** for Executives and Managers and drafted a job description for an **employment equity assistant** position.

Supported a successful Sustainability Projects Fund application for a **Community Projects Manager (Racialized & Ethnic Students)** under the [Social Equity & Diversity Education \(SEDE\) Office](#).

Advocated through the **Joint Board-Senate Committee on Equity** for revisions to the *Harassment* and *Sexual Violence* policies as well as the creation of a **mandatory online equity tutorial** via Minerva.

SSMU

Launched the [University Affairs website](#) as a central resource for **student representation, research and advocacy** at McGill, including information on university committees, research reports, and key contacts.

Organized the second annual [Student Academic Summit](#) as an opportunity to **share knowledge** and **build collaborations** with other student representatives. Topics included mental health programming, Universal Design for Learning, the Library Improvement Fund, university policy development, and more.

Increased the reach of updates through a more coordinated communications plan, including [University Affairs](#) and [Equity](#) Facebook pages, the University Affairs [blog](#), and a new [monthly listserv](#).

Thank you to all of our student senators, staff, committee members and volunteers for their important contributions this year, without which none of these accomplishments would be possible!

Cheers,

Erin Sobat
Vice-President (University Affairs)