



An Open Letter to the McGill University Administration

11 March 2013

Having lasted now for almost three years, the negotiations between McGill and SSMU for the SSMU Building lease have been lengthy and arduous. With this letter, we as the 2012-2013 SSMU Executive aim to publicly reaffirm our basic principles moving forward and state our goals for the Society's space in negotiations and our commitment to student space and life at McGill more generally.

The building at 3480 McTavish is a service that SSMU administers for McGill undergraduates and their activities. This building was built with student fees from 1963 to 1965 for the sole purpose of providing space for student clubs and society activities. We agree that as much of the space in the building as possible should be allocated for student groups, whether SSMU clubs or services or campus newspapers. This building, as a space that was built together by the Students' Society and the University, stands as a very tangible symbol to the place student life and activities has on this campus. We understand that running such a building has a cost, and we further understand that the University is facing tough financial decisions, but student fees allocated by students to go directly towards SSMU's operations of student groups and activities should not go in majority toward paying simply for the building to stand. These negotiations could vastly affect student fees by mandating a significant increase to the SSMU base fee in order to maintain continued operations. We understand that running a building costs money, but this is a contribution to the entire McGill community that SSMU needs help with in order to operate. Student life on the McGill campus has a massive value for the University, and we ask that McGill acknowledges this in ways more tangible than philosophical agreements.

We – SSMU – in attempting to represent the 22,000 undergraduates on campus, are just as much “McGill” as the McGill Administration, and it is a testament to the strength of the McGill community in such difficult financial and political times that we as a separately-incorporated students' association still feel such great ownership in the McGill community. As stated in our Constitution, SSMU's most vital mission is to serve students through service, representation, and leadership; we see autonomy in this building as essential to fulfilling demand for student space and activities on campus, and we know well that this has material financial value to the University. Our almost 300 clubs, 21 student-run services, and affiliations with 12 Independent Student Groups together represent McGill student life that attracts such inspiring and motivated students to attend this institution; our involvement in University committees and advocacy engages students in the governance of their University and allows us to practice in real settings what we learn in our classes, building leaders that later make McGill alumni such an inspiring force. It is SSMU's unbelievably dedicated staff and student volunteers that allow this entire mechanism of lively campus activities to exist in an otherwise entirely academic context, and even more powerfully to make concrete links between the extracurricular and academic worlds.



Though the details of lease negotiations must remain confidential in order to negotiate in good faith, we wish more than anything else that we could be more open about this process with our membership, as it is hardly appropriate for six executives or even a representative Legislative Council to make such massive, financially impactful decisions on behalf of 22,000 students with such barriers to consultation. With this letter, we hope to demonstrate that we are advocating in students' best interests, while asking you, McGill, to do the same. We very much understand that McGill has made financial commitments to student life in this building. We now need you to reaffirm that in the current context of lease negotiations.

Signed,

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