

## SSMU Mental Health Committees Status Update

This year there are two mental health committees. The mental health advocacy committee focuses on mental health issues at the policy level and work towards administrative changes. The mental health outreach committee is responsible for increasing awareness in the student population and connecting them to campus resources.

Most notably this semester, the advocacy committee planned and carried out the Mental Health Open Forum. They are currently working on a blurb on mental health to be included in course syllabi, an exam deferral research project, and a simple document informing students about exam deferral policies. They are also drafting an open letter to Deans to ask what they have been doing for student mental health.

- I. The mental health forum took place on March 11, 2016. We split it up into two sections: a discussion block and a Q&A with student services.
  - a. For the discussion, we invited numerous students, staff and faculty and split them into small groups to discuss an overarching question of “What are stressors in the McGill environment, and how can we create a more supportive campus environment?” Falling under the categories of academic, social and institutional. We had notetakers at each table, and will be compiling the notes to distribute the most important points to various stakeholders.
  - b. For the Q&A, we had a panel comprised of representatives from Mental Health, Counselling, OSD and Student Services. Students were given the opportunity to ask questions about the services available for mental health at McGill. We had a great turnout and hope to do additional Q&As in the future!
- II. We are aiming include a blurb on mental health on the course syllabus just like for academic integrity. The blurb will aim to help students become more aware of the importance of mental health as well as providing a list of resources. The blurb has already been written and reviewed by professionals and peers from Mental Health Services, Counselling Services, and Healthy McGill. At beginning of January, we contacted professors of large classes such as introductory science classes and ask them to include the blurb on syllabi. The long term goal is to pass through the Senate and make the blurb mandatory to be included on the syllabus of every course, which we will be working on into next year.
- III. We have developed a flow chart advising students of the policies related to midterm and final exam deferral, and the process for deferring exams. The first draft has been completed and we hope to distribute it online and throughout McGill!

- IV. We are drafting an open letter to Deans to ask them about their efforts accommodating students with mental health issues. It is in early development, but we hope to finish it by the end of the school year.

The outreach committee has been working on several projects for this academic year. In addition to reaching out to students through social media and tabling, we will be building a resource map and implementing the Friendship Bench:

- I. The resource map will aim to help students navigating through all the different services that support student mental health on campus. Currently there are many great resources on campus, however often students don't know about their existence or students are not sure about the differences among them and which one best suits their needs. This map will include all resources related to mental health and will highlight the type of services they offer. We have started compiling the resources and brainstorming ways to make the map clear and easy to understand for students.
- II. The Friendship Bench is a yellow bench installed on university campuses as a reminder to all students to speak up about mental health. The project is started by an external organization that we would be working with. Its slogan is #yellowisforhello, which seeks to provide a reminder that something as simple as a hello can change someone's day. The bench will also feature a URL where students can quickly access mental health services. Thus the bench is a place for students to meet new friends while also acts as a physical presence for mental health awareness. Right now, the most important part of implementing the bench has been fundraising - we need to raise about \$5,000 to install the bench. The committee has planned a number of initiatives to raise the funds, and are about \$750 in.
- III. Our Outreach team also posts a lot of great articles on the Facebook page - please go check it out! (SSMU Mental Health)

We hope that a lot of the initiatives both committees have started will continue into next year!