

VP External End of Year Report

Emily Boytinck, 2015-2016

When I began my position, the Quebec student movement was in the process of reorganizing itself. The [FEUQ](#) had just collapsed, and the ASSÉ saw their [entire executive leave the association](#) amidst controversy. Furthermore, student associations across the province remained unsure of the future of the anti-austerity movement, which had [large mobilizations in the spring](#). The SSMU had adopted mandates for climate justice, anti-austerity, and anti-military research, all of which implicated the VP External.

Following the [collapse of the FEUQ](#), student organizations from across the province began having conversations towards creating a new provincial student association. Internal tensions were quickly apparent, with competing visions in relation to voting structures and political stances. Thus, two associations were formed, the [Union Étudiante du Québec \(UEQ\)](#) and the [Association for the Voice of Education in Québec \(AVEQ\)](#). As VP External, I sat around both tables, advocating for positions relevant to McGill students and assisting in the creation of governing documents. I was particularly active at AVEQ, where I helped to draft [policies](#) related to sustainability, equity, communication and accountability. On McGill campus, I visited a number of faculty associations in order to explain the importance of provincial representation. Ultimately, council chose to run a referendum for AVEQ, which failed in the winter, but overwhelmingly mandated the VP External to continue participating in the association as an observer. There is a lot of potential within the organization, which is particularly well-positioned to advocate on behalf of anglophone and international students, and I'm proud of the work that the SSMU was able to contribute in its founding year.

The anti-austerity movement in Quebec attempted to reignite in the fall, with very little success. Despite the fact that many public sector workers were on strike, student associations had a tough time mobilizing. The same frustrations were present on McGill campus, with no strikes and small demonstration contingents, but despite this, we managed to solidify a new campus campaign fighting specifically against austerity. [McGill Against Austerity](#) was founded after a successful [anti-austerity week](#), held in the beginning of September. The campaign has been active all year, organizing a number of contingents for demonstrations, creating mobilization materials, and spearheading the [Beyond McGill](#) workshop series. Anti-austerity mobilization will continue to play a role in the student movement, though it is unclear as to what form that will take. The Quebec government recently announced a reinvestment in higher education, though that has been largely [denounced by student associations as insufficient](#).

The Quebec student movement has begun to prioritize initiatives of social and environmental justice, and this type of organizing is particularly welcome on McGill campus. The [internal regulations of the external portfolio](#), written and passed this year, outline the expectation for the SSMU to act as a leader on matters of social and environmental justice and to support political campaigns, including [Demilitarize McGill](#) and [Divest McGill](#). I have also had the chance to work with [QPIRG McGill](#) on initiatives such as [Social Justice Days](#) and [Culture](#)

[Shock](#). These initiatives and campaigns fit well within a student movement which is slowly moving beyond a tight focus on education initiatives.

I was particularly active on initiatives related to climate justice, be it through organizing a demo with [ECO \(Étudiantes Contre les Oléoducs\)](#), helping out at the [Conference of Youth \(COY\)](#), or spearheading a trip to Ottawa for the [Climate Welcome](#). I passed a [Climate Change Policy](#) this year which further details the SSMU's commitment to social and environmental justice, and I hope that for many years to come the SSMU political campaigns will continue to fight for a more sustainable future. Divest McGill had a particularly active year, with the organization of [Fossil Free Week](#) and the [#OurFutureOurChoice Sit-in](#).

My commitment to sustainability was also apparent in the work that I did with respect to the [community relations](#) aspect of my portfolio. I contributed to both social and environmental sustainability through harm reduction street teams during frosh and St. Patrick's Day, as well as an ongoing "greener streets" project which analyzed the garbage present in the streets and worked with Projet Montreal to address this. I also worked with the community engagement committee to host events such as film screenings or the community engagement awards. Finally, I worked with the Milton Parc Citizens committee to redraft the [CARE agreement](#).

Much of the work of the VP External is to mobilize in relation to the political context of the time. This year, we saw the federal elections, and with it the launch of the [McGill Votes](#) campaign. This particular campaign saw debates, a vote mob, and voting stations on campus. This year there were also specific initiatives organized surrounding the COP 21 negotiations, a motion in support of Black Lives Matter Protests in Toronto, and a motion in support of the Leap Manifesto.

Ultimately, it is the job of the VP External to be active at the university, municipal, provincial and federal levels on issues related to education and social and environmental justice. By supporting relevant political campaigns, working with the local Quebec student movement, and working with the Milton-Parc community, the VP External can encourage McGill students to step outside of the bubble and get involved in their communities.