



Deputy Provost (Student Life & Learning)

Portfolio Questions and Recommendations

**Submission to:
Professor Anthony Masi, Provost, McGill University**

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Introduction

Dear Professor Masi,

This past summer, the term of the Deputy Provost (Student Life & Learning) was extended without any student consultation or notification. The subsequent review of the Student Life & Learning portfolio has generated much discussion about the implications of the portfolio and the ways in which it relates to McGill's various student constituencies. Consequently, downtown undergraduate associations have collaborated to outline the major successes and challenges of the portfolio and to make recommendations on how to improve its effectiveness. We are confident that the Student Life & Learning portfolio can be reassessed to ensure its success in years to come and enable McGill to further its mission as a student-centred university.

We hope that this document can be the start of a deeper and more productive dialogue between students and the McGill Administration. A series of framing questions are first posed and then followed-up with an articulation of our understanding successes and concerns regarding the Deputy Provost's role. We have attached two appendices where the questions and recommendations are listed without our commentary for easy referral. Where possible, we further illustrate our points with specific case studies. Please note that while these case studies are placed in relation to specific recommendations, they often are pertinent to other questions and concerns.

The concerns and recommendations that are presented are the result of a genuine effort to provide constructive feedback to the review of the Student Life & Learning portfolio. Further, we wished to accurately outline what student organizations find most problematic about the current organizational structure. Please note that due to the complex nature of the Deputy Provost's portfolio, few students, including elected student representatives, have a full and comprehensive understanding of the full scope of the Student Life & Learning portfolio. We have therefore focused on the areas of the portfolio—and on the specific role of the Deputy Provost—as they directly relate to us as students and student organizations.

It would have been productive to discuss specific aspects of this document directly with the Deputy Provost before its submission to the Provost's office; it would have been beneficial to have a clearer understanding of how the Deputy Provost views his own portfolio. However, given recent events and some of the challenges outlined herein, this did not prove feasible.

Nonetheless, we hope this will provide a comprehensive starting point for further discussions and we look forward to working with the Provost's office throughout the coming months. Please feel free to contact any of us for further elaboration on any of the points listed below.

Regards,

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Vanessa Harman, *Education Undergraduate Society*

Josh Redel, *Engineering Undergraduate Society*

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Making Good Decisions & Providing Justification

How does the Deputy Provost proactively involve students in decision-making processes?

What onus is placed on the Deputy Provost to provide rationales behind the University's decisions that affect student life and learning?

How can the Deputy Provost ensure that important decisions regarding student life are not made during the summer while student associations are less able to consult their constituencies?

From the Principal's Task Force on Student Life & Learning (PTFSLL):

“Determining mechanisms and institutional standards appropriate for the implementation of the broad recommendations of the Principal's Task Force in different academic and administrative units across the University should include input from students and individuals who work with them daily in these various contexts.”
(pg 10)

Successes

The creation of the Consultation and Communication Working Group was an important initiative in response to student outcry about the closure of the Architecture Café. The Office of the Deputy Provost has been proactive in initiating conversations about how to best implement the recommendations of the final report. For example, the first Consultation Fair was planned in equal collaboration between the SSMU and the Office of the Deputy Provost. It was refreshing to see the Deputy Provost sitting at a table and engaging with students on the topic of “freedom of speech”. Further, efforts have been made to ensure that other student associations are engaged in the planning of subsequent Consultation Fairs.

Another positive move is the Deputy Provost's willingness to discuss ways to restructure the Committee on Student Services to ensure that students are empowered to actively drive the way in which it is run. More concretely, there has been serious consideration on the possibility of a student co-chair. Unfortunately, due to the MUNACA strike, this work has been put on hold.

Concerns

The Office of the Deputy Provost has become seen as a “roadblock” for student societies. Indeed, the position has provided a defined way of working with the University, but it has simultaneously created a problem of agency. The Office of the Deputy Provost appears to have defined its own vision of student life and seems primarily interested in validating its own perceptions and understandings. The Deputy Provost’s vision should be an active process of reevaluation and development through consultation.

Often, there is a disconnection between what students and the Deputy Provost value. This creates a dynamic where the Deputy Provost is tied to an attitude of hyper-control and a primary dedication of managing real and reputational liability as defined by Senior Administration and Legal Services. Effectively, students are made to feel like liabilities rather than intrinsic members of the McGill community. Additionally, it seems that once decisions are made, any follow-up is simply a reaction to the aftereffects of that decision and a bid to placate students.

The Deputy Provost has made seemingly unilateral decisions and refused to explain the background motivation. When a decision is made, it is crucial to its effectiveness that the expected consequences and benefits are clearly outlined. Otherwise students can feel disempowered and pigeon-holed into being reactive when it appears that the only input they can have is after a decision is made.

Sometimes there is a failure to understand, from all sides, the timeline on which each group operates. Since it is clear that students are not necessarily available during the summer for consultation, the Deputy Provost should take this into account when realizing decisions during this time. Simultaneously, student groups must work to ensure that there is a more effective transition period and a strengthening of institutional memory.

Case-Study: The Architecture Café

The decision to close the Architecture Café was made quietly during the summer, and when students returned in September 2010, its closure was presented as a *fait accompli*. While issues of financial sustainability were blamed for requiring the closure, a proposal from the EUS and the ASA where the EUS would take on the financial risks was dismissed quickly. Given that many students viewed the financial concerns as possible to overcome through a management transfer to the EUS, student anger focused on what appeared to be a political decision taken without sufficient consultation.

These perceptions were not helped by the Deputy Provost’s comments in the campus press. The Deputy Provost was quoted saying “I assume it was being run in good faith by students who were really dedicated to the enterprise... but the café was essentially run like a lemonade stand” and that the café “was not being run professionally and could not be run professionally because students are not professionals in this industry.” Since there was no assertion that every reasonable effort had been made to work with students to find solutions that would allow the café to continue, these comments seemed to belittle student efforts and dismiss students’ abilities.

Furthermore, while, the Deputy Provost was originally quoted in the campus press as justifying the closure due to financial concerns, later arguments included that it was a long-term strategy to have all student-run operations, with the exception of those run by SSMU (and presumably PGSS), be “repatriated” by McGill Food and Dining Services.

Recommendations

Students should be informed and consulted in the decision-making process; in the case of decisions being made during the summer, there must be proactive consultation throughout the winter semester. The Office of the Deputy Provost should be willing to clearly communicate the University’s concerns or objectives and then work with students to establish a way in which they can be addressed without harming student life.

The narrative concerning what consultative processes were undertaken must be clearly communicated on an ongoing basis, particularly when the decision-making and subsequent implementation processes are multi-year. While it is understandable that the Administration might find it frustrating to explain the context of decisions, it is an inherent challenge of university communities where most the student body turns over ever 3-5 years. Proactively communicating rationales and timelines for decisions will help create better understanding between students and the Office of the Deputy Provost.

Informing students about the rationale behind decision making will facilitate the implementation of decisions. McGill students and student leaders are not generally inherently unreasonable; however, they do object to decisions made without due justification or prior warning. To be clear, consultation in decision-making doesn’t entail decisions being made purely from a student perspective. It entails a concerted effort to ensure that a baseline of understanding and trust has been previously established.

By making the student consultation website more comprehensive, student associations will be able to direct their constituencies for important and relevant information.

Finally, it would be productive if the Deputy Provost screened recommendations from Legal Services to ensure that they are reasonable when it comes to student life. Students see this increasingly legalistic approach as seriously detrimental to a sense of belonging on campus.



Working Proactively to Improve Student Life & Learning

What is the Deputy Provost's responsibility to actively undertake projects with student organizations to improve student life and learning?

How can the Office of the Deputy Provost proactively help other parts of the Administration to consult with students?

From the PTFSSL:

“Ultimate responsibility for University policy governing the provision of a broad range of services to students should rest with the Deputy Provost (Student Life & Learning), with policies elaborated in consultation with students and members of the community involved in the delivery of services to them.” (pg 9)

Successes

As stated above, following the report of the Work Group on Student Consultation and Communication, the SSMU worked with the Office of the Deputy Provost and the Interim Student Life Coordinator to host the first Consultation Fair. The event had an excellent turnout from key administrators and produced productive discussions as well as informal interactions which are usually not accessible to your average student.

Another strong initiative from the Office of the Deputy Provost was the Diversity Survey and its follow-up of a series of focus groups. The Deputy Provost was active in fighting against tolerating acceptance of any relative form of discrimination. As stated in the February 16th Senate meeting, “It was mentioned that more comparative data for other universities was needed and that there should be more clarity about the difference between real versus perceived discrimination. The Deputy Provost (Student Life & Learning) noted, however, that the relative amount of discrimination between McGill and other universities is not important because any discrimination is unacceptable”. The current project of developing a series of focus groups which target specifically racialised students is welcomed, especially due to the lack of articulation in the Principal’s Taskforce on Diversity, Excellence and Community Engagement about racial discrimination at McGill.

There have been other successful projects with which the Office of the Deputy Provost and student groups have collaborated. For example, the Off Campus Fellows program was a joint project between SSMU and the McGill University. Throughout the year-long program, first-year

students who live off-campus work together to create a supportive and social community. It has been extremely successful with registration exceeding expectations.

Concerns

Indeed progress has been made recently; however, it is still perceived that student associations are required to initiate collaborative projects with the Office of the Deputy Provost. An attitude of “if you ask us, we will come,” rather than a partnership, does little to dispel the feeling that the Deputy Provost does not deeply care about student life. This change will help convey the understanding that student-administration dialogue and consultation is a responsibility he must undertake.

Consultation efforts are improving, but often remain poorly facilitated for democratic student governance structures. For instance, background information and questions should be circulated in advance, allowing students not only to think over the issues but also to consult with their constituencies. Student associations have a role to play in facilitating consultation, but should not be expected to take on all the work of doing McGill’s consultation.

Recommendations

In recognition that student associations are often stretched thin with their own ongoing projects, McGill should take responsibility of providing staff capacity for such consultation projects. Nonetheless, students should be actively involved in helping to design and publicize consultative efforts. While student associations are happy to give their input, it would be beneficial to see greater leadership from the Office of the Deputy Provost in terms of ideas for events and projects to streamline bureaucratic procedures which affect student life, etc. It is important that students’ input to how consultation is achieved is taken seriously.

Student associations could work with the Office of the Deputy Provost to create an understanding of “best practices” in student consultation to help ensure that it can be as effective as possible. Such a document could include the relevant timelines as well as suggestions regarding the format of presentations and so on.

How can we ensure that the Deputy Provost's actions are not (and are not perceived as) primarily reactive or political?

Successes

The implementation of the H1N1 self-reporting system available on Minerva was an effective way of supporting students through the flu epidemic. The system served as sufficient documentation for absences from class and assignment to aid in containing the virus. Although criticized for the possibility of abuse, it allowed students to take care of their health and ensure that the McGill community remained safe from further outbreaks. This was not a political decision but a practical one.

In response to the events of November 10th, students initiated a gathering called “We are all McGill”. Many attendees of the event articulated strong criticisms of the McGill Administration. Nonetheless, the Deputy Provost was present for almost all the event.

Concerns

As discussed elsewhere, students generally hear little about the Deputy Provost’s portfolio unless an unpopular decision has been made. Since consultation measures about student life often seem to end at speaking with SSMU Executives, there is often a sense that the Office of the Deputy Provost does not take student feedback into account and does not capitalize on the ideas of other student leadership in a productive way. Students are not always aware of any overall strategy when it comes to student life and learning, or how they might possibly influence it. Meetings are only held between Faculty Associations and the Deputy Provost in reaction to events and issues.

Case Study: Choose Life

“Freedom to express a wide range of ideas – a privilege of our democracy – is essential in a modern university,” wrote the Deputy Provost in a commentary piece both in the McGill Daily and the McGill Tribune in response to the censuring and suspension of the pro-life group, Choose Life. This was a divisive topic for many parts of the community and could be interpreted in multiple ways. On one level, the Deputy Provost’s commentary piece could be indicative of the Administration willing to take strong principled stances on controversial issues. On another, it could be interpreted as undue meddling and circumvention of the duties of elected student representatives.

Recommendations

The Deputy Provost should play a proactive role in campus life. The Deputy Provost should actively seek student input and foster a consistent working relationship with Faculty Associations as well as SSMU, MCSS, and PGSS. With this open line of communication, both sides will feel more comfortable sharing ideas, thoughts and current projects and plans. Furthermore, by proactively working with students, issues will be able to be resolved before they reach a critical point.

Projects run by the Deputy Provost would benefit from a built-in feedback loop structure so that students can actively provide feedback on projects before they reach completion. The creation of a strategic planning mechanism which places students at the forefront of working with Administration to make McGill a truly student-centred university would be seen as a significant step towards addressing these concerns.

Where is "student life" championed within the Deputy Provost portfolio, beyond academic matters or direct provision of services?

Where is the place for helping students have a fun time at McGill (unimpeded by McGill's many layers of bureaucracy), and seeing that the Deputy Provost wants this to happen?

The PTFSLL recommended that the Deputy Provost be responsible for:

"Exploring institutional mechanisms that might better support students in undertaking extra-curricular activities that contribute to the life and learning of their peers, particularly in relation to processes for the approval of access to University space and for establishing the fees charged for the use of that space." (pg 8)

Additionally, the PTFSLL further claims:

"The University is accountable for minimising unnecessary obstacles to students in academic and administrative matters, for making relevant information available in a timely fashion, and for providing the guidance students need through the academic cycle." (pg 9)

The PTFSLL further states that *"the Deputy Provost will champion...the development of a greater sense of belonging for McGill students"* (pg 9). The Deputy Provost's website states that he is responsible for *"encouraging a strong sense of community for both current and future students."*

Successes

Office of the Deputy Provost has successfully created a central liaison and decision-making entity for many of the issues concerning student life. The workshops for student leaders with members of the Student Life & Learning team at the start of each new student executive team's turn are a good initiative which should be continued. It is clear that there are attempts to streamline the processes for organizing events and for clarifying the various consultation processes that exist at McGill. The upcoming hiring of a Student Life Coordinator is also seen as a positive step in helping student organizations to navigate McGill's bureaucracy.

Concerns

Many students express feelings that the Office of the Deputy Provost supports solely academic activities and student services, without recognizing the importance of other forms of student life. Student groups and associations run many events which promote strong social ties on campus and expose students to wealth of information and causes which help McGill students become engaged, informed citizens. These events make up much of the fabric of student life

and create relationships between students which can improve their academic performance and decrease reliance on student services.

There are increasing concerns that campus events are tightly regulated and require many levels of approval. It seems that each unit (fire prevention, security, risk management, etc.) has to separately sign off on each proposal, but that nobody evaluates the overall risks and benefits of a given event. Consequently, fewer events are approved; expectations are not always clear from the outset, leaving student organizers surprised when they are informed that certain activities (e.g. a tug of war) are not permitted. Furthermore, there has been a consistent push from the McGill Administration to control the use of the McGill name, wordmark, trademark by student groups and associations. Despite this, the Administration still often uses specific student groups for various PR campaigns.

Case Study: Frosh/“Integrated Orientation”

The case of Integrated Orientation 2011 highlights many of the issues addressed in this report and demonstrates the problems that occur when there is a lack of dialogue between the Deputy Provost and student societies. The collective impression from student associations is that Integrated Orientation was handled overall relatively poorly. Many decisions were handed down extremely late, with little to no prior consultation or discussion during its implementation, and a lack of clarity and specificity throughout the entire process. As per the mandate of the position, the Deputy Provost ought to make it easier for student societies to operate, yet the decisions handed down made Frosh more expensive, more difficult to operate, delayed the planning process, added uncertainty to the events, and in some cases affected the quality and nature of the events.

One example of a well-intended but misguided decision was that of making students pay for beer on lower field. Presumably, this was intended to curb excessive alcohol consumption and ensure greater safety of students. However, it gave students an incentive to leave the safety of campus to drink in residences and other areas as a means to save money. This added risk to our students as they were not with their Frosh leaders. It also reduced the quality of the event on lower field as incoming students were not with their peers.

By far the most frustrating decisions were made without any clear or reasonable explanation. One example of this was the decision not to allow sponsorship tents on campus during Frosh. This decision was made at the very last minute (in the week leading up to Frosh) and caused a great deal of panic for student associations. We were told that sponsorship tents have never been allowed on campus during Frosh registration, when in fact they have been present for many years. Without these tents, our events would not be financially sustainable. Given that the Deputy Provost works to foster student life on campus, and that Orientation is essential to beginning one’s life as a student at McGill, it would be a huge waste to jeopardize the viability of Frosh. This example demonstrates how the Deputy Provost can misunderstand the nature of student life and the events student societies run. Without a clear understanding of the current situation through discussion with people who are directly involved with these events, it is very difficult to implement beneficial changes. Consequently, many decisions can seem arbitrary.

We understand that McGill has certain priorities and interests that it hoped to meet by introducing the Integrated Orientation. However, these interests would have been better served

if the decisions made were a result of collaboration between the Deputy Provost and the students who organize Frosh and could set more realistic goals and take more effective actions to achieve them.

Case Study: the McGill Name

Students have frequently asked for rationales as to why is McGill concerned with the use of the McGill name by student societies and student groups. The response we have heard thus far is that McGill needs to protect its brand, and consequently desires a clear distinction as to what is run by the University and what is run by students. While it is understandable that McGill wishes to establish a strict criteria on the usage its brand, its overzealous approach to student societies and clubs is confusing and alienating to many students. While many groups have been granted permission to continue using the McGill name with “Student” added to the group’s name, many students still perceive the change as a move by the University to distance themselves from their largest constituency: the students. Furthermore, McGill’s arguments have not been clearly explained nor defended leaving the feeling that this decision is arbitrary and unduly harsh. The argument of protecting McGill’s brand is disrespectful to many of McGill’s student leaders whose work with various student groups is indeed aimed at making our campus and broader society a more just, engaged, happy, and/or sustainable place. This is further emphasized by the use of these same groups to enhance McGill’s public profile. It raises a clear contradiction that is hard to reconcile.

Involved students make involved alumni. McGill is constantly reaching out to its alumni for funding to improve services. Students who get involved in societies and clubs add real value to McGill through their extracurricular achievements. They also form a closer bond with their Faculty and University. This link has great potential for improving fundraising, mentorship, networking and many other aspects of McGill University and its students. Nevertheless, the current relationship between McGill’s administration and its students does not foster a positive connection between students and their University. Rather than McGill being seen as a student-centred university where students feel respected and accommodated, the University administration is often seen as being fundamentally opposed to student life in their goal of promoting academic research.

Recommendations

The Deputy Provost should appear more interested in non-academic aspects of student life (perhaps he could participate in informal fun events and/or work with student associations to come up with events at which he would be comfortable). It is important that he interacts with students on a more personal level. Developing relationships on a micro-level can effectively influence macro-perceptions of trust and accountability.

Expectations concerning event planning need to be clearly outlined and would benefit from a process of dialogue rather than purely a bureaucratic system of form submission. Time should be taken to explain the rationale behind decisions which alter what types of events students can hold.

There should be a much greater commitment to laying out the rationale behind the University's concerns and working with students to overcome them. Student leaders respond well to and can be convinced by reasonable arguments. Even if there is a disagreement, there is a clear understanding why a specific decision needs to be made.



Working with the Right Stakeholders

What is the optimal degree of communication between the Office of the Deputy Provost and the student Faculty Associations?

What does the Deputy Provost currently rely on SSMU to communicate to other associations, and is this appropriate?

Successes

The Integrated Orientation debrief with the SLL team was a good forum for students' views to be heard. It was interactive and it felt like the Administration was coming to students for advice rather than approaching them with a pre-established opinion.

The Principal's meeting with the Faculty Associations, SSMU, and PGSS after November 10th, in which members of the Office of the Deputy Provost participated, was an improved format and brought together many student leaders. The facilitation by a PGSS executive encouraged more open discussion as there was a clearer distribution of speaking time between students and administration.

Concerns

Student Faculty Associations provide a huge amount of faculty-specific programming, advocacy, and support to their constituents. Faculty Associations often have good relationships with their respective Deans, Associate Deans, and other faculty administrators, but have little direct contact with the Deputy Provost unless a major problem arises. This can leave Faculty Associations vulnerable in situations where a fast transmission of information is required for the benefit of their respective constituencies.

Of undergraduate student associations, SSMU has the strongest and most frequent access to the Deputy Provost, with regular meetings scheduled for about once a month and informal meetings in other campus governance forums (e.g. Senate) and at campus events. However, SSMU is not able (nor mandated) to act on the numerous faculty-specific concerns which Faculty Associations address. There is currently no clear understanding of how such issues are supposed to be brought to the attention of the Deputy Provost; it would not be effective for SSMU to be solely responsible for facilitating communication around these issues.

Case Study: MUNACA Strike

During the early days of the MUNACA strike, little information was relayed to some of the Faculty Associations regarding the impacts and possible contingency plans. While this information should arguably have been transferred from each faculty's Dean, the central information provided to SSMU (and presumably PGSS) would have been helpful. Having an email chain where specific updates relevant to students could be shared from the Office of the Deputy Provost to all student associations could have helped to reduce student stress and confusion by making sure student leaders were fully informed. As the suggestion of more communication directly between the Deputy Provost and the Faculty Associations was rejected, SSMU relayed information throughout the first week or so.

Recommendations

The Deputy Provost would benefit from a standing reporting structure that could come out of collaboration with student associations. In addition to monthly meetings with SSMU, it would be highly beneficial for the Deputy Provost to meet at least twice a semester with the different Faculty Associations.

While Faculty Associations appreciate collaborative meetings with the Deputy Provost involving other Faculty Associations, SSMU and PGSS, it is crucial to establish relationships with each Faculty Association on an individual basis. The Faculty Associations are diverse, and it is important that the Deputy Provost take initiative to understand each group on an individual basis in order to better understand and promote student life and learning on campus.

As an advocate for students, the Deputy Provost could also work to ensure that Faculty Associations are receiving sufficient information via their Deans, Associate Deans, etc., particularly under extraordinary circumstances such as the MUNACA strike.



Visibility & Publicity

How do students know what the Deputy Provost is doing, whether or not he is really presenting students concerns?

How do students other than those who are most involved get to know the Deputy Provost and understand his role?

How can the Deputy Provost effectively communicate to students the projects and efforts he is making to improve their campus experiences?

From the Principal's Task Force on Student Life & Learning:

"The University should work to enhance communications to students and to expand responsibility for communicating relevant information in a timely fashion." (pg 10)

Successes

The Deputy Provost has consistently made it clear that he is willing to attend any event that students invite him to. He has been present at a multitude of student-initiated events such as the Forum on Undergraduate Education, various Strategic Summits and the recent BASiC Town Hall. He also makes the effort to come and present to SSMU council at least once or twice a year. This has taken the form of a topic specific presentation such as the results of his Diversity Survey in winter of 2011 or a broader question and answer period. Both are important in illustrating the scope of his portfolio as well as to solicit feedback from students who are not an integrated into student association governance.

Furthermore, once the Deputy Provost is present at an event, he is able to be approachable and willing to take into consideration what students have to say.

Concerns

Many students are unaware of the existence of the Deputy Provost. Those who are aware often learn of the role in a negative light, such as through an article in the campus press explaining a controversial or unpopular decision. While the Deputy Provost makes appearances at various campus events, there are generally few informal forums where students other than elected representatives could interact with him. Due to other issues of lack of frequent access to the Deputy Provost, the relatively few formalized opportunities to discuss current campus

concerns tend to focus on the most controversial issues; consequently, the tone of these discussions is often confrontational on the part of students and defensive or dismissive on the part of the Deputy Provost.

Recommendations

The Office of the Deputy Provost ought to revamp its publicity and communications strategies so that it can clearly convey its successes and ongoing projects to the student body. Additionally, efforts should be made to ensure that more students have the opportunity to interact with the Deputy Provost both formally and informally. This could include initiatives such as:

- The creation of a more comprehensive understanding of the Deputy Provost's role (complete with concrete examples) on the Deputy Provost website;
- Two reports per semester on the progress of the Office of the Deputy Provost which would be circulated to all students by email, along with any timely updates regarding current campus affairs;
- A town hall on Student Life & Learning each semester;
- Continued commitment to supporting and attending more consultation fairs and other similar forums;
- Increased presence of the Deputy Provost at Faculty Association council meetings, residence meetings, and student events.
- When events are planned, use association listservs and means of communication to spread information. Do not rely only on internal McGill communication channels.

It is important that in increasing the visibility and accessibility of the Deputy Provost it is clear that he sincerely wants to hear what students have to say, is open to changes suggested by students, and has a deep commitment to the importance of student life and learning. Interpersonal interactions--particularly with student leaders--will inherently affect students' perceptions of the position and, by extension, of the university administration as a whole.

How can the Deputy Provost's portfolio be made less onerous, so that the Deputy Provost has more time to spend on the ground getting to know students and their concerns?

The Deputy Provost's portfolio has dramatically expanded over the past five years. As many of the concerns identified in this report focus on the need for more direct communication with students and student groups, it is clear that someone in the Office of the Deputy Provost needs to be able to spend more time interacting with students and understanding their point of view.

It may not be feasible for this to be done by the Deputy Provost given the large number of responsibilities under his portfolio.

Recommendations

The Deputy Provost's responsibilities should be decreased in order to enable him to spend more time with students. Alternatively, some of his decision-making powers should be delegated to other members of the Student Life & Learning portfolio who do have time to interact with students on a more regular basis.



Respect, Trust, & Conflict Resolution

How can there be spaces created where students and student representatives can speak openly and honestly, without fear of political reprisals?

How can a culture of trust and respect be created?

From the final report of the PTFSSL:

“Ultimate responsibility for University policy governing the provision of a broad range of services to students should rest with the Deputy Provost (Student Life & Learning), with policies elaborated in consultation with students and members of the community involved in the delivery of services to them.” (p 10)

Successes

Senate has been a forum where student representatives openly engage the Administration. For example, the recent proposal of an Academic Amnesty policy was a productive debate that involved strong voices from different constituencies.

The Deputy Provost is working on reforming the structure of various committees to encourage more effective student representation.

Concerns

It is challenging for student leaders to be open about their concerns regarding the actions of the Office of the Deputy Provost or the Administration more generally when there is such a substantial power imbalance and a history of actions being taken without the rationale being fully presented. Student leaders are sometimes accused of being too political or rhetorical; this appears to be a frustrating double-standard when it is clear that the Office of the Deputy Provost is responsible for representing and enforcing the Administration’s political position. Similarly, attempts to delegitimize student representatives (based on low voter turnout, general assertions regarding whether or not leaders are acting on behalf of their entire constituencies, etc.) only damage any possibility of mutual trust and respect.

Case Study: Travel Directive

In 2008-2009, the Deputy Provost drafted the controversial travel directive which would limit the ability of students and post-doctoral fellows to receive credit for research and internships developed in countries classified as being dangerous by the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Students reacted strongly against this move as it was seen as limited Academic Freedom. To quote an open letter in the McGill Daily from the Middle East Studies Student Association, “Some of the best and most necessary work to be done today is done in areas considered unsafe. For many of us, an internship or thesis is the first major step of our chosen careers, careers that may bring us to politically unstable areas. Research in these regions is not without risk, but it is crucially important.” Notably, Senate voted to suspend the guidelines and requested that they be brought to Senate Steering for consultation prior to approval. However, the Administration deemed that the Travel Directive was not under Senate’s academic purview; the vote was considered void.

This was an example where students felt that despite strong multi-partisan support, student interests were not taken into consideration even when the formal governance mechanisms were used to their fullest capacity. Although changes were implemented by the Administration to loosen the restrictions, the guidelines were nonetheless considered unnecessary bureaucratic red tape.

Recommendations

Criticisms of student leaders should be expressed constructively; while we are always open to hearing the Administration’s opinions, criticisms should be aimed at producing a more productive relationship rather than at political intimidation.

Students would like to see a more proactive approach from the Deputy Provost, and an atmosphere that fosters a good working relationship. Ideally, a set meeting between the Deputy Provost and Faculty Associations would allow concerns to be addressed before they become a larger problem. In addition, having improved contact with more members of the Faculty Associations would allow the Deputy Provost to gain a true understanding of what student life is on campus, an understanding that the position must have in order to be effective.

Work to ensure that student representatives on committees feel safe and free to express their opinions. A simple orientation at the beginning of each year would help. Further, depending on which committee, asking if SSMU can host the meeting could help ensure that students feel like they are in a safe space and that Administrators are going to them as sources of information.

Is the Deputy Provost at all “accountable” to students for acting in their best interests?

Is there a greater role for student oversight/governance regarding the SLL portfolio (e.g. a comprehensive student advisory board for the whole portfolio, rather than just student reps on various committees)?

Successes

The Deputy Provost comes to SSMU Council each year to present and answer questions. This is an appreciated forum in which some level of dialogue can be achieved. Additionally, the Deputy Provost is often willing and able to attend other discussion or consultation events hosted by students.

Concerns

The Deputy Provost is sometimes said to be the “chief administrative advocate” for students. However, it is unclear whether the role is actually responsible for advocating for what students themselves desire, or whether the role simply advocates for the Student Life & Learning perception on what is in students’ and/or the University’s best interests. Periodic calls for the Deputy Provost to become an elected position chosen by students are likely rooted in the desire for greater accountability regarding championing students’ causes.

Futhermore, on several occasions, the Deputy Provost has been unwilling to address questions about issues that are deemed finalised. At last year’s Forum on Undergraduate Education, when a student raised a question about the closure of the Architecture Café, the Deputy Provost made it clear that this was no longer a topic of discussion and that the matter was closed. This was despite a strong voice from students articulating a frustration of not being heard. As such, some students feel that they do not have the opportunity to effectively engage with issues that directly impact them.

Recommendations

A student advisory board to provide strategic input on the Student Life & Learning portfolio could not only help students to better understand the whole portfolio (and thus contribute to its strategic direction rather than simply providing input on various committees within the portfolio) but could also dramatically increase the effectiveness of student input into University decisions.

Student involvement in or contributions to the performance evaluations of the Deputy Provost could also create a sense that the Deputy Provost is in some manner accountable for justifying his actions to students.

**How are students supposed to resolve conflicts with the Deputy Provost?
To whom can students appeal the Deputy Provost's decisions?**

Successes

After the Choose Life situation, the Deputy Provost co-hosted an event where it was discussed how the SSMU and McGill decide what events should and should not be allowed in the Shatner Building and on campus. This was a well attended event that allowed for discussion on the topic.

Concerns

It seems that if students are unhappy with a decision made by the Deputy Provost and cannot convince him to reconsider the decision, students have no ability to appeal the decision. Given the previously outlined frustrations concerning a lack of face-to-face contact with the Deputy Provost as well as his failure to provide justifications or rationales for decisions, this can result in students feeling extremely frustrated and alienated from the Administration. In these situations, students who feel they have no productive place to express their concerns within official channels are more likely to turn to public displays of outrage such as protests and media statements which are highly critical of the Administration.

Recommendations

This issue should be further discussed. While it might not be a major issue if other recommendations are implemented so that there is greater dialogue about decisions before they are made, it would be beneficial to develop an appeals process.

What should the role of the Dean of Students be in the Student Life & Learning portfolio? What should the role of the Ombudsperson for Students be?

The PTFSELL recommended that the following be included in the mandate of the Deputy Provost:

“Supporting the Dean of Students in working closely with student organizations to ensure the highest quality of student life on our campuses, consistent with our academic missions and our identity as a research-intensive university.” (pg 8)

Successes

Both the Dean of Students and the Ombudsperson have the ability to help students in cases where students' rights have been encroached on. The Dean of Students has also acted as a productive liaison with the Milton-Parc Community.

Concerns

The Dean of Students is often viewed as a safe person to approach with personal and important issues. Often, if a student doesn't feel like they have recourse through the Deputy Provost, they may approach the Dean of Students. While the Dean of Students is very supportive to those students she meets with, she does not seem to have any substantial power within the Student Life & Learning portfolio and does not have clear lines of communication with student associations outside of a small number of Senate committees. Similarly, there is no obvious outreach from the Ombudsperson to the Faculty Associations and no consistent relationship between the Ombudsperson and SSMU.

Recommendations

As the Administrators responsible for Student Rights and Responsibilities and offering neutral dispute resolution services respectively, the Dean of Students and the Ombudsperson for Students have the potential to facilitate conflict resolution where the Deputy Provost has come into conflict with a student association or group. However, within the current structure it does not seem as though either of these Administrators have the necessary agency in order to be successful in this role, particularly as both are within the Student Life & Learning portfolio and thus report to the Deputy Provost. These structures should be examined further.

When should the Deputy Provost intervene directly in student association affairs? When is it appropriate for the Deputy Provost to step in regarding conflicts between student organizations?

It is unclear under what circumstances the Deputy Provost has the authority to interfere in student association affairs. This has become controversial regarding the withholding of student association fees from the Arts Undergraduate Society and the SSMU, as well as in regards to resolving disputes between Faculty Associations. Less recently, questions were raised regarding whether the Deputy Provost should exercise powers concerning determining what types of events can and should be held on campus (e.g. the Choose Life "Echoes of the Holocaust" event).

Recommendations

The areas of jurisdiction of the Deputy Provost should be clarified beyond what is laid out in each association's Memorandum of Agreement with the University. This should be undertaken in good faith by both student associations and the Office of the Deputy Provost.

Since it is not SSMU's role to mediate between Faculty Associations in the event of a dispute, it would be wise to discuss what member of the campus community is best suited for this role.



The Ultimate Purpose of the Deputy Provost's Role

How can McGill address the inherent conflict in the Deputy Provost's role between acting as an advocate for students and being in charge of enforcing policies with which students do not agree?

It is clear that the role of the Deputy Provost is a complex one. The Deputy Provost is simultaneously portrayed as an advocate for students and as the person responsible for enforcing the University's (sometimes unpopular) policies and decisions. These two roles are inherently in conflict, as the one requires trust while the other eats away at it. There can be reluctance to express dissent against the Deputy Provost's decisions when the role holds so much sway over both the financial proceedings of each association and over what will be permitted in terms of social events. A culture where student societies are too intimidated to bring forward the concerns is surely not the ideal relationship that should be cultivated between students and Administration.

Recommendations

Unless stricter guidelines are put in place regarding the jurisdiction of the Deputy Provost, the requirements for presenting the rationale behind decisions, and an appeal process regarding those decisions, it is advisable to split the roles of advocate and enforcer between two separate roles in the university.



Concluding Remarks

We hope the questions, successes, concerns, case studies, and recommendations presented here help to provide a more nuanced understanding of how the signatory associations think that the Student Life & Learning portfolio and, in particular, the role of the Deputy Provost can be improved.

We look forward to being able to discuss these issues more fully and to contributing to effective solutions.

Respectfully submitted,

Hardeep Asi, *Dentistry Student Society*

Vanessa Harman, *Education Undergraduate Society*

Josh Redel, *Engineering Undergraduate Society*

Catherine Coursol, *Law Students' Association*

Dave Fortin, *Management Undergraduate Society*

Esli Osmanlliu, *Medical Students' Society*

Katie Larson, *Music Undergraduate Students' Association*

Allyson DeBolster, *Nursing Undergraduate Society*

Akshay Rajaram, *Science Undergraduate Society*

Maggie Knight, *Students' Society of McGill University*

Ariane Duplessis, *Social Work Student Association*



Appendix A

Summary of the Questions

1. How does the Deputy Provost proactively involve students in decision-making? What onus is placed on the Deputy Provost to provide rationales behind the University's decisions that affect student life and learning? How can the Deputy Provost ensure that important decisions regarding student life are not made during the summer while student associations are less able to consult their constituencies?
2. What is the Deputy Provost's responsibility to actively undertake projects with student organizations to improve student life and learning? How can the Office of the Deputy Provost proactively help other parts of the Administration to consult with students?
3. How can we ensure that the Deputy Provost's actions are not (and are not perceived as) primarily reactive or political?
4. Where is "student life" championed within the Deputy Provost portfolio, beyond academic matters or direct provision of services? Where is the place for helping students have a fun time at McGill (unimpeded by McGill's many layers of bureaucracy), and seeing that the Deputy Provost wants this to happen?
5. How do students know what the Deputy Provost is doing, whether or not he is really presenting students concerns? How do students other than those who are most involved get to know the Deputy Provost and understand his role? How can the Deputy Provost effectively communicate to students the projects and efforts he is making to improve their campus experiences?
6. What is the optimal degree of communication between the Deputy Provost's office and the student Faculty Associations? What does the Deputy Provost currently rely on SSMU to communicate to other associations, and is this appropriate?
7. How can there be spaces created where students and student representatives can speak openly and honestly, without fear of political reprisals? How can a culture of trust and respect be created?
8. Is the Deputy Provost at all "accountable" to students for acting in their best interests? Is there a greater role for student oversight/governance regarding the SLL portfolio (e.g. a comprehensive student advisory board for the whole portfolio, rather than just student reps on various committees)?
9. How are students supposed to resolve conflicts with the Deputy Provost? To whom can students appeal the Deputy Provost's decisions?

10. What should the role of the Dean of Students be in the Student Life & Learning portfolio?
What should the role of the Ombudsperson for Students be?
11. When should the Deputy Provost intervene directly in student association affairs? When is it appropriate for the Deputy Provost to step in regarding conflicts between student organizations?
12. How can McGill address the inherent conflict in the Deputy Provost's role between acting as an advocate for students and being in charge of enforcing policies with which students do not agree?



Appendix B

Summary of Recommendations

This appendix is intended to help create greater clarity but should not be taken out of the context of the document as a whole. These recommendations represent a productive step in the right direction but should not be considered exhaustive.

Consultation & Decision-Making

1. The Office of the Deputy Provost should take a lead in laying out timelines for University decisions which affect students and, in collaboration with student associations, ensure that students are consulted appropriately. This document should be posted publicly well in advance of the intended consultations and should be as open to change based on student input. Results from consultation processes should be clearly documented, especially for multi-year projects and decisions.
2. While student associations should be involved in helping to design effective consultation strategies, they are often already overcommitted and McGill can benefit from making the clear commitment to listening to students.
3. Projects run by the Deputy Provost would benefit from a built-in feedback loop structure so that students can actively provide feedback on projects before they reach completion.
4. The Deputy Provost should work with student associations and the Secretariat to design better orientation and integration methods for student representatives serving on University committees.
5. The Deputy Provost should provide in writing the University's justification for a decision when requested to do so. Unless legally impossible, such rationales should be made public.
6. Expectations concerning event planning need to be clearly outlined and would benefit from a process of dialogue rather than purely a bureaucratic system of form submission. Time should be taken to explain the rationale behind decisions which alter what types of events students can hold.
7. The Deputy Provost should work proactively with students and Legal Services to facilitate compromises where legalistic concerns threaten to have a major negative impact on student life.
8. A student advisory board to provide strategic input on the Student Life & Learning portfolio could not only help students to better understand the whole portfolio (and thus contribute

to its strategic direction rather than simply providing input on various committees within the portfolio) but could also dramatically increase the effectiveness of student input into University decisions.

9. Student involvement in or contributions to the performance evaluations of the Deputy Provost could also create a sense that the Deputy Provost is in some manner accountable for justifying his actions to students.
10. A method of appealing decisions made by the Deputy Provost should be further discussed. Implementation would be a substantial step forward.

Communication & Participation in Student Life

1. The Deputy Provost should show interest in all parts of student life, including those aspects which are not academic and do not directly relate to service provision. These aspects of student life are central to the creation of a sense of belonging.
2. Efforts should be made to ensure that more students have the opportunity to interact with the Deputy Provost both formally and informally. It is important that in increasing the visibility and accessibility of the Deputy Provost it is clear that he wants to hear what students have to say, is open to changes suggested by students, and has a deep commitment to the importance of student life and learning. Relationships at a personal level are important for building trust.
3. The Office of the Deputy Provost should revamp its publicity and communications strategies so that it can clearly convey its successes and ongoing projects to the student body.

Leadership & Relationship-Building

1. Students would like to see a more proactive approach from the Deputy Provost, and an atmosphere that fosters a good working relationship. In addition to monthly meetings with SSMU, the Deputy Provost should meet at least twice a semester with the different Faculty Associations (once as a collective group and once with each association individually).
2. The Deputy Provost would benefit from a standing reporting structure that could come out of collaboration with student associations.
3. As an advocate for students, the Deputy Provost could also work to ensure that Faculty Associations are receiving sufficient information via their Deans, Associate Deans, etc., particularly under extraordinary circumstances such as the MUNACA strike.
4. Criticisms of student leaders should be expressed constructively and be aimed at producing a more productive relationship rather than at political intimidation. Interpersonal interactions--particularly with student leaders--will inherently affect students' perceptions of the position and, by extension, of the university administration as a whole.

5. There should be a much greater commitment to laying out the rationale behind the University's concerns and working with students to overcome them. Student leaders respond well to and can be convinced by reasonable arguments. Even if there is a disagreement, there is a clear understanding why a specific decision needs to be made.
6. It should be considered how the Dean of Students and the Ombudsperson for Students could facilitate conflict resolution where the Deputy Provost has come into conflict with a student association or group. If neither of these roles have the necessary agency, other roles or structures should be considered.
7. The areas of jurisdiction of the Deputy Provost should be clarified beyond what is laid out in each association's Memorandum of Agreement with the University, including who is responsible for mediating between Faculty Associations. This should be undertaken in good faith by both student associations and the Office of the Deputy Provost.

Changing the Structure of the Deputy Provost's Role

1. The Deputy Provost's responsibilities should be decreased in order to enable him to spend more time with students. Alternatively, some of his decision-making powers should be delegated to other members of the Student Life & Learning portfolio who do have time to interact with students on a more regular basis.
2. Unless stricter guidelines are put in place regarding the jurisdiction of the Deputy Provost, the requirements for presenting the rationale behind decisions, and an appeal process regarding those decisions, it is advisable to split the roles of advocate and enforcer between two separate roles in the university