

# SSMU Equity Research

*A Three Part Project:  
Structure, Funding, and Complaints  
2013*

# Three Comparative Projects

- This research reviewed the SSMU's Equity Related Initiatives as compared to other U21 Universities, U of T and other comparable research-intensive universities in North America
- **1) Structure**
  - Researcher: Chelsea Barnett
- **2) Funding**
  - Researcher: Simon Bignet
- **3) Complaints**

# School Selection

- **University of Toronto: U of T Student Union (UTSU)**
  - As requested, traditionally compared
- **University of British Columbia: Alma Mater Society of UBC (AMS)**
  - The other Canadian U21 University
- **University of California, Berkeley: Associated Students UCal (ASUCal)**
  - Generally known for strong equity practices
- **Concordia: Concordia Student Union (CSU)**
  - Montreal based Anglophone University
- **University of Virginia: UVa Student Council (UVaSC)**
  - American U21 University with strongest equity practices

# Some Notes on the Findings

- Low research participation, little collaborative effort from other schools
- Not all schools had comparable Equity Institutions
  - This made research geared at improvement difficult
  - This is a good thing! SSMU is ahead of the curve for Equity Initiatives
  - That being said, there is always room for improvement

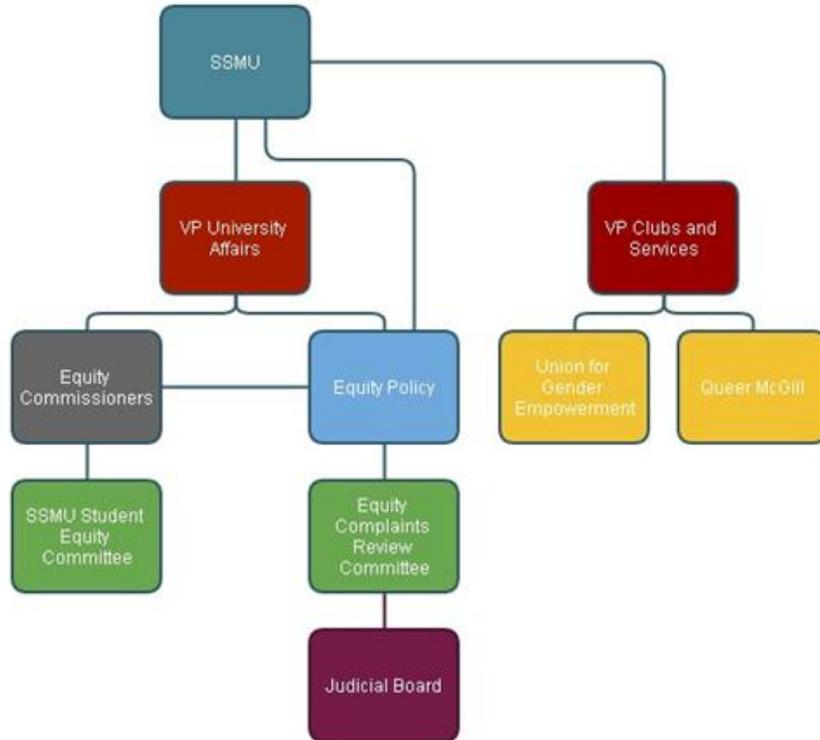
# Structure

1. Is SSMU's structure of Equity formally operationalised under the portfolio of one executive (the VP University Affairs), with 2 commissioners paid for 225 hours a year, supported by an Equity Committee effective in optimally a culture of equity at McGill?
2. How do other undergraduate student societies operate to institutionalize equity-building cultures at their universities? What is their programming? What are their benchmarks of progress? How do these compare to that of SSMU?
3. Ultimately, how effective is SSMU, compared to other Universities in institutionalizing equity-promoting culture at McGill? How can we improve, based on comparison to other Universities?

# Structure: Table Interpretation

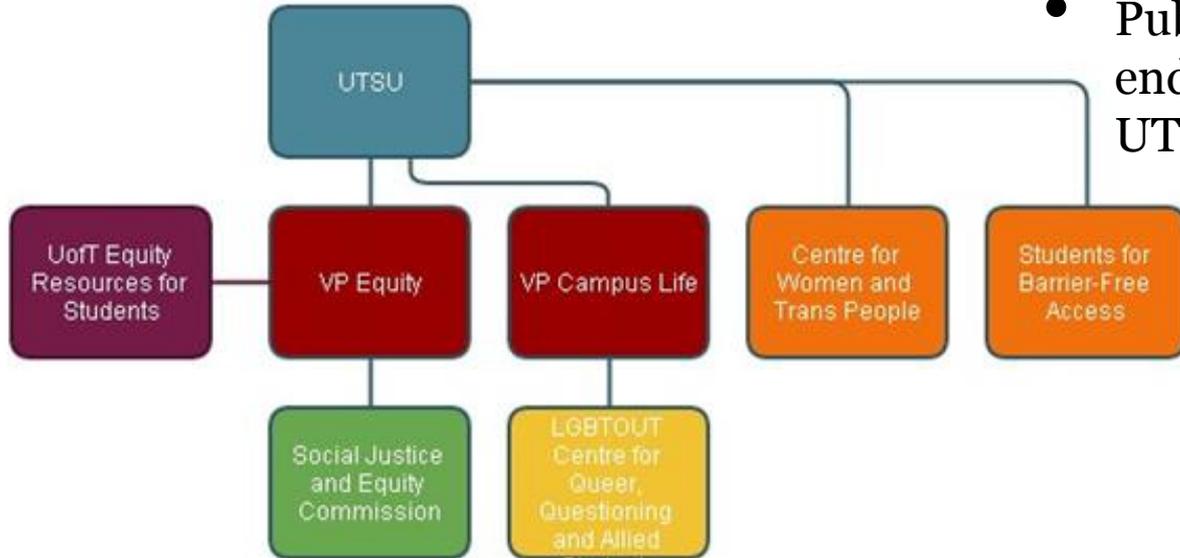


# Structure: SSMU



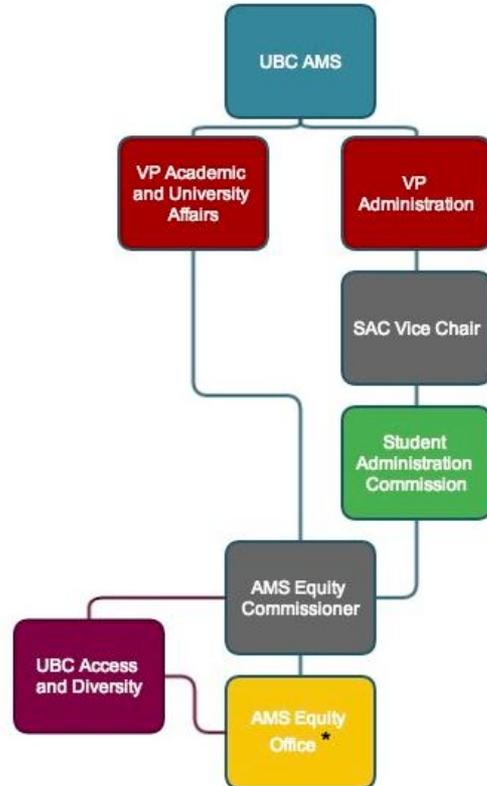
- Policy separate from that of the university
  - Very progressive
  - “personal characteristics include, but are not limited to, women, trans\* and gender non-conforming persons, indigenous persons, Métis, people of color, visible minorities, ethnic minorities, queer people, people with disabilities, people whose language is not that of dominant usage, persons without citizenship status, immigrants, refugees, people who do not conform to dominant size norms, or people from a disadvantaged socioeconomic status”
- Annual research conference
- Special focus on Montreal political climate

# Structure: UTSU



- Executive Position specifically for equity
- Publication of open letters endorsed by Council published on UTSU website

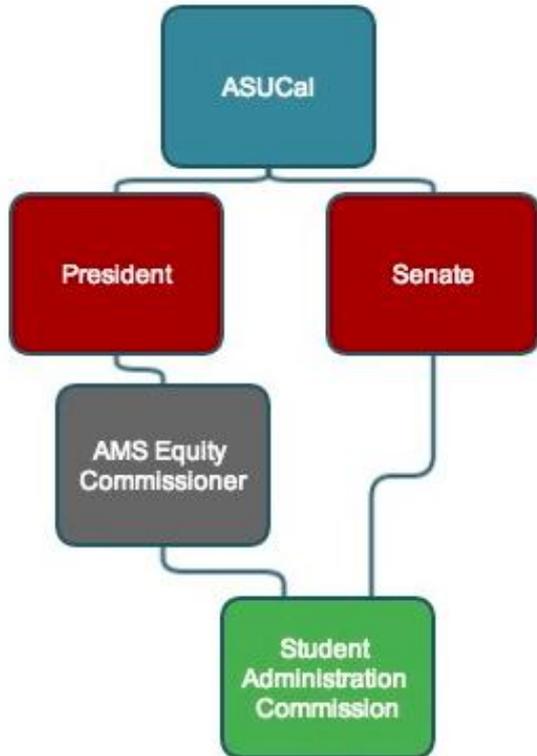
# Structure: AMS



- The Equity Office functions largely as a resource for clubs

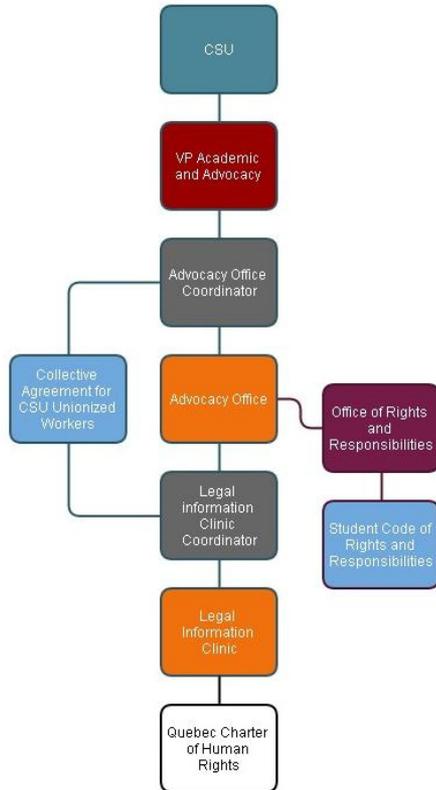
\* The UBC AMS Equity Office is not a club itself, but rather a service specifically for AMS clubs

# Structure: ASUCal



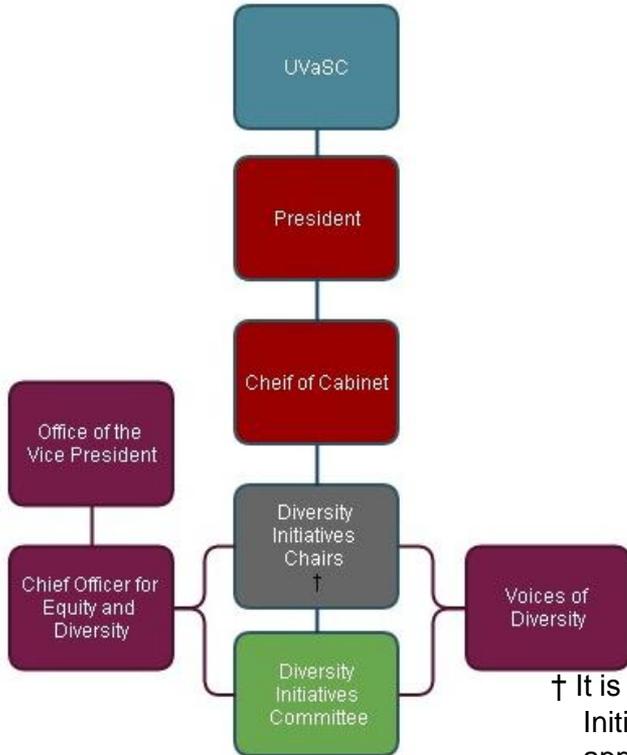
- Berkeley's strong equity practices are partially lost in the bureaucracy of a centralized Student Association for all UCal students
- The hired position of Campus Inclusion and Diversity Coordinator is currently vacant
- Offers a Diversity Affairs Scholarship

# Structure: CSU



- Members and Executives use university equity policies
  - Poses difficulty because the CSU is seen as both autonomous from and mandated by university Equity policies
- CSU staff are unionized and have an equity clause in their collective bargaining agreement
- Strong connections between Equity and Sustainability (emphasis on holistic social sustainability)
- Funding available through the Advocacy Office > Legal Info Clinic for legal representation if Equity charges are filed

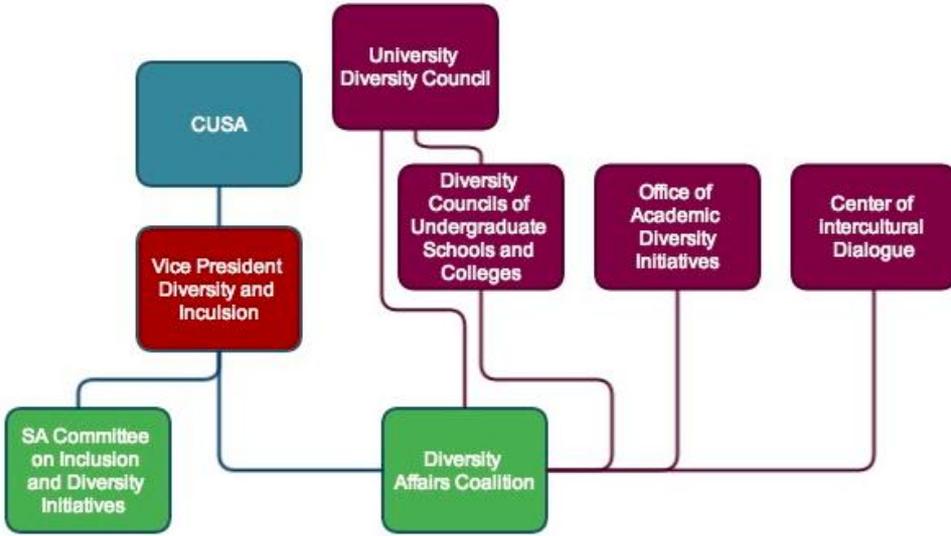
# Structure: UVaSC



† It is unclear if the UVa Diversity Initiatives Chairs are hired or appointed from within the committee or by the executive

- Basic Equity Programming implemented
- Although there are some strong initiatives, the work is slightly dated in terms of current equity trends
  - e.g. Handicapped Student Housing Fund: funding project for accommodations to housing for students with disabilities - interesting project; problematic project name 'handicapped'

# Structure: CUSA



- Strong equity community: The University Diversity Council is a collaborative working group made up of all equity stakeholders on campus
- Strong connection and advocacy/outreach work for Indigenous communities
  - e.g. Mandated the University to celebrate Indigenous Day, rather than Columbus Day

# Structure: Findings

**Is SSMU's structure of Equity formally operationalised under the portfolio of one executive (the VP University Affairs), with 2 commissioners paid for 225 hours a year, supported by an Equity Committee effective in optimally a culture of equity at McGill?**

- Yes!
- The next step is formalize Equity as an Executive Position (VP Equity)
  - Rejected by Council in 1992-1993 and 1996-1997
  - Implemented at UTSU and CUSA
  - This does not necessarily mean the Equity Commissioner positions should be eliminated

**How do other undergraduate student societies operate to institutionalize equity-building cultures at their universities? What is their programming? What are their benchmarks of progress? How do these compare to that of SSMU?**

- More connection with University Equity Policies
  - Both positive and negative outcomes

# Structure: Findings

**Ultimately, how effective is SSMU, compared to other Universities in institutionalizing equity-promoting culture at McGill? How can we improve, based on comparison to other Universities?**

- Very effective! But some ways to improve:
  - Unionization of student run organization staff, with collective bargaining agreement explicitly addressing issues of discrimination
  - Closer connections between sustainability and equity
  - A committee which is made up of one member of each campus equity stakeholder to promote collaborative efforts between student run organizations and the university
  - Revisiting the creation of a Vice President position specifically for equity initiatives
  - More “symbolic acts” coming from the equity office (eg. plaques, monuments, website and listserv endorsements, and published open letters)

# Finance

1. Where does SSMU get funding for their Equity institutions and equity-related initiatives?
2. How much funding does it get?
3. How much funding do the aforementioned other universities get funding for such institutions and initiatives, and from what bodies?
4. What is the funding allocation breakdown at these other Universities?
5. How does the quantity of funding reflect the quality of equity-promoting culture in SSMU and McGill, compared to other universities and their undergraduate societies?
6. Based on the review of the above questions, how can SSMU increase economic support for equity-related initiatives at McGill?

# Finance: Funding

- See report for full budgets
  - Few organizations were willing to release much financial information; budget breakdowns for AMS, UTSU, and CSU available
- Collection from common sources:
  - Student fees
  - Fee levies

# Finance: SEDE

- Funding from multiple sources:
  - Allocated a part of the Provost, Foundations, and the Dean of Students budget
  - Student Services funding recently cut
  - Desire for a more permanent operating budget

# Policy

1. Is SSMU's structure of making visible the equity complaints process and dealing with such complaints effective?
2. How do other undergraduate student societies operate to promote visibility of and address equity complaints processes in their universities?
3. How can SSMU promote both the informal and formal collection of complaints to keep a record of equality infractions?
4. In what way does the resolution process of Equity in McGill and other universities allow for building a culture of equity, as opposed to simply resolving one complaint in a way that isolates it from addressing the wider culture that permits inequitable practices at the university?
5. Based on the comparison, how can we improve both the visibility of and the effectiveness of the equity complaints process at SSMU?

# Policy: Findings

- **No other University Student Union studied had a policy independent from their University**
- SSMU member have access to both the SSMU and the McGill Policies
- The differences: comprehensiveness and scope
  - SSMU's policy is more comprehensive
    - more up-to-date on current equity practices (e.g. provisions included for fatphobia/sizeism)
  - McGill's policy has more scope and capacity
    - covers a larger population; includes the entire McGill Community not just undergraduates
    - greater possibility in terms of consequences: possible ramifications

# Policy: Use

## Number of complaints in 2012

- McGill: 35
- SSMU: 1

\*Number of complaints vary significantly from year to year, but always remain low compared to population

† Most complaints relate to sexual harassment: chicken or egg phenomena

# Policy: Hypothesis

## Why so few complaints?

1. McGill students over look the SSMU policy because it does not apply to them. In this scenario, they might be going directly to the McGill administrative policy because it is more applicable (given its wider scope). The SSMU policy is only applicable in very particular instances involving a smaller group of people.
  - The SSMU policy covers more **types** of grievances, but has a much smaller **jurisdiction**
2. McGill students do not know the policy exists. Without polling (which is certainly a possibility) it's impossible to know whether or not this is the case, but either way a visibility campaign might be a useful avenue.
  - Perhaps we could consider employing the same method as SACCOMS or the Nightline - stickers/posters etc.
3. Students choose to use the McGill administrative route because of its greater capacity to exact punishment, or, as it is not administered by fellow students, because of a perceived neutrality. This could be determined through polling.

# Policy: Improvements

- Possible Improvements:
  - Greater visibility
    - Continue and broaden poster campaign
    - Different avenues of advertising
    - Poll student on whether they know the policy exists
  - Promote accessibility
    - Translate the policy (french at minimum, but possibly other languages that are well represented on campus)
    - Continue with the website project
    - Ensure the policy is compatible with text to voice software

# For More Information

- Contact Joey (VPUA), or Shaina and Justin (Equity Commissioners) for full reports
- Setup a meeting with me:
  - Chelsea (Academic Research Commissioner)
  - [arc@ssmu.mcgill.ca](mailto:arc@ssmu.mcgill.ca)

**Questions?**