



SSMU POLICY ON ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION AND ACADEMICS

Adopted by Legislative Council: 2020/04/02

Expires: 2025/01/01

Adopted Motion ([Link](#))

1. Preamble and Purpose

All people deserve the right to a quality and accessible education. The security of this right should be one of the primary responsibilities of a student union.

This policy is designed to reaffirm the principles of the Students' Society of McGill University (hereinafter "SSMU") on the matter of educational and academic accessibility, and to outline advocacy efforts to be directed toward both government entities and entities of McGill University.

2. Background

The SSMU recognizes that Western academia is systemically inaccessible. Barriers to education disproportionately and predominately impact members of historically marginalized groups and identities, including, but not limited to: Indigenous students, racialized students, queer students, non-male-identifying students, religious students, students with disabilities, low-income students, first-generation students and student-parents. These barriers serve to perpetuate class structures, as those individuals privileged with a quality education tend toward a higher socio-economic status allowing their children to do the same. The SSMU furthermore recognizes that intersections of the identities outlined above often serve to exacerbate the severity of barriers faced. The SSMU commits itself to dismantling the barriers these students face and combating the systems of oppression they operate within, wherever they present themselves.

The SSMU has historically engaged with the larger fight against these efforts to strip support away from those in need of accessibility measures. In 1989, following the lifting of a 22-year tuition freeze by Robert Bourassa's Liberal government, the SSMU hosted the founding congress of the Fédération des Étudiants et Étudiantes Universitaires du Québec (FEUQ)¹. The SSMU participated frequently with this group for 20 years, arguing for reinvestment in education and fighting further increases to tuition.

¹ <https://ssmu.ca/about-us/history/>



In 2005, the SSMU stood with a strike effort organised by the Association pour une solidarité syndicale des étudiants (ASSÉ) when Jean Charest's Liberal government attempted to convert \$103 Million from grant allocations into loans. Most notably, the SSMU stood with ASSÉ, once again striking against Charest's Liberals, as the government aimed to raise tuition by 75% in what became known as the *Printemps Érablé* of 2012. Significant portions of this strike movement demanded not only an end to the proposed increase, but a renewed movement toward free education in Quebec.

The SSMU recognizes that the 2012 movement was far from perfect, with groups appropriating one another's voices, and with a culture of sexism, racism, violence, and sexual violence coming from within organising circles. The SSMU commits, in its fight against inaccessibility, to always prioritise the safety and well-being of its Members and to calling out harmful structures in all communities, activist or otherwise.

3. Scope, Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 While the SSMU Policy on Accessible Education and Academics (hereinafter "PAEA") shall serve to benefit primarily the undergraduate population of McGill University, impacts of these efforts on non-undergraduates and non-McGill students shall be an integral consideration in the enactment of this policy.

3.2 The PAEA is designed to exist in tandem with all SSMU and McGill governing documents, in particular, the SSMU Accessibility Policy, SSMU Equity Policy, SSMU Indigenous Solidarity Policy, SSMU Policy Against Unpaid Internships and McGill Charter of Student Rights.

3.3 Unless otherwise indicated, advocacy efforts directed at McGill University are to be carried out primarily by the SSMU Vice-President (University Affairs). Advocacy efforts directed at government entities (municipal, provincial, and federal) are to be carried out primarily by the SSMU Vice-President (External Affairs).

4. Values and Student Rights

4.1 The SSMU affirms the Union Nationale des Étudiants de France (UNEF) interpretation of a student as a young intellectual worker.²

4.1.1 The interpretation is upheld empirically if we look at the intellectual services provided by McGill's students and researchers to the public and private sectors, and corporations' increasing reliance on university research to inform their activities.

² <http://grenoble.unef.fr/unef-syndicat-etudiant/la-charte-de-grenoble/>



4.1.2 This interpretation carries with it the implication that students ought not pay for access to the institution that requires this intellectual labour in exchange for a certification.

4.1.2.1 On the contrary, the student as an intellectual worker reinforces the need to remunerate students for this labour.

4.2 The SSMU recognizes the legitimacy of the McGill Charter of Student Rights on the matters of accessibility. While the SSMU has, and continues to have, grievances with the implementation of the Charter, we will strive to uphold, in particular, the following clauses:

4.2.1 Students have a right to a quality education (Article 18).

4.2.2 The University makes every reasonable effort to provide an appropriate environment for learning and assessment activities for the student body, including the provision of safe and suitable conditions for learning and study (Article 18.iii).

4.2.3 The University's administrative decisions and actions that affect students must be taken with due regard to the best interest of the student body (Article 14).

4.2.4 Students have a right to be free from vexatious conduct displayed by a representative of the University acting in an official capacity (Article 13).

4.3 In addition, the PAEA will commit SSMU to affirm and guarantee for its members:

4.3.1 The right to equal access to a quality education, irrespective of identity, background, or individual barriers.

4.3.2 The right to just and timely academic accommodations.

4.3.3 The right to be fairly remunerated for labour required by one's degree program, on top of the costs associated with the relevant course credits, where applicable.

5. External Advocacy

5.1 It shall be the responsibility of the Office of the Vice-President (External Affairs) to defend the values and rights enumerated in this policy to the federal, provincial, and municipal governments, as well as all inter-university federations, in order to advocate for and monitor their implementation.

5.2 In all academic and educational accessibility-related advocacy directed at external bodies, the SSMU shall:



5.2.1 Oppose non-consensual hikes to tuition costs, including the deregulation of tuition, and support mobilisation against them.

5.2.1.1 This shall include defending the rights of international students to accessible education, and opposing and mobilising against the continual deregulation of their fees.

5.2.2 Advocate for reinvestment in higher education from all levels of government, with the goal of reducing and eventually eliminating all tuition and ancillary fees in favour of alternate financing structures which do not place the burden on students.

5.2.2.1 Work to move away from a neoliberal culture of “user pays” and toward understanding the promotion of the opportunity to access high-quality, accessible education as a public interest and human right.

5.2.2.2 In the short-to-medium term - that is, up to the renewal of this Policy - the Vice-President (External) or a delegate will also work with student unions, Federations, and solidarity networks to push for reforming of and investment in the Aide Financière aux Étudiant.e.s (AFE) program.

5.2.3 Ensure the fair remuneration, including security and benefits, of student interns, and to seek recognition from the provincial government that unpaid internships are not substantively different from unpaid labour, and thus serve both to exploit workers and render certain professions inaccessible to low-income families.

5.2.4 Work toward the implementation of a province-wide Open Educational Resource (OER) database with both English and French material.

5.2.5 Advocate to the provincial government for the expansion of international partnerships such that students from Francophone African countries may pay the same tuition as students from France.

5.2.6 Support student unions, Federations, and solidarity networks that share these values and goals.

5.3 In accordance with the SSMU Indigenous Solidarity Policy, the SSMU recognizes that both systemic, and primary and secondary education, factors largely act as barriers to Indigenous peoples accessing post-secondary education. Accordingly, resources and efforts must be aimed at addressing these barriers in accessible education prior to students even applying to post-secondary institutions.



This includes both legislative and fiscal support for addressing discrepancies between on-reserve education systems and off-reserve education systems. As such, the SSMU shall:

5.3.1 Call upon the federal government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves

5.3.2 Call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families.

5.3.3 Advocate for the additional funding and reserved spaces necessary at all levels of government needed in order to close the attainment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, including funding through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program, the Quebec First Nations and Inuit Faculties of Medicine Program, and similar programs.

6. University Advocacy

6.1 It shall be the responsibility of the Office of the Vice-President (University Affairs) to defend the values and rights enumerated in this policy to the McGill administration, and to advocate for their implementation and operationalization accordingly.

6.2 In all academic and educational accessibility-related advocacy directed at the University administration, the SSMU shall, in conjunction with the SSMU Vice-President (External) and other applicable SSMU Student Staff, consult the lived experiences of those experiencing academic barriers, and where possible and desired by these students, allow them to self-advocate.

6.3 Physical and Infrastructural Accessibility

6.3.1 The SSMU recognizes that physical and infrastructural barriers can greatly impede students' ability to feel safe, welcomed, and respected on campus. As such, these barriers may detrimentally impact students' ability to succeed academically. The SSMU hereby commits itself to advocating for:

6.3.1.1 The removal of commemorative names that honour or otherwise glorify problematic historical figures, and/or bring to light the injustices committed by historically problematic figures through advocacy and education

6.3.1.2 The celebration of great McGillians from diverse backgrounds (including, but not limited to BIPOC and LGBTQ2+) going forward when it comes to naming new buildings, etc.

6.3.1.3 The increased implementation of gender-neutral washrooms across campus

6.3.1.4 The provision of free menstrual hygiene products by the University in all womens, mens, and gender-neutral washrooms on campus.



6.3.2 The SSMU shall also advocate for any physical and infrastructural accessibility measures not specifically enumerated herein, but that align with the values set forth in this policy.

6.4 Financial Accessibility

6.4.1 Many financial barriers faced by students while accessing post-secondary education can be addressed at the University level. As such, the SSMU shall advocate for:

6.4.1.1 Ending the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education by providing increased and adequate funding to address financial barriers.

6.4.1.2 Systemically identify and apply for external funding to fund more extensive support services for Indigenous students.

6.4.1.3 A revision to existing merit-based scholarship renewal requirements such that they take into account students' level of extracurricular and community involvement and familial + labor-related responsibilities, in addition to academic performance.

6.4.1.4 The implementation of a clearer and more widely-distributed ban on paid course materials and assessment software (eg. Top Hat polling) where this is not clearly indicated in the original version of the course outline.

6.4.1.5 Increased implementation of Open Educational Resources (OER) in and outside of the classroom, ideally in the place of hard-copy textbooks and coursepacks.

6.4.2 The SSMU shall also advocate for any financial accessibility measures not specifically enumerated herein, but that align with the values set forth in this policy.

6.5 Pedagogy-Based Accessibility/Accessibility in the Classroom

6.5.1 In all academic and educational accessibility-related advocacy directed at the University administration, the SSMU shall advocate for the:

6.5.1.1 Implementation of a university-wide In-Course Academic Accommodations policy that shall serve to centralize existing policies, codify accessible accommodations practices, and expand the situations for which accommodations are guaranteed

6.5.1.2 Universal implementation of wait lists on all course sections where one is appropriate and able to be added

6.5.1.3 Permanent institutionalization of the First-Time Deferral Pilot Project for final examinations

6.5.1.4 Revision of the current final exam conflict regulations and formal inclusion of these revised regulations into the University Student Assessment Policy (USAP)

6.5.1.5 Universal usage of students' preferred names and pronouns, including during convocation ceremonies

6.5.1.6 Mandatory universal accessibility of lecture recordings for all compatible classes



6.5.1.7 Universal usage of subtitles in all in-class and assigned videos

6.5.1.8 Destigmatization of the usage of fidget toys in the classroom

6.5.2 In all academic and educational accessibility-related advocacy directed at the University administration, the SSMU shall advocate for the **removal of:**

6.5.2.1 In-classroom bans on the use of laptops or other electronic note-taking and learning devices

6.5.2.2 Required medical notes for academic accommodations

6.5.3 The SSMU will work to ensure that the services offered by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) remain effective, properly integrated into course management, and in and of themselves, accessible.

6.5.3 The SSMU shall also advocate for any pedagogical accessibility measures not specifically enumerated herein, but that align with the values set forth in this policy.

6.6 Accessibility in Academic Programming

6.6.1 In all academic and educational accessibility-related advocacy directed at the University administration, the SSMU shall advocate for the:

6.6.1.1 Expansion of courses offered at McGill that focus specifically on non-Western or Eurocentric content

6.6.1.2 Teaching of Indigenous language classes as credit courses

6.6.1.3 Ability for students to gain transfer credit or advanced academic standing for land-based Indigenous curricula

6.6.2 The SSMU shall also advocate for any academic programming accessibility measures not specifically enumerated herein, but that align with the values set forth in this policy.

7. Reporting and Review

7.1 All Officers responsible for the implementation of this Policy shall report to the Legislative Council on an annual basis regarding the fulfillment of their responsibilities as outlined above.

7.2 In reviewing this policy, Officers shall commit to consulting, at a minimum: SSMU Senate Caucus, Faculty Association-level Vice President Academics (or their equivalents), SSMU Equity Committee, SSMU Indigenous Affairs Committee, SSMU Environment Committee, Quebec Public Interest Research Group (QPIRG) McGill, the Black Students' Network, Indigenous Student Alliance, Union for Gender Empowerment, Queer McGill, and Climate Justice Action McGill.



Students' Society of McGill University

Tel: (514) 398-6800 | Fax: (514) 398-7490 | ssmu.ca

3600 McTavish St., Suite 1200, Montréal, QC, H3A 0G3

Located on Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, traditional territories

7.3 The SSMU Executive shall hold a semesterly town hall to hear student's concerns regarding academic life and this policy.