



MOTION REGARDING A DRAFT OF A STUDENT ENGAGEMENT PLAN 2020-03-26

Submitted for: 2020-03-26

Submitted to:	SSMU Legislative Council	Document no.:	LEG-PUB-MOT-2020-03-26-003 (to be assigned by Steering)
Moved by:	Adam Gwiazda-Amsel <i>Vice-President (External Affairs)</i>	Current Status:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FOR APPROVAL <input type="checkbox"/> APPROVED <input type="checkbox"/> POSTPONED <input type="checkbox"/> COMMITTED <input type="checkbox"/> NOT APPROVED
Seconded by:	Jonah Fried <i>Inter-Residence Council Representative</i>		

Issue The SSMU Constitution makes reference to a student engagement strategy within the mandate of the Vice-President (Internal Affairs).¹ However, no such strategy in fact exists to build capacity year-over-year or to test and retain best practices for student engagement.

Background and Rationale Plans are inherently designed to consider capacity-building initiatives of the Society. They should be formalized and committed to only when there is a legitimate reason to believe that such efforts are necessary and realisable. In the present instance, these conditions are satisfied.

It is necessary to have some institutional memory surrounding the state of student engagement, things that have been tried to boost it, and where to go from here. In terms of feasibility, the movers trust that Council is satisfied with the actionable nature of the strategies encompassed here, many of which have been benchmarked from similar-sized institutions that exhibit high student engagement.

Regrettably, the plan could not be finalized in time for the final legislative council of the year, but it is the hope of the movers that this work will be

¹ [SSMU Constitution \(p. 22\)](#)



carried out by next year's Executive and interested councillors, stakeholders, and members-at-large.

Alignment with Mission

In the interest of properly representing our student body, it is necessary to engage in active consultation with the Membership to understand their priorities and adjust our action plans accordingly. This works best when Members are engaged and actively giving feedback that allows us to improve.

Consultations Completed

The Draft Student Engagement Plan included as Appendix A has been reviewed by the SSMU Communications Department and the Vice-President (Internal Affairs), all of whom have an obligation to responsibly and meaningfully engage the Membership.

The Draft has also been reviewed by those in charge of mobilization at other student associations, and notably CSU, AFESH-UQAM, and AFESPED-UQAM

Risk Factors and Resource Implications

The Plan requires a fairly hefty time commitment year-over-year, which is consistent with how difficult it is to meaningfully engage and mobilize some 23,000 Members. It should be reiterated that e-mail blasts are not a substitute for tabling, flyering, and classroom announcements, which are time-tested methods that increase student engagement. These practices and others outlined in the Plan are more challenging than simply sending out e-mails every week, but with a sincere commitment by the Society to engage in this work, they can be achieved with responsible resource and time dedication.

Sustainability Considerations

Actively engaging the Membership touches on social and institutional sustainability. It ensures some degree of regenerative culture in empowering more students to feel the Society is their own, and thus positions more Members to involve themselves in committee work and leadership roles. This subsequently leads to a more fulsome representation of McGill's population as the path toward engagement is open to more than simply a select few in what is sometimes perceived as the "inner circle of SSMU".

In terms of environmental sustainability, increased flyering does have small deleterious effects on the environment.



Impact of Decision and Next Steps

If approved, the incoming Executive Team will be mandated to complete the drafting of this plan with relevant stakeholders. The finalized plan will be brought to Council and, upon approval, will be included in the Policy and Plan Book to serve as a guide for future Executive teams. Much of the actionables outlined in the Plan take effect beginning next academic year.

Motion or Resolution for Approval

Be it resolved that the SSMU 2019-2020 Legislative Council approve the Draft Student Engagement Plan (Appendix A).

Results of the Vote

In favour ()
 Opposed ()
 Abstain ()

APPENDIX A: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT PLAN

A note: Some of the items being proposed can be implemented without a long timeline. In this case, it may be helpful to either give them *metrics* rather than timelines, or else to put them first and present them as Step 1 toward some of the more long-term goals of this Plan.

1. OVERVIEW AND SCOPE

1. Execs are primarily responsible for coordinating and carrying out the mandates of this plan. The communications & events departments can be leveraged in supporting roles. Reference can and should be made to the Committees of SSMU as a venue for bringing groups and individuals into the core activities and decision-making processes of the Society.



2. PUBLICIZING SSMU

1. Commitment (including timelines) to establishing and maintaining good partners from around the University who engage their constituencies successfully. This allows us to have great platforms to broadcast the variety of offerings (funding, clubs & services, jobs) to the student body. Historically, a good relationship with CL&E is the reason the SSMU President still gives the keynote speech to the Entering Class. Good examples of partners include CL&E (start-of-year events, McGill Entering Class pages, other first-year networks such as COMunity), CaPS (presenting SSMU at job fairs), IRC/RLife.

2. Direct publicity:

2.1 classroom announcements, including a commitment to systematize a timetable of every class offered in each semester along with class size. Classroom announcements are the University equivalent of door-to-door canvassing, and are the most effective way to reach students if done well.

2.2 Start-of-year presence as a way to bring students in. Continuing to grow Activities Night is a great way to do this, as well as thinking critically about our presence during O-Week. Examples of this presence include booths at CL&E events, the Street Teams organized by the Vice-President (External), and potential collaborations with Frosh's Internal Organizing Committee (IOC).

2.3 Build more of a conversation (surveys, etc.) between the SSMU and its members about what they want or need from our social media platforms/website; annual consultation between Internal and students about what information they would like to see on social media/website



2.4. School year general tabling – has been successful at the UC kiosk (lots of traffic) when the building was open. Perhaps a biweekly tabling event by executives (1–2) with handouts/materials to augment or swap out for office hours sometimes. Perhaps each could be themed (insurance, services, club engagement, etc.).

3. PARTICIPATIVE DEMOCRACY

1. A commitment to hosting themed public assemblies on advocacy and student life to draw students in.

1.1 Students galvanize around specific concerns and issues (as evidenced by past Assemblies, demonstrations, etc.); can these topics be brought to Assemblies / public forums for discussion on the SSMU's end to encourage student participation?

1.2 These do not need to be directionless discussions. A great idea was brought up about having a pre-GA discussion/talk forum on a specific topical issue, bringing in guest speakers, etc.

2. A strategy (with timelines) about how to best assist Councillors who wish to engage students for their opinion on motions at Council. A best practice at other universities: for particularly hot-topic motions, council is discouraged from voting unless they have gotten a mandate from a faculty General Assembly committing their vote one way or another. This could of course include electronic consultations.

2.1 Highlighting motions that are being brought to council directly; make these motions more transparent and accessible to the student body by posting them to social media.



3. A plan (with timelines) on accessibilizing documents. These should be shorter and less legalistic. This allows students to meaningfully engage with the core documents of the Society and participate in structural changes.

4. Enhancing the livestream for members – right now it de facto functions more as an archival tool for journalists and the institution. Could viewers submit questions via the livestream as digital gallery members? Making the livestream in general more participatory might increase engagement.

4. A SEAT AT THE TABLE

This section title refers to inclusivity and equity in representation. We should strive to publicize our jobs more widely so that the pool of applicants isn't limited to the people casually browsing SmartRecruiters.

1. SSMU/University Committees should be publicized during activities night and start-of-year classroom announcements as a stepping stone into SSMU. Being a member-at-large is a fantastic way for students to first get involved in the socio-political orientations of the Society, and may encourage students to take on leadership roles in these committees (such as paid positions and/or Executive roles).

2. CaPS and other Job Fairs should be leveraged to present SSMU as an employer! The roles we offer to students are fantastic because of our non-profit essence. We have roles that can give students skills that are useful outside of SSMU.

3. Another way to get students thinking about taking on commissioner/exec roles is to create awareness around SSMU roles. This was started this year with the Instagram Takeover



initiative. Other things have been explored in the past, such as “A Day in the Life” of a SSMU Executive (in partnership with Student Media), with varying degrees of success. It is useful to think critically about how this can be improved.

4. First-year council should be recognized for the amazing body it is! This is a platform that can bring together various first-year networks (RLife, CL&E) to give students a take of governance and policy work. This gives them experience so that these processes are accessible later on. FYC should be at once an event-planner, a place to learn about political mobilization and advocacy work, and internal SSMU workings that help to better the lives of students.

5. POPULAR EDUCATION

This section explores how to accessibilize the political leanings of the Society. Often, the positions and/or statements of the Executives seem to come out of nowhere, but they are often built on years of advocacy work. This should be better explained.

1. The “more political” Executive roles should have a way to “fit” into the larger SSMU structure. This involves a greater degree of synchronization on the part of the Executives. A process worth thinking about:

- a) We have a political position in our Policy & Plan Book.
- b) A window of opportunity opens up for McGill or Montreal or Quebec to mobilize around this very issue, and this is brought to the attention of the VP External through their community contacts (or the attention of the VP University Affairs in the case that the issue at hand is one of University-facing advocacy).



- c) The VP External finds as many community organizations (political and otherwise) from outside the university that want to work on this issue.
- d) The VP External goes to the VP Student Life, who has a working knowledge of which clubs & services are active, what kinds of events they are throwing, etc. They direct the VP External to the groups that can add to the critical mass of people who are engaged on the issue identified in a).
- e) The VP External goes to the VP University Affairs and they work together to find non-undergraduate campus partners to work on these issues. This includes sympathetic professors, labour unions, university administrators, etc.
- f) The SSMU Executive, now involved in multiple arenas on the political issue, work with the VP Internal to get this message out to the student body. The VP Internal has a mandate to maintain interfaculty relationships (and indeed starts the year off meeting faculty execs), so at this point, students are being engaged “on the ground”, through faculty GAs, classroom announcements, listservs, flyering, etc.
- g) The VP External, SSMU President, or VP University Affairs (as the case may be) use the force of this campaign to advocate for the change the campaign wishes to accomplish.

Not that all of this needs to be detailed in the final plan, but the idea here is that SSMU Executives need to be working together in coordinated concertation to reach their goals. No one Office can succeed on its own as well as the SSMU can succeed as a whole.



It should also be mentioned here that when the mobilization is around an issue where there is the possibility of self-representation (i.e., another group has been doing this work far longer), the Executives will step back and let the more knowledgeable individuals self-advocate.

Some things to consider in this section: can staff be hired to facilitate this process? What other infrastructure can be established to make the above process easier? What do those timelines look like?

6. STUDENT SPACES

We have a position of holding Clubs & Services as our highest priority. There is an incredibly good reason for that. This section is about thinking critically about what the University Centre should “be” as a space. It should be a space for community, for engagement, for celebrating the spaces our community creates through all the students who take on the task of being club execs etc.

McGill doesn't do anything for student spaces. We create the student community. This section might explore what future plans are to create and maintain student spaces (one idea earlier this year was enhanced insurance to more student activities can be covered by SSMU). It may also be worth thinking about how to partner with McGill to increase the amount of the University that is used for student life, and not only in-class academics.