



MOTION REGARDING REFERENDUM QUESTION ON RENEWAL OF THE MCGILL WRITING CENTRE ANCILLARY FEE 2021-02-11

Submitted for: 2021-02-11

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Moved by:	Brooklyn Frizzle <i>Vice-President (University Affairs)</i>	Current Status:	<input type="checkbox"/> FOR APPROVAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> APPROVED <input type="checkbox"/> POSTPONED <input type="checkbox"/> COMMITTED <input type="checkbox"/> NOT APPROVED
Seconded by:	Jake Reed <i>Engineering Representative</i>		

Issue The existing McGill Writing Centre Ancillary fee, a non-opt-outable fee of \$1.50 per student per term, is set to expire after Winter 2021.

Background and Rationale The McGill Writing Centre was established in 2011 as the University's central resource for written communication. As an academic unit, the Writing Centre offers a slate of credit courses and non-credit activities for students from across the disciplines. The establishment of the non-opt-outable McGill Writing Centre Ancillary Fee of \$1.50 in 2013 and its successful renewal in 2016 has enabled students to benefit from 30-minute to 1-hour tutoring sessions on written work (up to 7 hours per term). In Spring 2020, all the tutoring sessions moved online without great interruption. And since that time, we continue to offer sessions through the day, during the evening, and on weekends.

Over the years, student surveys have revealed a *high degree of satisfaction*, with results from a recent survey revealing that 100% of users would recommend the Service to a friend. Yet, the main comment for improvement has consistently been the addition of *more tutoring hours and/or expanded hours*.



Alignment with Mission

Reading and communicating complex ideas effectively is central to the academic experience, regardless of your program – and a skill that is highly prized by employers. By sustaining Tutorial Service and improving its quality and accessibility, our motion is aligned with SSMU’s Service mandate to enhance student access to an educational experience that will enrich their studies and serve them well beyond the Roddick Gates.

Consultations Completed

With regard to SSMU processes, initial outreach in the fall and subsequent consultation has been conducted with the Vice-President (Finance) and the Elections Officer.

Concerning the broader student community, post-session surveys have been collected from students, previously on paper and now online (see Appendix for more details). The results are regularly reviewed and concrete changes based on feedback have been implemented when possible.

Risk Factors and Resource Implications

Should the renewal fail to be approved, this decision would leave a gap in University writing support that is used and appreciated by undergraduate students.

The 2013 motion to create the ancillary fee as a non-opt-outable fee established the necessary infrastructure to support the Tutorial Service. Its renewal in 2016 suggests that the SSMU legislative council and voting body continued to affirm its proof of concept.

Sustainability Considerations

The McGill Writing Centre’s Tutorial Service generates little negative environmental impact and offers a social and economically sustainable model for in its day-to-day workings.

When we were tutoring in person, students might have brought hardcopy assignments to discuss with their Writing Tutor – though many students also used laptops to avoid printing and for convenience.

With regard to sustaining access to our work, the shift to tutoring writing via MS Teams has meant that we’ve become even more accessible to students who are not residing locally, have off-campus jobs, or have difficulty getting to campus.



Finally, beyond the cost of the ancillary fee, the Tutorial Service provides all students with access to high-quality writing consults, which would normally be more expensive, at no additional cost.

Impact of Decision and Next Steps

Should the renewal of this fee pass, students will continue to be charged \$1.50 per term (excluding summer).

Motion or Resolution for Approval

Be it resolved that the Legislative Council approve the following question for the Winter 2021 referendum period:

(PART 1): Do you agree to the renewal of the non-opt-outable 'McGill Writing Centre Ancillary Fee' of \$1.50 per term (excluding summer) for all part-time and full-time Members of the SSMU, starting Fall 2021 and ending Winter 2026 (inclusive) with an understanding that a majority 'No' vote shall result in the discontinued access of undergraduate students to the Tutorial Service?

Be it further resolved that the SSMU Legislative Council adopts the actionable aspects of this question and that any grammatical or legal changes necessary do not need the re-approval of the Legislative Council.

Results of the Vote

In favour	(UNANIMOUS)
Opposed	()
Abstain	()



Appendix A : Relevant Appendix



McGill Writing Centre Tutorial Service Information Sheet

1. What is the McGill Writing Centre Tutorial Service?

Learning to write well is key to both academic and professional success. With this critical success factor in mind, the McGill Writing Centre (MWC) Tutorial Service provides opportunities for all McGill students to refine their writing skills in one-to-one sessions with experienced tutors and seasoned writing instructors.

Tutors work with students at every stage of the writing process—from outlining to final revision, and on texts of various lengths—from one-page personal statements for graduate school applications through to draft research essays.

In order to maximize opportunities for access, tutoring sessions are offered throughout the day, during the evening, and on weekends. Students may book any combination of 30-minute or 60-minute appointments, for up to 7 hours per term. Additionally, during peak periods, the MWC has offered “drop in” hours at the Library or other locations on campus.

The ancillary fee of **\$3.00 per semester** will allow the MWC to offer undergraduate students up to 9 hours of individualized tutoring over the course of the academic year and unlimited access to other writing support, e.g., workshops on a range of writing strategies, topics, and genres.

2. Which Students use the Tutorial Service? What do they say about the experience?

During the most recent academic year (2019-2020), we offered ~2800 hours of tutoring, with appointments during the day, evenings, and on weekends. During that year, *undergraduate students represented approximately 60% of all users.*

Unsurprisingly, given the number of students who use the Tutorial Service, the user population is remarkably diverse. Undergraduate and graduate students *from all Faculties* use the service, with Arts and Science representing the majority. Management, Engineering, Medicine, and Law students are also routinely well represented. The linguistic diversity of McGill’s undergraduate and graduate student population is likewise very well represented with a roughly 40/60 split between those who identify first language English speakers and those who list languages other than English as their mother tongue.

Based on paper evaluation forms, which we’ve since moved to an online form, we have received



useful feedback about students' experience with the tutoring session. Since digitizing the forms takes time and existing paper forms are still in the office, we can only offer a snapshot from Fall 2018 to Summer 2019. Please note that these are anonymous, but not all students complete the survey as it is voluntary.

Among 92 respondents in 2018-2019, we've learned the following key points:

- a) **100% of respondents would recommend the MWC Tutorial Service to other students.** Two students noted that their only hesitation was that there were too few appointments and they wanted to make sure the service was available to them!
- b) **When asked about improvements, nearly 50% wrote that they would like more availability (hours/student, tutors, time slots)**

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Four students requested longer appointments. One student requested making tutors available in various buildings/departments.

- c) **Around 50% had used the service more than once; 50% were first-timers.**

This speaks to our ability to bring in new users but also in our ability to retain students once they've attended a session.

- d) **Sample of comments:**

"It changed the way I approach writing."

"It has helped me upgrade the quality of my writing."

"This service is amazing. I'm so grateful that this is available."

"I swear by this service! My grades have gone up since using this."

"This is amazing. I learn so much and improve with every appointment."

"I have a lot more confidence in my work and the quality improved greatly."

"Anyone who is struggling with an essay or research paper can come and get the help they

need." **3. Who are the Tutors?**

The majority of tutors employed by the MWC are themselves McGill graduate students who have experience tutoring in other university settings or experienced writing instructors who have PhDs in their field. They receive training/upskilling from the Coordinator on how to provide constructive feedback, ways to address English-as-second-language needs, and other opportunities for development. The ancillary fee thus provides McGill graduate students with significant opportunities for both employment and professional development and all students with highly-trained tutors.

4. What other forms of writing support does the Tutorial Service provide?

In the past, the Tutorial Service had offered a series of 2-hour workshops designed to fine-tune specific writing skills, improve students' ability to organize and express ideas, and enrich their understanding of



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how to use grammatical forms to make their written and oral communications clear, lively, and engaging. The workshops provide opportunities for students to work with a writing specialist in an interactive, low pressure environment.

Due to budget constraints, we have preferred to privilege more hours on the tutoring schedule as opposed to separate workshops. However, if we are granted a renewal and increase, then we would make plans to restart this popular offering.

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