



SSMU GENERAL ASSEMBLY WINTER 2021 MINUTES

February 16, 2021

1. Call to Order: **18:26**

The Speaker calls the meeting to order at 18:26.

2. Land Acknowledgement

The Speaker presents the Land Acknowledgement.

The SSMU acknowledges that McGill University is situated on the traditional and unceded territory of the Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee nations. The SSMU recognizes and respects these nations as the true and constant custodians of the lands and waters on which we meet today. Further, the SSMU commits to and respects the traditional laws and customs of these territories.

3. Adoption of Standing Rules — **ADOPTED UNANIMOUSLY**

The Speaker presents the standing rules. There are no questions on the standing rules. The standing rules are approved by unanimous consent.

4. Approval of the Minutes

a. Fall 2020 General Assembly Minutes 2020-11-24 — **ADOPTED UNANIMOUSLY**

There are no changes to the minutes. The minutes are approved unanimously.

5. Approval of the Agenda — **ADOPTED UNANIMOUSLY**

VP External moves to add motion 7b (*Motion to Adopt the Divest for Human Rights Policy 2020-02-16*) to the agenda. VP External states that there have been no substantive changes since the motion was reviewed by the Steering Committee. As such, the Speaker states that it is appropriate for the motion to be added to the agenda.



There are no further changes to the agenda. The agenda is adopted unanimously.

6. Question Period

Question:

VP University Affairs asks if there is anything that can be done to maintain quorum.

Answer:

The Speaker explains that there is no way to mandate people to stay in the meeting, but encourages participants to stay until the motions have been voted on, and that they will attempt to admit more members as the meeting goes on. The Speaker clarifies that the General Assembly will become a Consultative Forum if it loses quorum before a motion has been passed, and anything passed by a Consultative Forum must be further ratified by the Legislative Council.

Valerie Masny asks the Speaker to slow down the explanation of proceedings for the benefit of constituents.

Question:

Councillor Smith asks why there was no recess to review the motion from the floor, given that the Internal Regulations of Governance mandate that a recess is held to review motions submitted from the floor.

Answer:

The Speaker states that the motion has already been reviewed by the Steering Committee and it was not on the agenda due to a delay from the Steering Committee. It was submitted on time by the movers. Since the motion has already been reviewed, no recess is necessary.

Question:

Jonah Fried (Arts) asks how the motion presented stands in relation to the Judicial Board ruling in 2017.

Answer:

The Speaker responds that the motion does not contravene the ruling as it bans motions condemning a nation, it does not preclude the SSMU from taking a position on the actions of a nation's government. VP University Affairs adds that the Judicial Board has released an additional reference, clarifying that the SSMU can take a stance on political conflicts and the actions of governments. They add that this motion is primarily focussed on corporations and their actions.



Question:

Councillor Karasick asks the Speaker if they can provide a timeline of the motion's changes as proposed by the Steering Committee.

Answer:

The Speaker states that the motion was submitted on time and rejected by the Steering Committee. It was returned to the movers with a list of proposed changes, and those changes were implemented and returned to the Steering Committee the week ending February 13th. The motion was reviewed again the evening of February 15th, and there were additional suggestions that were approved by the movers. The Speaker confirms that all items on the Agenda have been approved by the Steering Committee.

There are no further questions.

7. New Business

- a. Motion Regarding Nomination of the Auditor for the Fiscal Year 2021 2021-02-06 — **APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY**

VP Finance presents and motivates the motion. He notes that the Society is required to undergo an audit every year to present its financial position and ensure that it is operating within Generally Accepted Accounting Principles for not-for-profit organizations. This report is made available to the membership each year. He continues that Fuller Landau LLP have audited the Society in recent years and have continued to provide good service to the Society. As such the VP Finance would like to continue with their services this year.

Question Period:

There are no questions on the motion.

Debate:

Brent Jamsa (U3, Arts) moves that this motion is adopted by unanimous consent. There is no opposition. The motion is adopted unanimously.

- b. Motion to Adopt the Divest for Human Rights Policy 2020-02-16 — **APPROVED**

Maya Garfinkel presents and motivates this motion. This motion is to demand McGill divest from eight (8) corporations that profit from violence such as land theft, environmental destruction and other crimes. They list the damages caused by corporations that are part of McGill University's investments. McGill invests in TC Coastal GasLink that has resulted in the colonization of Wet'Suwet'en lands,



Lockheed Martin that manufactures weapons used in conflicts around the globe. In addition, McGill University invests in ReMax and Oshkosh, corporations complicit in human rights violations against Palestinian peoples. In addition this motion cites investments in Puma, Nordstrom, Footlocker and Coles. These corporations have used forced labour from Uighur people in the Xinjiang region of China.

VP External adds that they have a responsibility to place emphasis on the importance of student activism with regard to international issues, and that there is a rich history of this at McGill. They note that McGill has a responsibility to consider the social impact of its investments as a result of student activism. CAMSR (The Committee to Advise on Matters of Social Responsibility) was created in 1979 in response to students' demands regarding divestment from the apartheid regime in South Africa. They continue that the Motion and Policy align well with all of the SSMU's policies and Judicial Board references. Failing to pass this motion would represent the SSMU failing to live up to the obligations enumerated in its existing policies.

Question Period:

Question:

Dorothy Yip asks the movers of the motion to talk about some of the methods that the SSMU will be using to campaign for McGill's divestment from listed corporations.

Answer:

VP External notes that methods are outlined in Section 4 of this policy (Mandates), managed by the VP University Affairs and VP External. The Office of the VP External will be mandated to mobilize a campaign, which consists of meeting with other Student Associations, protests and social media campaigns. The Offices of the VP University Affairs and President will be tasked with University advocacy, consisting of meetings with faculty, staff and alumni as well as utilizing their positions on governing bodies to advance this policy.

Question:

Neel Soman notes that the policy outlines specific companies and organizations. They ask if there is a policy rationale to justify re-affiliating McGill with these companies or providing guidelines for future companies that McGill may invest in.

Answer:

VP University Affairs states that all SSMU policies only last five (5) years, and they don't expect that these companies would meet any useful criteria within five (5) years. They note also that these policies could be repealed and amended as necessary.

Question:



Reem Majid asks why the policy provides a specific mandate to the VP External to mobilize a campaign rather than another Officer.

Answer:

VP External states that according to the SSMU Constitution, the VP External is the Officer with the mandate to coordinate political mobilization efforts. On that basis, the Office of the VP External is the location with the primary responsibility to support campaigns that the SSMU is affiliated with.

Question:

Ghida Mawlawi inquires why the scope of this policy is not larger and if it could be increased in subsequent years.

Answer:

The Speaker responds that this policy was originally broader in scope, but the Steering Committee recommended that a narrower slate of companies be defined to make the policy more actionable.

The VP External adds that the specificity of the policy facilitates the coordination of campaigns. For example, mechanisms for divestment advocacy pertain primarily to CAMSR at the University level, and to submit an expression of concern to this committee you must document and specify corporations that are complicit in actions that would result in the committee providing a recommendation to divest.

Question:

Zachary Couture asks why it is the responsibility of the SSMU to adopt this motion.

Answer:

VP External confirms that the SSMU has a mandate to demonstrate leadership in matters of human rights, social justice and environmental protection. There are similar mandates in other policies, such of the Society as well as the position on international solidarity.

There are no further questions.

Debate:

Councillor Reed states that they agree with the spirit of this policy in taking a stand against corporations complicit in human rights violations. They are concerned that this motion lacks adequate detail. They continue that the policy originally contained clauses that were violations of the SSMU's



Internal Regulations and Memorandum of Agreement with the University. Typically the SSMU's most visible attempts at advocacy are controversial social media posts that garner a great deal of attention, and this policy will not satisfy the need for more concrete advocacy measures. They note while this policy focuses on institutions and does not single out affiliations of SSMU members, it and similar documents have been used to do so in the past. They cite the case of a Jewish student who was singled out as a result of an interpretation of a SSMU policy last year. They conclude that policies such as this do have merit, but should be carefully written with greater care to provide concrete advocacy. As part of this, permanent staff and institutional memory. Policies should not result in the SSMU causing controversy, instead they should provide measures that allow it to lobby effectively. They are concerned that this policy is not concrete or actionable enough.

Brent Jamsa moves to divide the question on each clause of the policy in Appendix A of the motion. Adam Gwiazda-Amsel raises a point of order, stating that the previous motion is not constitutional as it would result in a clause that relates to corporations operating in Israel and the State of Palestine being separated from the rest of the motion which the Judicial Board has held to be unconstitutional.

The Speaker states the point is well taken and rules the motion to divide the question out of order.

Elissa Cohen (U2, Arts) states that criticism of the Israeli government is healthy and necessary, but this criticism can become Anti-Semitism, and that the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) is an example of this. Recognized definitions of Anti-Semitism in Canada include holding the state of Israel to a double standard, and this is done by this motion as it disproportionately targets Israel. Cohen continues that Israel is the only nation cited in the motion twice, and that nearly half of the sources mention Israel. In addition, BDS disproportionately harms Jewish students, and Cohen cites the example of a Montreal student spray painting swastikas on a synagogue after being affiliated with BDS. Cohen states that this outlook only further divides both sides of this issue, and states that it is wrong to view the issue as a zero sum game. They conclude that this motion would harm Jewish students on campus, and prevent resolution of this conflict.

Samuel Helguero states that they believe individuals who want this motion to fail are in the minority. Helguero does not believe that this motion has many references to BDS and does not believe the discussion regarding antisemitism to be relevant. Helguero believes that there is no double standard, citing the fact that this motion targets multiple companies in multiple countries.

Councillor Karasick states that Anti-Semitism is a serious concern and they do not believe that it should be brushed off as meaningless. He raises the point of the interpretation section of the policy, stating that he does not understand this section. He believes that it has been added in as a way to deny culpability for harm caused by this motion.

Lucy Everett states that they are here to talk about Coastal Gaslink. They state that the SSMU has a responsibility to ensure that money given to the university is not used to support a genocidal



occupation of Indigenous lands. They state that these lands have never been ceded to the Canadian Government, and they feel it is unjust to discuss being uncomfortable with this motion when others are suffering. They believe it is wrong for McGill and its students to benefit from this as an investment.

Senator Daryanani thanks the movers and writers for their work in creating this motion. He notes that he takes their constituents' concerns seriously but believes that this motion is a step that must be taken to hold McGill University accountable. He states that frequently marginalized peoples' concerns are overlooked, and that this motion is a testament to these concerns. Senator Daryanani urges the General Assembly to pass this motion as a symbol to McGill that shares in these corporations represent people's lives, not just investments.

Councillor Collins notes that the motion provides mandates to the VPs External and University Affairs to advocate to the McGill Board of Governors, however only the president sits on the McGill Board of Governors.

VP University Affairs states that this mandate has been placed on other Executives as the Presidents' seat occupies a specific role and it would not always be appropriate for the President to conduct advocacy at the Board. They note that these Executives could still meet with administrators and governors outside of the meetings themselves, and this is a better solution as it avoids breaches of the President's obligation to the university.

Genviève Nevin thanks the movers and writers for their work on this. Nevin supports this motion as an anti-Zionist Jewish person. Nevin takes issue with the framing of this motion as Anti-Semitism and note parallels between the conflicts on Wet'Suwet'en lands and between Israel and the State of Palestine.

Reem Majid states that McGill students have an obligation to stand up to oppression and colonial/state sponsored violence whether at home or abroad. They state that this motion does exactly that, and is a call for McGill to stop upholding corporations that partake in human rights violations.

Karla Heisele states that people deserve to feel safe in their homeland and that there is a grey area between legitimate concerns and Anti-Semitism. Heisele states the people question Israel's right to exist and this reinforces a cycle of hate. Heisele notes that last year, Jewish students at McGill University were singled out for visiting Israel and that this motion may perpetuate antisemitism.

Zachary Couture states that they believe this motion is being reduced to a BDS campaign. Couture states that this motion is not targeting Israel as a state or government, only corporations. There are no corporations specified are Israeli, and that it is wrong to equate advocacy for Palestinian rights and anti-Israel rhetoric. Couture continues that this alienates Palestinian students.



Zeke Bertrand states that this discussion should be sensitive to the needs of Jewish, Palestinian and First Nations students, and ensure that it is clear that everyone has a right to be at McGill University, taking into account communities that are being harmed by McGill's actions.

Avishai Infeld believes this motion goes against the 2017 ruling of the Judicial Board. If dividing the question would violate the Judicial Board decision, surely the entire motion would. The Speaker states the Steering Committee has concluded that this is not the case.

Adam Gwiazda-Amsel states that the most recent reference stated that isolating the questions is what caused the 2017 motion to be unconstitutional. By isolating the question, the motion becomes a discussion of specific nations and peoples, not divestment.

VP University Affairs states that the recent JBoard reference clarifies that the SSMU can take positions on the actions of a government, regardless of this, the policy does not refer to a government.

Michael Chalkhoun-Herbella moves to appeal the decision of the Speaker to rule the motion to divide the question out of order. Chalkhoun-Herbella states that a division that could be constitutional is dividing the motion based on clauses which could be deemed to have a sensitive issue regarding xenophobia. Dividing the question may seem as it is exclusionary, but it is a way to include people who would like to approve parts of the motion and disagree with others. This is a way to approach the motion as a question that is not black or white.

The General Assembly votes on the motion. The motion fails.

Danielle Fuchs states that they believe it is important to recognize the differences between the issues mentioned in this motion. Fuchs believes that few at the General Assembly take issue with voting to pressure McGill to divest from companies causing harm to the Wet'Suwet'en people, using forced labour or Lockheed Martin whose weaponry is in use in Yemen. The fact that there is opposition to the sections regarding Israel are unfair to the other causes listed and could result in them being voted down even though there is widespread support. The situation in Palestine is different in nature from other points, and the motion repeats talking points that have been found to be unconstitutional. Fuchs states that it is absurd that it is not possible to divide the question on the issues presented. They note that the VP University Affairs had mentioned that this motion is constitutional as it does not call for action against any one nation, however, condemnation of actions of some corporations in this motion is inseparable from condemnation of the State of Israel. Fuchs explains that BDS documentation advises separating motions such as this from the BDS movement to assure their passage.

VP University Affairs states that nobody at this meeting is a "citizen" of a company mentioned. They state that the authors of this motion have attempted to distance themselves from conflict and controversy where possible, and have included language to clarify that this motion has no intention of marginalizing Israeli students. They state that this has no direct condemnation of Israel as a nation,



and is purely based on corporations. They believe it is unfair to say that this motion will spur antisemitic marginalization. VP University Affairs explains that this motion is backed by facts, and no claims are contentions or laid against a specific nation. They believe this is a straw man argument, and that members should critique clauses of the motion rather than perceived marginalization that it could cause.

Simone Bobrow states that criticizing Israel is separate from criticizing the Jewish religion. They note that earlier it was mentioned that peoples deserve a safe place to live and that this extends to Palestinians. The corporations mentioned in this motion are simply profiting from a conflict, and the General Assembly should be able to agree that this is wrong and that McGill should not support it.

Eman Alali states that McGill students are leaders of change, they note the Yemen crisis that has left millions in need of assistance, and that the conflict has resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians. The SSMU should encourage McGill to divest from corporations that profit from this crisis such as Lockheed Martin.

Dounia Aljijakli states that it is baffling that there is an effort to dismiss the inclusiveness of this motion. Aljijakli restates that this is not about certain countries, but about corporations that have chosen to profit from conflict and encourage the General Assembly to vote in favour of this motion to hold McGill University accountable. This debate frames the concerns regarding First Nations, Uighurs or Yemenis as less important, which is outrageous.

Naomi Pastrana moves to call the question.

Noah Fisher states that the conversation has become circular and the best path forward is to vote on the motion.

The motion to call the question is approved.

The General Assembly loses quorum, the meeting is now considered a Consultative Forum. The Speaker clarified that any motions passed must now be approved by the Legislative Council.

Jasper Ross states that an issue with the online format where individuals can easily leave the General Assembly forcing it to lose quorum, taking away power from individuals here and giving it to the Legislative Council. The Speaker states that this happens in person as well, and there is no way to keep people in the room. This would not be a sufficient reason to call a special General Assembly, but they understand that this is a precarious situation. The Speaker suggests inviting as many people as possible to the following meeting of the Legislative Council.

Question:

Maya Goss asks what will happen when this motion goes to the Legislative Council.



Answer:

The Speaker responds that the procedure and debate will be the same, however only SSMU Councillors will be able to vote. SSMU members may still attend and participate.

Question

Amir Zaman asks when quorum needs to be reached for a motion to be binding.

Answer

The Speaker states that the quorum is 350 people and needs to be met during voting. Whenever quorum is lost, the General Assembly becomes a Consultative Forum. At present only 240 members are present.

The Consultative Forum votes on the motion:

In Favour: 190

Opposed: 19

Abstaining: 3

The motion is approved and will be debated at the February 25th meeting of the Legislative Council.

Sanchi Bhalla thanks the Speaker, Parliamentarian and Recording Secretary for their work.

8. Report of the Board of Directors

The President presents the report of the Board of Directors. He provides an overview of the membership of the Board of Directors - 4 Executives, 4 Councillors, 4 members-at-large, an International Student Representative and the General Manager. Directors must be at least 18 years of age, a citizen or permanent resident of Canada and have no criminal record or past bankruptcy.

The Board is the highest governing body of the SSMU, responsible for Finance, Human Resources and Legal. It approves decisions taken at the Legislative Council.

Important decisions of the Board in recent months include: Renovations for 3501 Peel and the University Center, approval of the Revised SSMU Budget, and approval of the 2020 report of the auditors and financial statements.

There are no questions on the report.

9. Report of Executives:

- a. President



The President presents. They describe the role of the President. The President is the CEO and spokesperson of the Society, is responsible for the enforcement of the SSMU Constitution and Internal Regulations, SSMU Governance, sitting on the Executive and Human Resources Committees and sitting on the Board of Directors. In addition, the President sets agendas for these meetings, manages relations with the administration, and represents students at McGill's Senate and Board of Governors. In this role the President sits on a number of university committees, including CAMSR. The President supervises the Sustainability Commissioners and Governing Documents Researcher.

The President has been working on constitutional changes, and ensuring that relevant stakeholders are involved in discussions. The opening of 3501 Peel has been delayed due to COVID-19, as has the reopening of the University Center and Gerts. The President notes that a Fall Reading week has been implemented and a SSMU 5-year plan has been put in place. In addition, the University Center is accessible to some tenants.

Question:

Sam Baron asks if there is any information regarding the Arts Lounge in the Leacock building.

Answer:

The President responds that the construction is nearing its end, and they would be happy to follow up with this at their next meeting with the McGill administration.

There are no further questions on the report of the President.

b. Vice-President (External Affairs)

VP External Affairs presents their report. His mandate is external affairs, community affairs, community engagement and inter-union relations. VP External Affairs presents a chart of their staff, and highlights the hiring of a Black Affairs Commissioner and a new Community Affairs Commissioner.

VP External Affairs sits on the Board of Directors' Advocacy Committee of UCRU (a group of U15 Universities), the Inter-Associatif (a roundtable of CEGEP and Quebec University Student Unions', and the Groupe de Travail Contre le Program d'Expérience Québécois (a working group against recent reforms to the PEQ). In addition the VP External sits on the Citizens' Committee of Milton Parc as an observer, the Board of CKUT, multiple committees at the SSMU and the Board of the PUSH Fund that will help the SSMU develop affordable student housing.

With regards to external affairs, the VP External Affairs has hired a political researcher and a coordinator. They have developed a guide to political research and external affairs positions. This helps provide a basis for advocacy that can be shared with other student associations. He participated in UCRU's advocacy week, meeting with over seventy officials in parliamentary and government



offices. UCRU is currently developing a policy library and hoping to become an incorporated organization and official federation.

VP External Affairs has been working with the Affordable Student Housing Committee and a forum will be held next week. The Community Engagement Committee is preparing long term goals and setting up a citizens assembly for Le-Plateau-Mont-Royal. In addition, a campaigns guide has been completed to familiarize others with the role of the external affairs office. VP External Affairs has been supporting a boycott of Metro corporation and researching possible next steps. A policy on harmful military technology has been passed, and campaigns relating to these mandates have been approved in the last few months.

There have also been meetings with other unions at McGill, and unions of other Quebec universities.

There are no questions on the report of the VP External Affairs.

c. Vice-President (Finance)

VP Finance presents their report. Regarding general finance and accounting, the VP Finance is responsible for long term financial sustainability including the creation of the annual budget. They work with the Society's accounting team to manage the Society's cash flow and approve contracts entered into by the Society. The VP Finance is also responsible for the annual audit and *Where is my Money Going?* document.

The 2022 budget is 'under construction' at the moment. VP Finance is also working with the auditors to censure a quicker timeline next year. A report on SSMU fee policies has been published on the SSMU website and the VP Finance is working on automated reports from the Society's accounting software. The COVID-19 pandemic has not severely impacted the Society. While there is no revenue from Gerts', the investment portfolio has recovered from the initial shock.

VP Finance is responsible for the distribution of around \$350,000 in funding to student groups every year. The process has been revised from 3-5 weeks down to 1-2 weeks turnaround time, and the committee terms of reference have been updated. There are fewer applications than usual due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For Clubs and Services, VP Finance provides general support and contract review and upkeep of bank accounts and credit cards. Banking is entirely online, and virtual bank tokens are available worldwide. Clubs can now send and receive e-transfers. A Service Finance Coordinator has been hired to reconcile credit cards and process accounting forms.

VP Finance administers the SSMU Health and Dental plan. The plan is brokered by Studentcare and underwritten by Desjardins. Students on the Health plan have access to Dialogue, a telemedicine service. International Students also have an extra opt out period in the case that they did not come to Canada in 2021.



There are no questions on the report of the VP Finance.

d. Vice-President (University Affairs)

VP University Affairs presents their report. The University Affairs portfolio has been restructured, with a number of staff across the portfolio. VP University Affairs is responsible for University Representation and research, and educating students on their academic rights. They sit on the McGill Senate, Scholarship review Committee and Committee on Student Services.

They have secured an implementation of the S/U Policy and an extended winter break. They have been working on revising the University Student assessment policy, and the terms of reference of the Committee of Student Services. At the SSMU level they are working on amendments to the Internal Regulations of Representation and Advocacy and amendments to the Constitution. There is research ongoing regarding usage of preferred names at McGill, and they are looking to establish a research ethics committee at the SSMU. In addition they sit on a number of committees at the SSMU, which take up a great deal of the portfolio.

A report on renaming the University Center and 3501 Peel has been released, and the VP University Affairs is looking to strengthen the Indigenous Affairs portfolio. There is an effort ongoing to vote in favour of compensating Legislative Councillors and Senators for their work. An Accessibility Commissioner has been hired.

Finally, the VP University Affairs is responsible for academic support, and encourages members to apply for the Library Improvement Fund. The Open Educational Resources program has left coursepacks accessible online, and they are now free to use from the McGill library unless you need a physical copy. Printing hubs are open in the library. The Library Improvement Fund has also been used for furniture and lighting at the newly renovated Schulich library.

There are no questions on the report of the VP University Affairs.

e. Vice-President (Student Life)

VP Student Life presents her report. VP Student Life oversees Clubs, Services and Independent Student Groups. In addition they work on mental health outreach with the Mental Health Commissioners, and administer the SSMU Family Care Policy. She currently serves as the President of the SSMU Daycare Inc, and works with Campus Life and Engagement at McGill.

Activities night happened in late January and went well. Unused features were removed, and over 300 student groups were involved. Turnout was lower than Fall Activities Night, but this is typical even in a normal year. Clubs workshops covered a variety of topics, and only clubs that didn't attend last



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Located on Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, traditional territories

semester were required to attend. The VP Student Life thanks everyone who was in attendance. They are working on a clubs portal, and are looking for a software supplier and are receiving demonstrations from potential partners. They hope this will be in place by Fall 2021. The club audit was due January 25th and submission review is ongoing.

VP Student Life is in the process of checking in with Services. The Services' summit took place on February 7th, and a new Instagram account was created to showcase services. The MSA is the SSMU's newest Service and the Services Review Committee is currently developing its annual report. The SSMU Family Care Policy is up for review at the Legislative Council, and the daycare is currently running smoothly despite personnel changes.

The Mental Health Action week was January 25-29 and surveys are ongoing regarding the McGill Wellness Hub. The Mental Health Fee is up for renewal this semester. KeepMeSafe/MySSP has seen increased usage.

There are no questions on the report.

10. Adjournment: **22:36**

The Winter 2021 General Assembly comes to adjournment at 22:36.