

austerity:
a report

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INTRODUCTION

This report has been created from a huge archive of collective knowledge that exists around austerity in Québec and at McGill in particular. It's been created as a formalization of this knowledge and as a document that can be used to leverage demands from SSMU, the McGill administration, and the government, as well as our fellow students and universities. It is a living document and should be updated frequently. It should be considered to be property of the students, for them to edit, criticize, add to, and use as they see fit.

Austerity is a system of financial management that systemically underfunds and cuts funding to communities, specifically in terms of public services. This report seeks to investigate this from a few angles. In Chapter 1 we will cover the "basics" of austerity. A broad definition of austerity will be introduced as well as some common myths and explanations of why they don't hold up. The chapter will end with a very short timeline of government financial decisions that have had effects on McGill (some good, some bad).

Chapter 2 delves into the McGill context. Here we'll outline what austerity looks like on the ground, in terms of labour, student life, and academics. We'll also talk about some of the student activism that has surrounded austerity in the past as well as some of McGill's common lies and why they're false.

The last chapter, Chapter 3, will take a look at more systemic issues at McGill, outside of situational austerity. This chapter acknowledges that austerity is part of a larger system of financial management at McGill that can be characterized by irresponsibility, inefficiency, and non-transparency, as well as a governance structure that doesn't work.

Austerity is a big problem, but it exists within a system that is inherently broken. No matter how much money we throw at a broken system, it will still be broken. For this reason, it's important to highlight that while this report deals with austerity, we cannot talk about austerity without addressing the fact that capitalism as a system can never and will never work on an ethical and just level. If this is a belief you don't share, then you might not find this report particularly useful.

Despite the fact that the system austerity exists within is so big, a lot of the examples presented here will seem small and potentially irrelevant. Some of these austerity-

related measures feel like they're just tiny blips on the map of millions of dollars. But it's important to realize that these tiny things add up. They work particularly well precisely because of their smallness: it becomes easier for people to ignore them and not think of them as a symptom of austerity. We have to consider these small measures just as harmful as huge budget cuts. Without seeing them for what they are, we risk becoming complacent.

This report has tried to emphasize that austerity affects everyone, but it affects some people on deeper levels. It has been written with a focus on using an intersectional, anti-oppressive, and radical social justice-oriented lens to examine austerity. Using these frameworks is critical for understanding how austerity works and how we can mobilize against it. At the same time, it's important to recognize that these ideas and terms are not new or unique to this report: they have been theorized by women and femmes of colour who are often not credited for this labour. As you read this report, keep this in mind. Women and femmes of colour, as well as other often disenfranchised groups, have been fighting austerity and social injustice for decades and continue to do so.

Despite trying to have a focus on intersectionality, anti-oppression, and social justice, this research is imperfect. This report should not be considered sacred; there are probably many flaws in it, and these absolutely should be identified, worked through, and corrected. This is part of the reason why this is a living document—it should not be viewed as exempt from criticism. It should consistently be edited, changed, re-arranged, cut down, re-worded, etc. etc. etc.

At this point it's relevant to mention the researcher's positionality. I believe this is important for the sake of transparency and accountability. I am an undergraduate at McGill University studying Gender, Sexuality, Feminism and Social Justice (GSFS) with a Political Science minor. I will (hopefully) be graduating in the spring of 2019. I'm 21 years old. I'm a non-binary, fairly masculine-presenting, queer, mentally ill, upper-middle class white settler student. I believe in everything written in this report, but at the same time as someone who often benefits from the same things I criticize here (such as whiteness, colonialism, and of course austerity), I should be held accountable for any assumptions I make and oppressive attitudes I may play into. If you have feedback for me, feel free to drop me a line at austerityreport2018@gmail.com.

Finally, there are a few things to say about the nature of reports and the written word. We have to be weary of reports. Reports are a very easy way to make it look like stuff is happening when nothing is. And a lot of reports just put into writing what we

already know, under the guise of “research”. This report aims to counter that narrative. It does not hold new information and it does not aim to upend any conversations that are already happening. Instead, it serves as a reservoir of information which can be presented as leverage. It is imbued with as many citations as possible in the hopes that this information can no longer be denied in the way it often is when students talk about it to the administration.

That being said, the fact we have to write down this information, students’ lived experiences, and provide “facts” and “truth” is fucked up. It’s a symptom of whiteness and settler colonialism to devalue a truth that exists within collective knowledge and conversations, instead only taking written and cited works seriously. This report is taking part in this harmful system in the hopes that it can do some good by providing a resource to those mobilizing against austerity. This is debatable, and it’s worth wondering if there can ever be radical social justice within the current system.

Along those same lines, it’s worth questioning whether we can ever have financial justice on stolen Indigenous land. No matter how much money McGill decides to give to marginalized students or how many steps it takes to resist austerity, it will always be an act of colonialism for it to exist. Until this land is returned to the Indigenous people it was taken from, there will always be violence on it.

This report is not a solution to all of the problems that exist at McGill. It is one step but is imperfect in many ways. It is produced in the hopes that one day it will be irrelevant because the problems, such as capitalism, which create austerity, scarcity, and institutional irresponsibility will be abolished.

A glossary is available at the back of this report for technical terms as well as those which might need some elaboration. These terms will be underlined.

CHAPTER 1: THE BASICS OF AUSTERITY

1.1 What is “austerity”?

In writing a report such as this, it’s extremely important to define what “austerity” means. While various definitions abound, this report uses a specific one that has been constructed throughout the research.

Here are some pre-constructed definitions of austerity:

1. Austerity measures refer to official actions taken by the government, during a period of adverse economic conditions, to reduce its budget deficit using a combination of spending cuts or tax hikes.¹
2. Austerity is defined as a set of economic policies a government implements to control public sector debt. Austerity measures are the response of a government whose public debt is so large that the risk of default, or the inability to service the required payments on its debt obligations, becomes a real possibility.
3. Austerity is a series of political choices that ask the general population to put in an exceptional effort of cutting back in order to achieve an objective that has been presented as legitimate by politicians.²

Our own definition:

Austerity...

- Is a **style of financial management** that involves cutting back on spending or persistently not spending enough to meet the needs of the population
- Is perpetrated by **governments** in their official budgets, but can also be:
 - Perpetrated by **organizations and institutions** (such as universities)
 - **Unofficially announced** financial behaviour (so, austerity can exist even when no one has set out to intentionally use an austerity measure)
- Often plays out through chronic underfunding or outright cutting of **public services** such as education and healthcare
- **Disproportionately affects marginalized populations** such as racialized folks, Indigenous communities, disabled people, queer and trans people, women,

¹ “Definition of Austerity Measure,” Financial Times Lexicon, accessed 30 June 2018, <http://lexicon.ft.com/Term?term=austerity-measure>.

² Eve-Lyne Couturier and Simon Tremblay-Pepin, *Les Mesures D’Austérité et les Femmes : Analyse des Document Budgétaires Depuis November 2008*, Montréal: Institut de recherche et d’informations socioéconomiques, 2015. Accessed June 30, 2018. <https://iris-recherche.qc.ca/publications/austerite-femmes>, 15.

low-income people, and immigrants. Among these groups, those who have overlapping marginalized identities may be even further disadvantaged.

- **Is an ideological and political choice** that those in power make, rooted in neoliberalism.
 - However, it is often **portrayed as an obligation** by the presentation of certain myths, such as that the level of debt is an emergency and the easiest way to cut down the debt is to cut public services.
- **Is not confined to an activity during recessions**; it can continue even into “good” economic times

While we can debate the nature of austerity and what definition is the best, this report takes this definition for granted because it is broader than any other and acknowledges facets of austerity that the other definitions don't (such as who it affects disproportionately and the fact that it can be both officially *and* unofficially used).

1.2 Debunking Myths

This section will outline 4 myths that are often told about austerity, as well as explain why they're not true.

Myth 1: Austerity is necessary in times of recession

On a practical, macro-economic level, austerity doesn't work. During a financial crisis, the government actually needs to be spending more on public services because regular people lack funds to invest in the economy.³ It's in financial high-times when the government should be cutting back and reducing its debt. This is basic macro-economic theory.

Myth 2: Diminishing government debt is necessary and urgent

This is a fear-based argument and isn't true for many reasons. Here are just two:

1. Government debt is operational, which means that many governments are in debt quite often, but they still function under it. Québec has no problem paying off the most crucial parts of its debt each year, which means that investors still have confidence and continue to invest.⁴ Think about a credit card, where you can spend \$2000 a month and your minimum monthly payment is \$20. If you continue to pay off the \$20 every month, your credit will be fine. Is it *amazing* if

³ Christopher T.S. Ragan and Richard G. Lipsey, *Macroeconomics* (Toronto: Pearson Canada Inc., 2011), 608.

⁴ Francis Fortier et Simon Tremblay-Pepin, *État de la Dette du Québec 2014*, Montréal: Institut de recherche et d'informations socioéconomiques, 2014. Accessed June 30, 2018. <https://iris-recherche.qc.ca/publications/dette2014>, 17.

you can only make the \$20? No; it would be great for you to pay the whole thing off every time. But if you need groceries and to pay your electricity bill, I doubt you would put off those essential needs just for the idea that it would be *cool* to have less credit charges.

2. While it might be preferable to have less debt, Québec's debt is *below* the average of all OECD countries. In other words, compared to countries with similar economies as Québec, it's actually doing fine.

Choosing to prioritize debt is an **ideological choice**. This myth is used to trick the population into believing that some numbers are more important than our health and wellbeing. Prioritizing debt over people is a choice, and not a very good one.

Myth 3: Austerity is designed to only be temporary

We all want to believe that once the economy picks back up, the government will go back to spending more. However, even when this happens, austerity has still led to a permanent change in our behaviour and financial outlooks. This instinctual move toward austerity is seen in the way that austerity has become not only a governmental problem, but also an activity pursued by institutions like McGill and our own student union, the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU).

When austerity isn't outright being perpetrated, its effects remain. Québec, after austerity-driven budgets from 2014-2016, is "reinvesting".⁵ However, "reinvesting" is far from being an accurate word or evenly spread across demographics.

- On a quantitative level, the reinvestments **don't make up for the cuts** that happened before.⁶ So, while "reinvesting" sounds nice, austerity has permanently cut the funds available for public services.
- On a qualitative level, the people who were most affected by the cuts are not brought back up again by reinvestment. These people are living under permanent austerity. Some examples include:
 - Cuts came from **education and health**, but the current surpluses are going toward infrastructure⁷.
 - Subsidized **daycares** continue to be cut permanently⁸.

⁵ "Québec's finance minister on austerity, tax cuts and marijuana as a 'dangerous substance,'" *CBC News*, November 22, 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/Montréal/Québec-tax-cuts-carlos-leitao-marijuana-1.4413665>.

⁶ "Québec budget 2017: Trains, cash for education, tax cuts for austerity-weary Québécois," *CBC News*, March 28, 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/Montréal/Québec-budget-2017-1.4042479>.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ "Québec outlines new financing for subsidized daycares," *CBC News*, February 23, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/Montréal/aqcpe-reaches-deal-with-Québec-government-1.3459666>.

- A large portion of the funding increases to universities go towards innovation and technology growth (for example, the JELF fund at McGill⁹), while cuts affected **casual labourers and students**.

Through these examples we can see that “reinvestment” means different things for different people. While the CEOs of large construction firms benefit from new contracts, the single parents who rely on daycare are **still living under austerity**.

Another problem with the idea that austerity can be temporary is that it doesn’t account for the fact that capitalism is our permanent system. Capitalism breeds inequalities and harsh market conditions. If we have a system that is permanently broken, and austerity is our way of “surviving” in that system, then it can’t be temporary. If you have a permanently busted car and the only way it works is to use a special part, you can’t possibly argue that you only need that part *sometimes*. Within capitalism, austerity is here to stay.

Myth 4: The best way to cut our debt is to cut public services

This myth is often disguised with phrases like “belt-tightening”, “running things differently”, “getting lean”, “being productive”, and “innovating”. On the news, these phrases don’t sound so bad, but what they really mean is: we believe debt *must* be cut, and we believe that public services are the most useless parts of our government, so we’re going to cut them. Debt, however, comes from a bunch of very different things, any of which could be cut.¹⁰ Those who implement austerity want us to think that this isn’t true, but when we examine their other financial behaviours, it’s clear that public services aren’t the problem; corporate-government ties are.

While the Québec government was complaining about its levels of debt and arguing that austerity had to be done, it was also giving Bombardier, a huge rail transport company, a 1B US bailout¹¹ and spending 3.1B on corporate subsidies.¹²

⁹ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2015*, Montréal: McGill University, 2014. Accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/budget-book/budget-book-archive>, 22.

¹⁰ Francis Fortier et Simon Tremblay-Pepin, *État de la Dette du Québec 2014*, Montréal: Institut de recherche et d’informations socioéconomiques, 2014. Accessed June 30, 2018. <https://iris-recherche.qc.ca/publications/dette2014>, 15.

¹¹ “Bombardier gets final instalment of Québec’s \$1B US investment in CSeries,” *CBC News*, September 2, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/Montréal/bombardier-receives-final-instalment-of-Québec-one-billion-investment-1.3745880>.

¹² Alexandre Moreau, “One province stands far, far above the rest in the corporate welfare championship,” *Financial Post*, January 18, 2018, <http://business.financialpost.com/opinion/one-province-stands-far-far-above-the-rest-in-the-corporate-welfare-championship>.

The government also doesn't recognize that there are other options to cutting public services. Some ways debt can be reduced include:

- Raising the **corporate tax bracket** from 11.9% to 15%.¹³
- Raising the number of tax brackets for individuals from 4 to 11, which would **increase income taxes for the wealthiest** while decreasing them for lower-income people. This could save an estimated 1B.¹⁴
- Getting rid of **tax credits** on individual capital gains. For example, when an individual makes a profit off of capital (like a house or a stock), a chunk of that revenue isn't taxable. If all of that revenue could be taxed, the government could make hundreds of millions of dollars.¹⁵
- Increasing royalties on **natural resource extraction**, such as mining.
- Fighting against **tax evasion**, which costs the government hundreds of millions every year.¹⁶

These are just a few methods for cutting debt without cutting public services. There are hundreds of possible sources of income for the government that it can access without cutting necessities for the population.

So, while the government might be telling us that public services have to go, they continue to spend on corporations and refuse to look at any other option besides public cuts.

...

This section has attempted to outline just 4 myths and explain why they're not true. Many more exist, and it's important to keep watching out for them.

1.3 A Brief Timeline of Government-University Relations

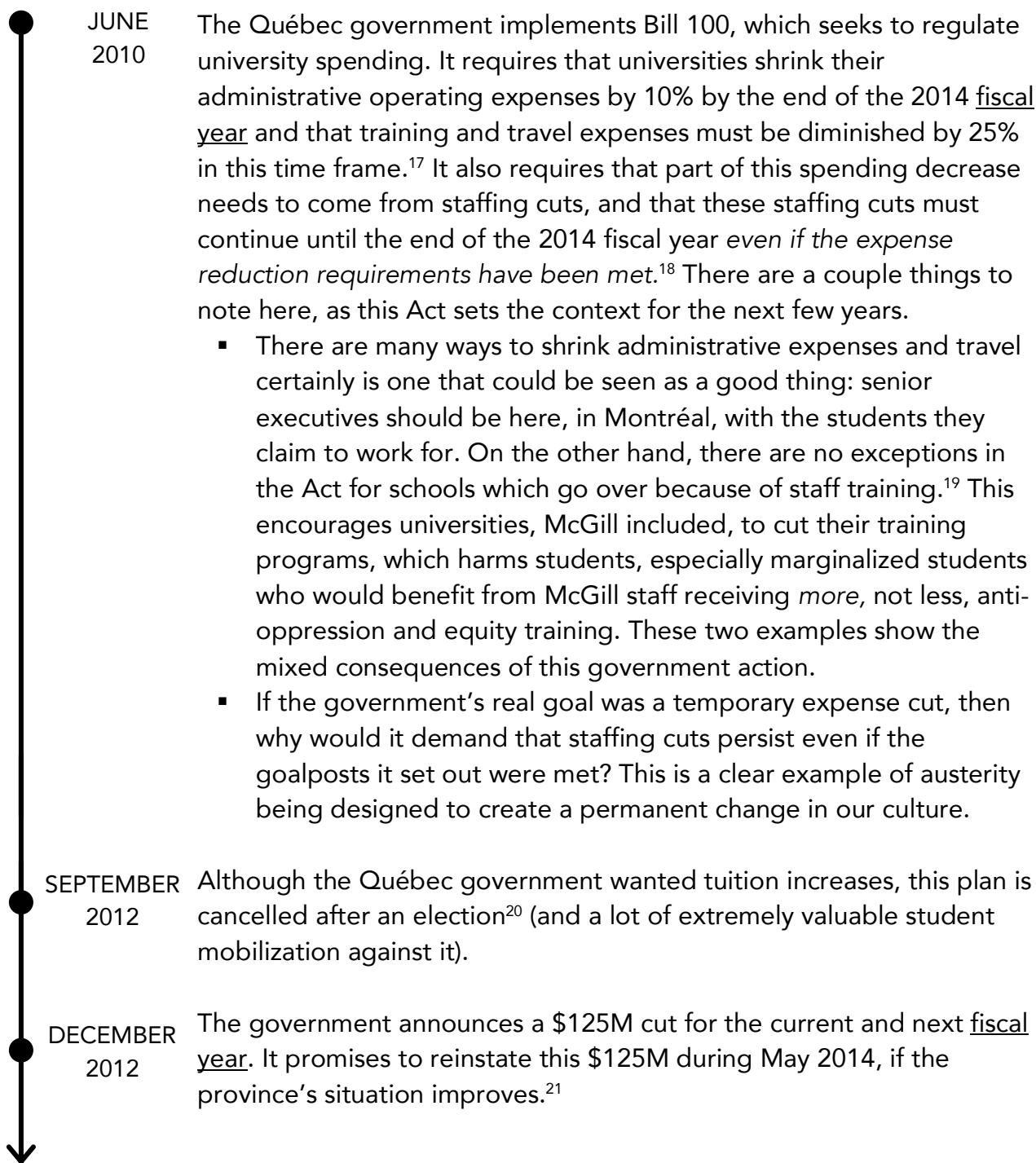
McGill is a public university. Because of this, it receives grants from the Québec government, and sometimes these grants are cut. Of course, McGill isn't a victim in the narrative of austerity: cuts are one thing, but the ways it deals with cuts are often unacceptable (McGill's role in austerity will be the focus of the next section). That being said, this section outlines some key dates in the long timeline of government actions that affect McGill. Some of these are negative and others are more positive.

¹³ Philippe Hurteau, Nesrine Bessaïh, Elisabeth Gibeau, *10 Billion Solutions*, Montréal: Coalition against the tariffication and privatization of public services, 2015, 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.



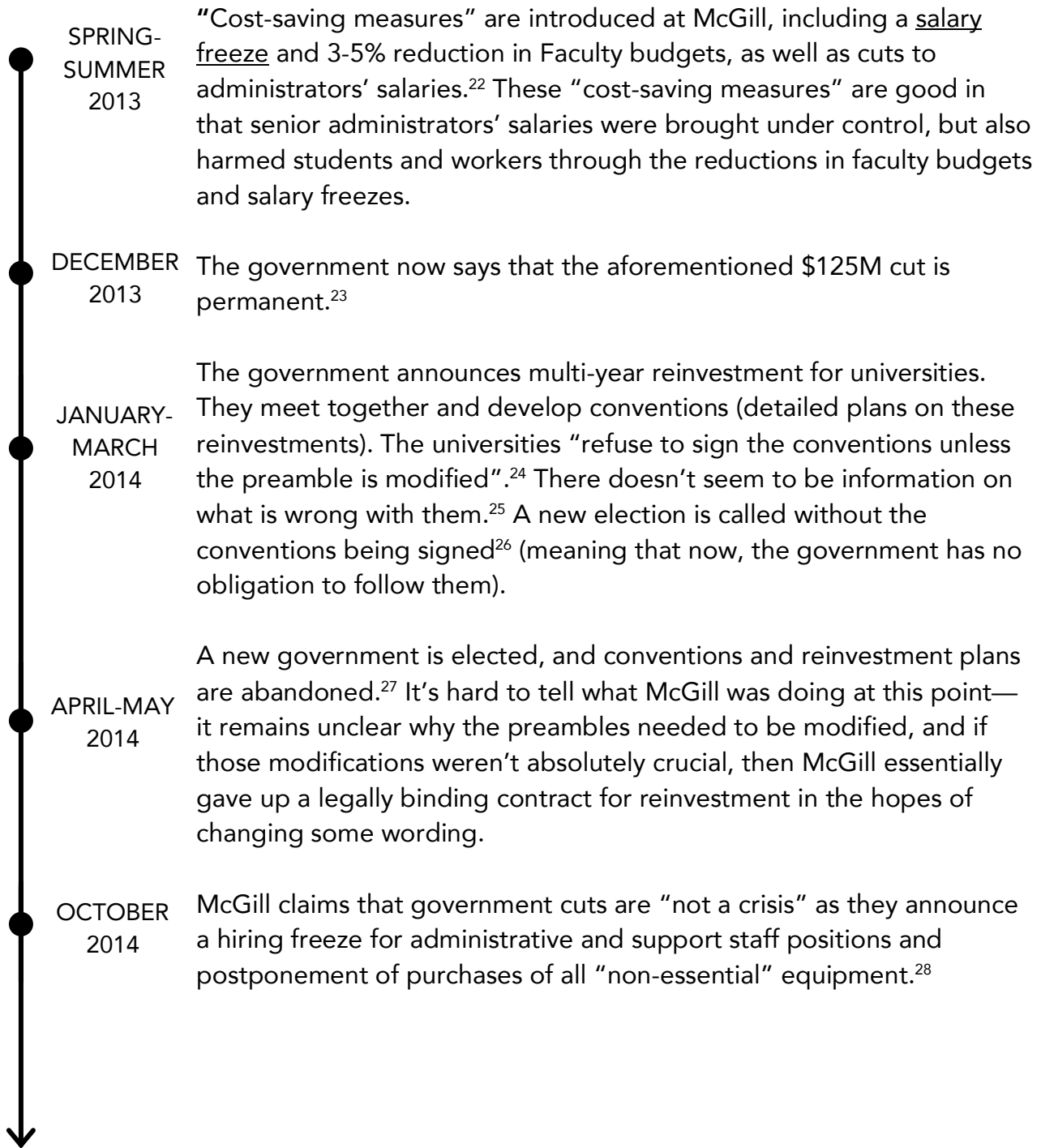
¹⁷ Québec, National Assembly. “An Act to implement certain provisions of the Budget Speech of 30 March 2010, reduce the debt and return to a balanced budget in 2013-2014.” Bill 100, 39th Legislature, 1st session, 2010, pg. 9.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2016*, Montréal: McGill University, 2015. Accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/budget-book/budget-book-archive>, 156.

²¹ Ibid.



²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 157.

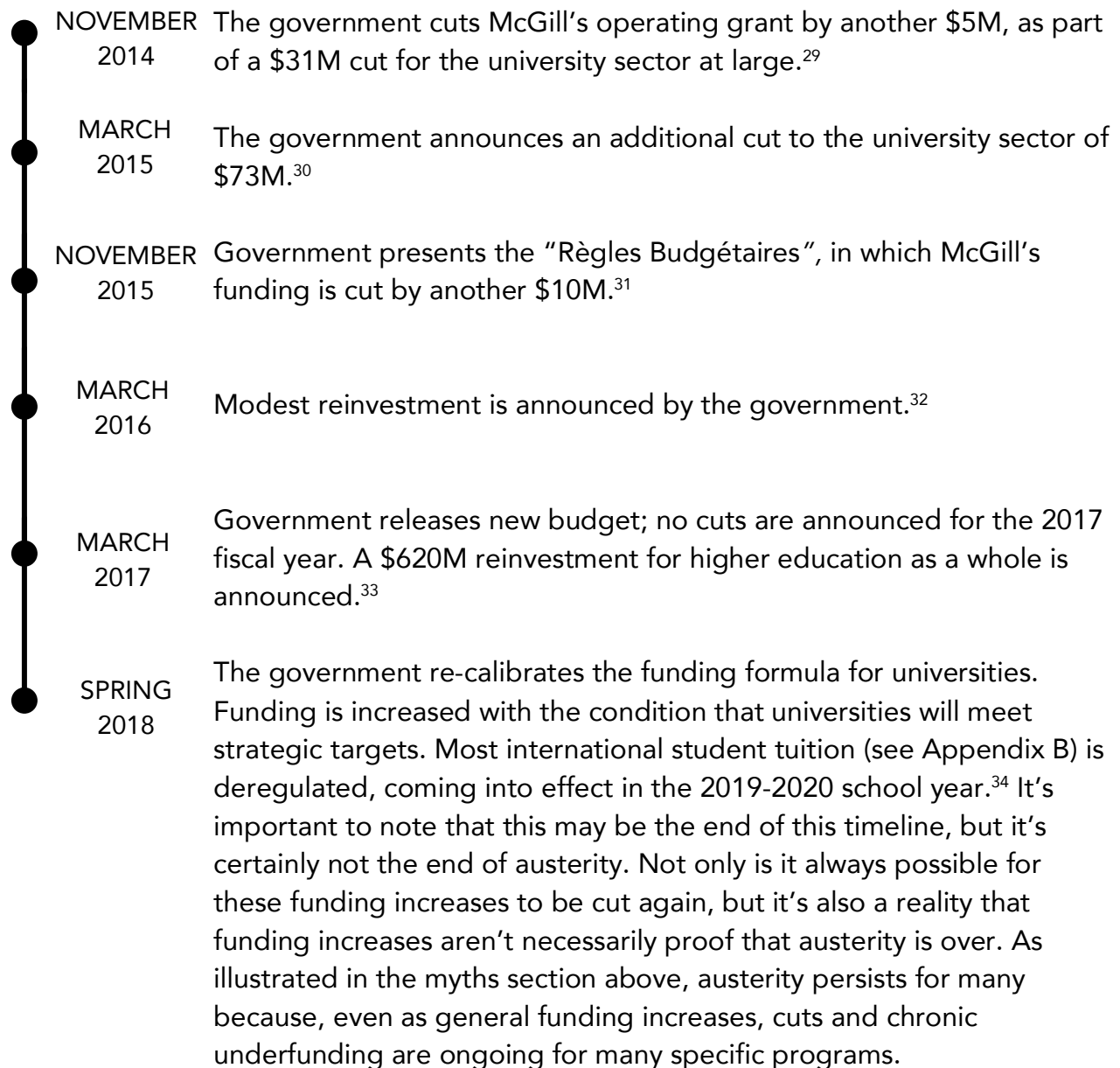
²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ While outside the scope of this report and not within the limits of this research, this should continue to be investigated because it is questionable behaviour.

²⁶ Ibid., 157.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.



²⁹ Ibid., 158.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2017*, Montréal: McGill University, 2016. Accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/budget-book/budget-book-archive>, 20.

³² Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2016*, Montréal: McGill University, 2015. Accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/budget-book/budget-book-archive>, 21.

³³ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2018*, Montréal: McGill University, 2017. Accessed June 30, 2018, https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/files/budget/budget_book_fy2018_final_20170905.pdf, 10.

³⁴ Jean-François Venne, "Major changes to the funding formula for Québec universities," *University Affairs*, June 19, 2018, www.universityaffairs.ca/news/news-article/major-changes-to-the-funding-formula-for-Québec-universities/.

Overall, the government has a long history of cutting funding for universities on the whole and McGill specifically. While it's important to recognize McGill's faults when it comes to financial management, it's also crucial to point out how the government has continuously cut the budget, sometimes even claiming it is reinvesting and then not following through. This would make it hard for anyone (McGill included) to manage their accounts.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to outline a broad definition of austerity, debunk some common myths, and present a timeline of government financial measures that have affected McGill. Despite being called the "basics" of austerity, there is nothing really basic about the problems that austerity creates. These are serious issues that some people study for their whole life.

The aim of this chapter was to introduce the general ideas behind austerity, especially in terms of the provincial government's role. The following chapters will take two different approaches: chapter 2 will look at McGill specifically, and chapter 3 will then zoom out and look at broader concerns and systems.

CHAPTER 2: THE MCGILL CONTEXT

2.1 What does austerity look like at McGill?

At McGill, provincial austerity measures affect us because we're a public university. So, when the government cuts education funding, that means cuts to the grants that McGill gets from them. On the provincial level, public services in general are likely to be cut: healthcare and education are some of the most common things affected. For example, the Québec university system at large is in a state of chronic underfunding. In McGill's budget books they compare the finances of Québec, Ontario, Alberta and BC to show that if McGill were located in these other provinces, given its size, it would be receiving tens—if not hundreds—of millions more dollars of funding every year.³⁵

That being said, just because the government has cut money from McGill doesn't make the administration completely innocent. What McGill decides to do under these circumstances *is* within its control, and what we've seen in recent years is that *responses* to government cuts and inadequate spending have not been responsible.

Some common areas that are affected are labour, student life, and academics. What we find within all of these contexts is that while students on the whole are negatively affected, marginalized students are disproportionately so.

Labour

There are many different ways that employers can make work cheaper. Because of basic workers' rights and minimum wage laws, those in power have to be more creative with their strategies. A few of these strategies will be touched on here: job casualization, hiring and salary cuts and freezes, the inappropriate use of hourly and salary pay, volunteering, internships, and miscellaneous forms of unpaid labour. All of these things have something in common: they save McGill money at the expense of student and worker wellbeing.

Job casualization entails many different tactics used to devalue labour, especially in low-paying jobs, and is often used as a cost-saving measure. Here are some ways McGill partakes in job casualization:

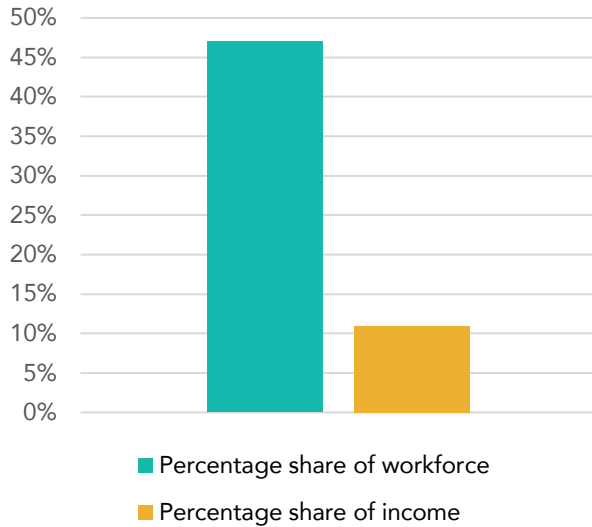
³⁵ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2017*, Montréal: McGill University, 2016. Accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/budget-book/budget-book-archive>, 87.

- **Replacing professional**, full-time staff with multiple untrained, minimum-wage part-time staff. On the books, each of these workers is “casual” and isn’t entitled to benefits.
- Creating **multiple temporary positions** instead of one secure position so that incoming staff consistently have to get contracts renewed. This means that if your contract isn’t renewed, you’re out of a job. Technically, it isn’t the same as getting fired so you may not be entitled to severance pay or even a reason for your being terminated.
- Listing certain jobs as “casual” and “unprofessional” which in reality require serious training and expertise. The people in these jobs are working a **professional role without the perks** of benefits and higher wages.
 - On the other hand, McGill can move people from unionized, casual position up into “professional” roles but keep them at the lower end of those. This means these people no longer have a union because they’re in a “managerial” role but in reality, are still getting paid almost the same amount and only have marginally more benefits. On paper this looks good: more people moving up. In reality, it increases worker precarity. Both of these strategies work to **devalue labour and manipulate workers**.
- Giving **no guaranteed minimum** hours of work in contracts, so that workers can’t plan their life knowing what their income will be.

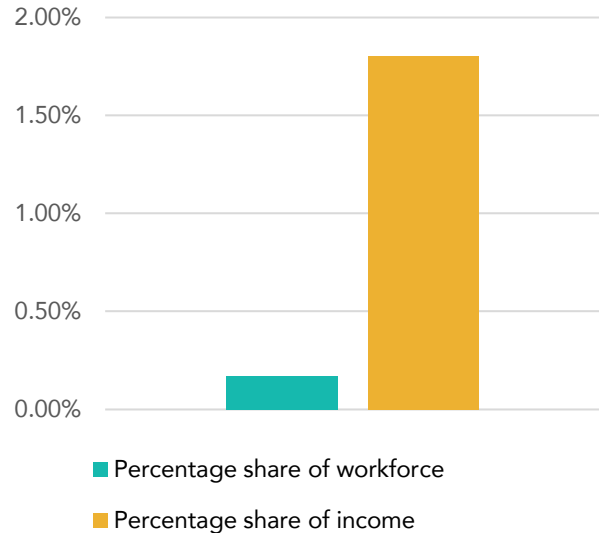
Casual workers are the powerhouse of McGill and yet are consistently short-changed. For example, for the 2017 fiscal year there were 808 casual employees in the office of the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning), which represented almost half of that entire workforce. Despite this, they collectively earned only 11% of the income in that office. Meanwhile, the 3 executives, representing 0.17% of workers, earned almost 2% of the income. If this wealth were distributed equally, then each 1% of the workforce population would be earning 1% of the total income. Instead, McGill devalues casualized labour and a vast wealth gap exists within its offices.

The following two graphs illustrate the wealth inequalities within the department. Note the different scales on each one. They had to be put into different graphs because the percentage of executives is so small that when plotted next to the huge number of casual employees, it became invisible on the chart.

Casual employees' share of workforce and income



Executives' share of workforce and income



Job casualization affects women and people of colour disproportionately, because women and people of colour (especially women of colour) are working the majority of casualized jobs.³⁶ Outside of these demographics, job casualization means lower-paying and more precarious jobs with less benefits, *for everyone*.

Cuts and freezes are often implemented in order to cut costs. For example, during the 2014 fiscal year McGill created a salary freeze, a hiring freeze, and a Voluntary Retirement Plan. Throughout the 2015 fiscal year it also incentivized people to retire early and implemented a 3-for-4 replacement model: for every 4 tenure-track staff to leave, only 3 would be hired as replacements.³⁷ It should be noted that, like many austerity measures, this was a mix of McGill's and the government's fault. The government implemented Bill 100, which mandated staffing cuts.³⁸ McGill should have fought back harder, before the law was passed, but apparently didn't do that.

³⁶ Saima Desai, "15 and Fair fights for living wage at McGill," *McGill Daily*, January 11, 2016, <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2016/01/15-and-fair-fights-for-living-wage-at-mcgill/>.

³⁷ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2015*, Montréal: McGill University, 2014. Accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/budget-book/budget-book-archive>, 27.

³⁸ Québec, National Assembly. "An Act to implement certain provisions of the Budget Speech of 30 March 2010, reduce the debt and return to a balanced budget in 2013-2014." Bill 100, 39th Legislature, 1st session, 2010, pg. 2, 9.

Hourly and salary pay are two different methods of paying employees, but when used inappropriately can simultaneously hurt workers and save money for McGill. This can be illustrated through 2 scenarios.

Scenario 1: You're an international student who, according to their work visa, can only work 20 hours a week. Your job is also technically 20 hours a week (according to your contract), but often goes over that because your workplace is understaffed. When you work more than 20 hours you're forced to choose between listing those and, if audited by the government, facing penalties, or simply not counting those hours and therefore doing unpaid work. In this case, your hourly pay clearly isn't working because it results in taking legal risks or doing unpaid labour. Your boss can take advantage of this, getting you to work over your hours without having to pay for it. In this case, it would make more sense to pay someone with weekly salary that, when spread across the actual number of hours, would meet their theoretical wage. This way they are still getting paid for work but don't have to risk getting into legal trouble.

Scenario 2: You're a student working a non-unionized job in a departmental office, doing research. The position is a semester long and you have a concrete task, for example, writing a report. The people who hired you didn't know how long it would take you, but your salary is \$1000 for the semester. By the time you finish the report, though, you've spent 125 hours on it. This \$1000 salary spreads out to \$8/hour, which is far below minimum wage. In this case, salary pay isn't fair: it would have been more ethical to pay you by hour, but again, this would cost more.

Both of these scenarios illustrate that McGill can cut labour costs by using inappropriate payment methods for its staff. This isn't always done intentionally, but like austerity has the same effects as if it were. In these cases, McGill saves money at the expense of its workers.

These two scenarios, like job casualization above, also illustrate that precarity plays a role in working conditions. Those in precarious positions, such as racialized folks, women of colour, disabled people, trans and non-binary folks, and low-income people are most likely already marginalized within the workplace, so they are not only working these low-paying jobs in the first place but may have the most to lose if they decide to speak up and demand more fair pay. While issues surrounding work and wages affect everyone, it's important to recognize that these already marginalized folks are affected the most.

Moving away from paid and precarious labour, volunteering, internships, and general unpaid labour also cut costs for McGill at the expense of their students, especially those who are already marginalized.

Volunteering is something McGill markets to students as a “resume-booster” and a great opportunity. It counts on students who lack experience and want to impress people with power at McGill, who will then do free labour. For example, during Campaign McGill, despite raking in over a billion dollars of donations, McGill *still* relied on volunteer (read: unpaid) labour.³⁹ This isn’t unique to McGill but is also something our various student associations rely on as well. For example, many faculty associations rely on students working for free, or even paying to work, for various Froshes at McGill.

Internships relate to volunteering in that they’re often not paid. Also like volunteering, they’re seen as a great opportunity. Internships usually occur outside of McGill, and many may be at non-profit or grassroots organizations that realistically can’t afford to pay their interns. Rather than have students unable to take these unpaid internships and pass up on great experience, McGill should be funding all of them, paying all students real wages for every hour of work they do. This is especially pertinent for internships which may be required or highly recommended for academic programs, taken for class credit: these, too, should be paid so that they are accessible to all students.

The effects of both volunteering and unpaid internships, like labour casualization, also affect marginalized folks the most, especially those from low-income backgrounds. For students who rely on working to pay for their degree, volunteering and unpaid internships are not an option. When these things aren’t compensated, it means that low-income people are excluded from opportunities that could boost their resume and give them experience. That’s just plain classist.

What’s more, while McGill might encourage low-income students to, for example, apply for internships in the hopes they get funding, funding usually isn’t guaranteed. For example, through the Arts Internship Office (AIO), you might not know if you’re being funded until after you have to accept the internship. And, even if you do get funded, the maximum amount is usually only \$2000-3000, which isn’t nearly as much as you’d be getting paid for working hourly. The funding also doesn’t arrive in your bank account until mid-July, after you’d already started interning. Simultaneously, the

³⁹ “Campaign McGill: Final Report,” McGill University, accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/campaign/by-the-numbers>.

AIO doesn't allow taking on part-time work during an internship so you can "be at your best" for your host organization.⁴⁰ These are all parts of the internship process that make it completely inaccessible for many low-income students.

Unpaid labour in general is an issue at McGill, even outside of volunteering and internships, especially when it comes to students actually trying to make McGill a better place. McGill conducts many surveys about its performance, seeking input from students. However, McGill almost always refuses to pay the people who come to focus groups, fill out surveys, and send in comments, often not even providing non-monetary compensation. This demonstrates a blatant disregard for the value of students to the university and jeopardizes the feedback process because the only students who can participate in these feedback-focused activities are wealthy enough to do hours of labour for free. One example of this is the recent Task Force on Respect and Inclusion. The methodology for their report relied completely on unpaid student labour, often at inconvenient times. It would be inaccurate to say that the report garnered a wide variety of participants and obtained as much feedback as it could have because in relying on unpaid labour it effectively barred a large portion of students from participating.

Besides surveys and focus groups, a lot of activism exists at McGill that has been unpaid until very recently. Some of this falls under student groups: for example, the Black Students' Network only getting funding from SSMU very recently. Additionally, students have given hundreds of hours of unpaid labour along the way to getting their labour paid. One example is Rez Project, which relied entirely on volunteer labour until very recently when it hired 2 coordinators; however, the university still has yet to pay the workshop facilitators. Floor Fellows also weren't paid until only a few years ago, when they successfully campaigned to be unionized. Although they are now, the activism that was done in order to unionize was all unpaid.

Labour casualization, unfair pay, and unpaid labour are all ways that McGill is able to reject student and worker needs while still benefiting from having them. Labour is expensive, and rightfully so. However, at McGill, government cuts are often translated into cuts to labour, which is unacceptable.

⁴⁰ "University-Related Internship Activity Internship Behaviour Form," McGill University Arts Internship Office, accessed June 30, 2018, https://www.mcgill.ca/arts-internships/files/arts-internships/internship_behaviour_form_2018_fillable.pdf.

Student life

Austerity affects student life in a million different ways, and this section will outline just a couple. Student services, groups, and programming are some of the first things that tend to get cut in financially difficult times, and even outside of these situations are often chronically underfunded.

Student services

An example: Mental Health Services continually fails to provide support for students because of long wait times and infrequent availability. In recent years McGill has tried to cut their costs further by promoting online therapy (concerningly supported by SSMU) instead of providing students with the resources they demand. The Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) has reformed mental health services to be a “stepped care” model which cuts staffing costs at the expense of students—if McGill decides you don’t “need” a therapist, it forces you to try online therapy or group therapy first before letting you use up in-person resources. While this might save McGill money, it hurts students.

Another example: SEDE, the Social Equity and Diversity Education Office, has been chronically underfunded for years. While not a “student service” in the strictest sense, SEDE provides professors and staff with crucial training, as well as provides programming for students, that in turn make university life more bearable for students. In this sense, the chronic underfunding of SEDE means a demonstrated disregard for the safety of students on campus.

Student groups

Student groups run on extremely limited capacity. They often have very little financial support, either from McGill or SSMU. Meanwhile, the activities they do are often disrespected by McGill and SSMU, making it even harder for them to function. Overall, almost all student groups on campus rely on thousands of hours of unpaid student labour every year, even as they meet student needs where McGill falls through. Take some of the most vital services offered by students, for students, through SACOMSS. For the longest time McGill didn’t have anything similar despite the needs of its students; SACOMSS was filling a gap that McGill simply ignored. Despite the critical nature of SACOMSS’ work, many of its students go unpaid because the organization isn’t given enough funding.

Events and programming

Events and programming are continually under- and de- funded at McGill and suffer because of this. One example of this is Black History Month. McGill also isn’t the only culprit of this: SSMU themselves did it during the 2017-2018 school year through

cutting their funding for Culture Shock, a program that has always been at least partially funded by them. These events and programming series are crucial to life on campus.

Marginalization and student life

There is a pattern to all the examples highlighted above: the consequences of underfunding and cutting fall mainly on marginalized students. Mental Health Services continually fails those with a wide range of mental illness. It also fails students of colour in particular through a lack of training. Despite having a “pride team” which consists of therapists with extra training to support those with LGBTQ+ identities (not a great solution to the problem of homophobia, but it could be a start), Mental Health Services has no such department for racialized students. This means that its therapists, while good-intentioned, are not knowledgeable in approaching issues from a perspective that is racially aware and addresses the specific mental health issues caused by systemic racism.

Likewise, while SEDE remains underfunded, McGill’s staff have less equity training and this in turn hurts marginalized students the most. Professors need *more* training, not less, to support students.

Where McGill has failed to provide support, student-led services step in, like SACOMSS. SACOMSS supports survivors of sexual assault, while other services and community networks such as the Black Students’ Network, Queer McGill, the Union for Gender Empowerment, and countless others, provide similar resources for the groups they aim to support. Again, the underfunding of student-led services often means the underfunding of services for marginalized students.

Finally, it’s no coincidence that two of the events suffering the most from underfunding or cuts altogether relate directly to issues concerning anti-racism on campus. Black History Month and Culture Shock both focus on the histories, stories, and experiences of racialized folks, and the underfunding and cutting of these events demonstrate the fact that racism and the strategies to combat it are not taken seriously by McGill nor by SSMU.

Overall, cuts and underfunding in the area of student life make it more difficult for students to survive on campus. This disproportionately affects marginalized students such as those who are racialized, trans, queer, disabled, and poor (among others). The way we fund (or don’t fund) important services and activities for these demographics says a lot about what we, as a campus, actually think about these students. Right now,

judging by the current financial behaviour, McGill and SSMU couldn't give less of a shit about marginalized students. That's not acceptable.

Academics

Like both labour and student life, academics at McGill are affected in various ways by austerity. Some examples include class cuts, shrinking professor populations, tuition deregulation, limited funding for research, a lack of focus on transferable skills, awards and scholarships that maintain the status quo, and the deteriorating status of academic and research facilities.

Class cuts

In 2013, McGill cut 100 Arts classes under the guise of helping students.⁴¹ This is far from the truth; cutting low-enrolment classes is clearly about making class sizes larger and therefore saving money. Cutting small classes also ignores why some classes are smaller in the first place: because they engage with critical ideas, often around race and colonialism, that need to be taught in smaller, more personal settings.⁴² While the action itself of cutting classes is simply about money, the effects of it are that students studying within the areas of anti-oppression and social justice are often the ones left behind.

Professors

Content note: this passage contains mention of sexual violence at McGill

McGill's actions towards professors and teaching assistants marks an intersection of labour and academics. Teaching staff who aren't on tenure rely on renewing contracts with McGill, which isn't guaranteed. Some staff are put in the position where they must teach with little preparation, because of the precarity of their contract. This, in turn, has effects on students, whose classes suffer.

While staff precarity has negative effects on students' academics, too much power in the hands of teaching staff does as well. For example, tenured professors who commit sexual violence against students can, in practice, often dodge the kinds of accountability measures that non-tenured or administrative staff would face. As McGill refuses to deal with these actions, the safety of the classroom is jeopardized.

⁴¹ Juan Velasquez-Buritica, "AUS holds Town Hall on elimination of 100 Arts classes," *McGill Daily*, January 24, 2013, <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2013/01/aus-holds-town-hall-on-elimination-of-100-arts-classes/>.

⁴² Eliyahu Freedman, "Eurocentrism and class cuts," *McGill Daily*, January 31, 2012, <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2013/01/eurocentrism-and-class-cuts/>.

Both these cases illustrate that the way McGill treats its course instructors has serious consequences on academic life. Both precarity as well as an overload of power threaten students' wellbeing.

Tuition

Deregulated tuition has become a hot topic in recent years. Deregulation essentially means that McGill can charge whatever it wants, instead of the rate being controlled by the government. More details about tuition break downs are in Appendix B. McGill has continuously advocated for the deregulation of all international tuition⁴³, finally achieving this goal in May 2018.⁴⁴ Prior to this, there were certain disciplines for which international tuition was deregulated. McGill is interested in money, and deregulating tuition allows it to collect enormous sums from international students.

Even besides deregulated tuition, the government and McGill have consistently raised all tuition in real terms. As of March 2016, tuition fees had risen 162% in real terms since 1990.⁴⁵

Overall, tuition rates continue to grow, whether or not they're deregulated. This creates barriers for low-income students by placing undue financial hardship on them.

Research

Funding for research at many universities is unevenly spread out across the disciplines. In general, more research grants are given to projects which will benefit or are applicable to the private sector.⁴⁶

At McGill, reinvestment doesn't mean actual reinvestment for everyone, as discussed in the section on myths. For example, even as "reinvestment" happens, it often benefits capitalist innovation the most. For example, for the 2015 fiscal year, McGill received funding from the Canada Foundation for Innovation John R. Evans Leaders

⁴³ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2015*, Montréal: McGill University, 2014. Accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/budget-book/budget-book-archive>, 25.

⁴⁴ Arno Pedram, "Québec just sold out its international students," *McGill Daily*, May 23, 2018, <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2018/05/Québec-just-sold-out-its-international-students/>.

⁴⁵ "Budget 2016: The Association for the Voice of Education in Québec Denounces the Leitaio Budget's Content," Association for the Voice of Education in Québec, March 17, 2016, <https://aveq-nous.ca/en/2016/03/17/budget-2016-the-association-for-the-voice-of-education-in-Québec-denounces-the-leitao-budgets-content/>.

⁴⁶ Samuel-Élie Lesage and Philippe Hurteau, *L'innovation en recherche universitaire*, Montréal: Institut de recherche et d'informations socioéconomiques, 2016. Accessed June 30, 2018, <https://iris-recherche.qc.ca/publications/recherche-universitaire>, 5.

Fund (JELF) but this is for “research equipment and related laboratory renovations for newly recruited faculty”.⁴⁷

Research funding is extremely limited at McGill, especially when it comes to projects that aren't infrastructure-related or beneficial for the private sector. This relates to the myth about austerity being permanent: while cuts are lifted, and reinvestment is announced, this only applies to certain researchers.

Transferable skills

At McGill, internship, co-op and mentorship programs remain underfunded. Instead of trying to prepare students for life after their degree, McGill apparently sees this type of spending as useless and refuses to improve these areas. Because these programs lack funding, the only people who can afford to participate in them are wealthy enough to take on often unpaid internships and placements.

Awards and scholarships

McGill persists in defining “excellence” as the status quo. Many of its awards are dedicated to excellence within this narrow box, which promotes the wellbeing only of students who are prepared to partake in activities McGill deems admirable. The lack of funding provided for alternative definitions of excellence demonstrates that McGill isn't willing to spend money on students unless those students conform.

Academic and research facilities

“Deferred maintenance” is a term thrown around a lot at McGill to excuse buildings that are falling apart and often dangerous. This is due to actions both on the government and university side. McGill has experienced a reduction in the grant it gets from the government to do capital renovations and improvements because of the flawed method the government calculates its funding. Every year the government gives out a bunch of money to the university sector and divvies it up between the universities. However, one of the ways of assessing need is by looking at age of the buildings. Building age is capped at 50 years old, meaning that for this needs assessment a 50-year-old building is counted as the same as a 200-year-old building. This affects McGill because many of its buildings have already hit the 50-year mark and although they continue to increase in age and decline in safety and functionality, the needs assessment done by the province doesn't take this into account.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2015*, Montréal: McGill University, 2014. Accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/budget-book/budget-book-archive>, 22.

⁴⁸ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2018*, Montréal: McGill University, 2017. Accessed June 30, 2018, https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/files/budget/budget_book_fy2018_final_20170905.pdf, 77-78.

That being said, McGill can't play the victim card here. Its capital grant might be reduced, but it should still prioritize working buildings and use funds from elsewhere in its operating budget. Even when notified by students and workers, McGill often refuses to do necessary repairs or delays them for far too long. This puts both students and workers at risk and means that later, when the problems do explode, they are far more inefficient to get fixed.

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While these are all areas affected by austerity, austerity does have many more consequences. What's more, some of the effects described here are hard to pin down. It's difficult to assess whether certain cuts are really a symptom of austerity or whether it's just the way that McGill functions. In general, what we can tell from the limited information we have is that austerity, defined as cuts as well as insufficient funding, hurts various parts of the university.

It's important to note that while austerity hurts everyone, it hurts different people in different ways. All of the issues outlined above harm low-income student disproportionately. As well, many of these problems are magnified for students of colour: women and people of colour work the majority of casualized jobs, the funding for anti-racism and anti-colonial programs and campaigns is often the first to be cut, and classes and academic opportunities that deal with the history of colonialism at McGill are often thrown under the bus. Marginalized students in general might have the hardest time surviving at McGill, and even when they do speak up the things that benefit them the most are often discarded the first.

Money doesn't operate in a vacuum; the harsh consequences for marginalized students at McGill are no coincidence. Within a systemically racist, ableist, colonial, queer- and transphobic, sexist, and patriarchal society, spending and cutting of funds follow these pathways of oppression.

2.3 Student responses to austerity

Students have not been silent when it comes to austerity. They as well as many members of the Montréal community have been part of extremely important activism that has had real consequences for our present day. Two of the arguably most important events in recent history are the Maple Spring and Printemps 2015. However, many more student campaigns and movements exist such as the \$15 and Fairness campaign

in Ontario, the unionization of Floor Fellows at McGill (and McGill's unions⁴⁹ in general), and McGill's student group "McGill Against Austerity", which has been campaigning against austerity for years, although hasn't been very active recently.

Maple Spring (2012)

The Maple Spring started with the announcement of tuition hikes that brought thousands of students and allies into the streets of Montréal. While originally just about Québec student tuition rates, for some the protests became about larger themes of free education and social equity. Because the protests ended up being somewhat about radical ideas such as free education, as well as because they raised consciousness for many students, Maple Spring is seen as an important event in the history of student activism in Québec.

Maple Spring was also the scene of actions by the government and McGill that aimed to restrict student freedoms. For example, many students saw a controversial emergency law that could be used to break down protests as an infringement on their rights.⁵⁰ Simultaneously, during the protests two floor fellows at McGill were fired for occupying part of the James Administration building.⁵¹

Printemps 2015

In the spring of 2015, many students as well as other members of the Montréal community took to the streets again to protest the state of Québec's budget and the province in general. As opposed to in 2012, the demands in 2015 were broader and had to do with austerity in general, not just tuition hikes.

Despite students' rights to freedom of speech, the Québec Education minister Francois Blais suggested that universities suspend politically active students.⁵² Like 2012, this illustrates concerning beliefs from those in power about civil rights.

These are just two examples of powerful activism by students and others in Montréal. Both of them illustrate the willingness of Montréalers to stand up against austerity, but

⁴⁹ You can find a list of McGill's unions and links to their websites here: <http://www.amusemcgill.org/about/unions-at-mcgill/>

⁵⁰ Morgan Lowrie, "As 'Maple Spring' marks five years, activists divided on legacy of Québec student protests," *Toronto Star*, March 26, 2017, <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2017/03/26/as-maple-spring-marks-five-years-activists-divided-on-legacy-of-Québec-student-protests.html>.

⁵¹ Jessica Lukawiecki, "Controversy over floor fellow dismissals," *McGill Daily*, March 10, 2012, <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2012/03/controversy-over-floor-fellow-dismissals/>.

⁵² Benjamin Shingler, "Québec student protests: What you need to know," *CBC News*, April 2, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/Montréal/Québec-student-protests-what-you-need-to-know-1.3018153>.

also the risks that are taken to do this; in both cases, the administration or the government have demonstrated their own willingness to crack down on political activity.

2.3 Debunking McGill's Bullshit

Like myths about austerity in general, there are quite a few McGill-specific myths that need to be addressed. This section will outline 3 of them, while many more exist.

Myth 1: We're Victims of Austerity™

Although McGill sometimes tries to pass itself off as the victim of austerity, this idea falls short. Although McGill *is* affected by government cuts, the ways it handles these are often profitable. For example, McGill has been keen on deregulating tuition to make up for government cuts, which will allow it to make even more money. Despite what it tells its students, administrators agree among themselves that this is a good thing.⁵³

Administrators have also let a lot of information slip that would suggest that they themselves don't view McGill as a victim, even if it's what they tell the students. McGill has consistently refused to denounce the cuts⁵⁴ or admit that austerity affects the university in the present day since they believe austerity is "a thing of the past".⁵⁵ If even the administration doesn't think McGill is a victim, why should we?

McGill isn't a victim—its students are. McGill makes money off of the methods they use to compensate for governmental cuts, and they themselves admit this.

Myth 2: We Don't Have a Choice™

This myth goes hand in hand with the first one. The argument goes like this: "we're victims of austerity and therefore we don't have a choice about what we spend on". This argument doesn't make sense: McGill runs on millions of dollars and *always* has a choice about what to spend on.

⁵³ "Question Regarding McGill's Stance on the Deregulation of International Tuition Fees," McGill University Senate, published January 21, 2015, accessed June 30, 2018, http://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/2._question_regarding_international_tuition_with_response.pdf.

⁵⁴ "Neither crisis mode nor complacency," *McGill Reporter*, November 18, 2014, <http://publications.mcgill.ca/reporter/2014/11/neither-crisis-mode-nor-complacency/>.

⁵⁵ Linda Webb, email message to author, 26 April 2018.

Again, while the government's cuts affect McGill, what it *does* in these situations can be criticized. Here are 3 choices McGill has made in the past that probably weren't the best.

1. In 2014, McGill decided not to do a "phased approach" in responding to the government cuts, instead cutting its own costs dramatically, right away.⁵⁶ While this benefits them as a corporation because it gets the cuts out of the way, it's a choice that makes the cuts more dramatic. Instead of taking the time to cut marginally year by year, which still wouldn't have been great, it forced the consequences of those cuts to appear right away **without time to plan any coping strategies**.
2. After Bill 100 was passed, which was designed to force universities to cut their costs, McGill decided to **cut 100 Arts courses** (discussed in section 2.1). While this did cut expenses, it wasn't the only option for McGill and wasn't one of the requirements in the law—this was a choice it made to the detriment of academic life.
3. McGill has consistently used deferred maintenance to save money. It pushes off renovations and repairs that aren't deemed to be necessary at the time. However, when they do become necessary, the damage is so far gone that it ends up **costing more money as well as student and worker safety**. Again, this is a choice it has made to save money, but it could have found another way to save those funds.

Myth 3: The Administration Works in the Students' Best Interests™

This myth extends beyond austerity and finances to the climate and culture on McGill's campuses. It's very easy for administrators to say this, but when it comes to McGill's official documentation, there's very little evidence of this being true.

It becomes clear when speaking to administrators one on one who they think students are. They view their students as clients, not participants in the community they're "trying" to create. And their view of their client is that they desire professional development workshops and state-of-the-art campus buildings. Some students would agree with these priorities, but there are many more who have different needs. If a student can barely attend class because they have to hold down multiple part-time jobs to pay for tuition, their number one priority might not be taking a workshop on professional development. Similarly, if a student uses a wheelchair and can already barely get into any buildings on campus, what good does it do to make those

⁵⁶ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2015*, Montréal: McGill University, 2014. Accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/budget-book/budget-book-archive>, 26.

buildings look pretty? The image of “student” in administrators’ minds reflect a small portion of the population and marginalized students are left out of that image altogether, which makes it impossible for the administration to work in their interests.

On paper, McGill spends far more time in its budget books and official documents talking about how it can compete internationally than addressing student concerns. While it used to outline specific goals for each faculty and administrative unit in its budget books, it stopped doing that a few years ago, first replacing these with generic overviews of the departments and then deleting this information altogether. This displays a lack of transparency and an unwillingness to put specific and realistic goals into action, modelled off student needs. Even when it does outline goals in some of its official documents, these are so vague that they can’t hold anyone accountable. For example, in the past they’ve listed one of their goals as “expanding opportunities for internships and UG research”⁵⁷, but haven’t included any details that would force them to stay in line with this.

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The myths McGill promotes to justify its behaviour are unacceptable and just plain false. In order to mobilize against austerity, we have to mobilize against these myths as well as identify others and break them down.

Conclusion

Austerity has existed at McGill for a long time and will probably continue to exist. It is reflected through issues around labour, student life, and academics, among others. That being said, important student activism has been done to fight austerity, and sometimes this has been successful. Students must continue to actively combat the myths that McGill spreads about itself as well as identify new ones and tear them down.

⁵⁷ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2015*, Montréal: McGill University, 2014. Accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/budget-book/budget-book-archive>, 32.

CHAPTER 3: BROADER CONCERNS

While austerity is a big problem in Québec and at McGill, there are also questions outside of austerity that we should be asking and continue to ask even when (if) the current austerity crisis is resolved.

These concerns can be articulated in terms of responsibility, efficiency, and transparency.

3.1 Responsibility

Main questions to ask: Is our money being managed responsibly in general? Is McGill spending on and investing in the right things?

The answer: No. In 2015, McGill ended the fiscal year with more than \$66M in surplus. By 2017, McGill was over \$17M in debt. Somehow McGill managed to spend this much cash in this short amount of time. This is irresponsible behaviour on a quantitative level.

In terms of the *quality* of McGill's spending and investing patterns, the answer is still no. McGill doesn't spend on or invest in the "right things".

Spending on... students? Nope.

McGill doesn't listen to the needs of its students and this extends outside of austerity-specific scenarios. For example, in the Faculty of Science, McGill hires TAs for some courses but not others. When demand for a different distribution of TAs came up, McGill didn't bother listening. Students have become so used to this that they have now created systems for hiring their own TAs and even created a mental health support system within certain departments. While they are forced to create their own resources where McGill is supposed to provide them, McGill still demands money from various departments, who can't refuse because they create their own course packs and sets of notes to help students pass classes (the professors' materials apparently don't make sense), and these will be banned if they don't give money to McGill.

This is an example of irresponsible spending: students have voiced desire for money in different places, and McGill has not listened.

Investing in... a better future? Nah.⁵⁸

McGill is far from responsible investing. It has millions of dollars invested in financial corporations, the extractive industries of mining, oil and gas, the occupation of Palestine, and the military.

Here are some things that McGill invests in:

<i>Banks and financial institutions</i>	\$71,488,693.62
<i>Mining and extraction</i>	\$16,690,079.60
<i>Oil and gas</i>	\$40,833,530.11
<i>Occupation of Palestine</i>	\$1,400,416.93
<i>Military</i>	\$3,644,743.25
Total	\$134, 057, 463

Almost 1.5 million dollars are being invested in industries that harm people. McGill invests in human suffering, illegal occupations, the destruction of Indigenous land, and the poverty of the masses.

The “Fossil Fuel Free” (FFF) investment option: it’s a lie

McGill recently developed an option for donors, so they could “make sure” their donations weren’t going to be invested in fossil fuels. This is an important step but has serious limitations. Hexavest manages these funds for McGill, but their “fossil fuel free” index only excludes “companies owning fossil fuel reserves used for energy purposes” that can be proven.⁵⁹ This means that companies owning fossil fuel reserves for production or industrial purposes are still listed as “fossil fuel free”.⁶⁰ Clearly, this donation option is far from the end goal, even though McGill uses it in an attempt to show that they are socially responsible.

The FFF option also brings up the challenge of ethical investment within an oppressive system. It provides a halfway solution (i.e. it’s *kind of* more environmentally friendly than other options?) to a couple problems that need systemic change. Even while this option is better than others, it still doesn’t cover all corporations that rely on fossil fuels. Moreover, the fund is still managed by a large corporation that relies on advancing capitalist interests over the wellbeing of people.

⁵⁸ Taken from Divest McGill’s “Endowment Browser”, which, since writing, has been taken down.

⁵⁹ Sophie Leblanc, “Endowment 101,” (Powerpoint presentation, McGill Office of Investments, Montréal QC, September 2017).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

One of the most important aspects of fossil fuel extraction is the fact that it happens on stolen Indigenous land. While partially avoiding investing in this industry could be seen as a noble cause, the investors and McGill university remain on stolen Indigenous land, and donating to McGill at all, even if it's "fossil fuel free", still contributes to an ongoing occupation of Indigenous land as well as advancing a university built by enslaved people. Fossil fuel free comes nowhere close to being truly ethical or just. To market it as a solution is dishonest.

Overall, McGill's finances are not managed responsibly. They don't spend according to student priorities and they invest in extremely violent industries.

3.2 Efficiency

Main question to ask: When money is spent, are (valuable) results seen?

The answer: No.

Deferred maintenance: even "professionals" procrastinate

McGill often pushes off necessary infrastructure updates because it "just can't afford it", and this is called deferred maintenance. However, it's far more inefficient and disruptive later when the problems explode. We've seen this on campus in the SSMU building and other buildings on campus. If the problems had been dealt with right away, it would have been cheaper, and the construction timeline would have been shorter. Besides convenience and economy, pushing off updates jeopardizes safety. For example, several places on campus still have asbestos in them, putting students and workers at risk.

The Deputy Provost got \$80 million. What happened with it?

For the 2015 fiscal year, the Deputy Provost of Student Life and Learning (DPSLL, headed by Ollivier Dyens) was allocated about \$21M.⁶¹ The following year that number had dramatically increased, according to McGill's records: for the 2016 fiscal year the SLL office was allocated over \$100M.⁶² This amount remained fairly steady for the

⁶¹ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2015*, Montréal: McGill University, 2014. Accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/budget-book/budget-book-archive>, 41.

⁶² Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2016*, Montréal: McGill University, 2015. Accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/budget-book/budget-book-archive>, 43.

2017⁶³ as well as 2018⁶⁴ fiscal years. This increase is, at its core, a good thing: student services should be getting more money. But what exactly did the approximately \$80 million do? Throughout Dyens' entire term, including the period between 2015 and 2018 where funds increased dramatically, the SLL unit was failing miserably.⁶⁵ This example illustrates that an increase in cash doesn't necessarily mean improvements. At McGill, we see cash influxes all the time that don't result in valuable change, such as \$80M to the SLL office while it spiraled downwards.

3.3 Transparency

Main question to ask: Is it easy to see exactly how much and on what McGill is spending?

The answer: No. Students don't have access to a lot of information both in terms of money as well as the goals and objectives of the university.

Financial statements, budget books, and still... a lot of questions

McGill's two main sources of knowledge about money come from the financial statements and its Budget Book. Financial statements are an important tool for an organization, but they're more easily understood with an accounting degree and knowledge of all the technical language they employ—they're not very accessible to the general public or students. The Budget Book is released every year and is usually over 100 pages long. It focuses on broad ideological themes such as the Principal's goals for that year and general spending patterns. The most detailed it gets is a budget for each administration and faculty unit. It doesn't tell us what each dollar is going to; it just tells us that, for example, the Principal's office spent x amount on "non-salary expenses". That's not a lot of information when it comes to students wanting to know *what the money is doing*.

This lack of transparency means that students don't have access to detailed accounts of where money is going and what it does there. In general, students can find out what units' budgets are and a few subcategories, but no more details are accessible.

⁶³ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2017*, Montréal: McGill University, 2016. Accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/budget-book/budget-book-archive>, 41.

⁶⁴ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2018*, Montréal: McGill University, 2017. Accessed June 30, 2018, https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/files/budget/budget_book_fy2018_final_20170905.pdf, 29.

⁶⁵ "Ollivier Dyens has failed you," *McGill Daily*, October 3, 2017, <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2017/10/ollivier-dyens-has-failed-you/>.

Speaking corporate: flashy words, clean formatting, no substance

Besides the problems with its finances, McGill lacks basic transparency when it comes to ideological goals. The administration continuously crafts nifty catch phrases and reports but rarely explains the concrete, actionable steps it will take to achieve its “mission”. For example, in the 2016 Budget Book McGill reiterates ASAP 2012 (a strategic planning document) but doesn’t actually talk about how they will achieve the goals laid out. In the budget book for the 2017 fiscal year McGill again reiterates these and says that there are “key performance indicators” that “help monitor progress towards [their] strategic objectives”⁶⁶ but doesn’t tell us what these indicators consist of. It’s very easy to talk the talk, but McGill has not demonstrated that it is ready to follow-through which what it says. This makes it hard to trust the administration, even when they (might, sometimes, maybe eventually?) have good ideas.

3.4 An example

McGill lacks responsibility, efficiency, and transparency, even outside of its austere attitudes. But it would be, in itself, non-transparent to just explain these things in theory. Instead, let’s use a concrete example.

Scenario: McGill needs to improve its mental health services (sounds familiar...).

In terms of responsibility, we can look at *how much* money McGill is funneling into mental health services. Is it enough?

In terms of efficiency, we can look at *how that money gets translated into improvements*. If McGill is dropping huge amounts of cash but no improvements are being seen, then clearly that money isn’t being spent efficiently.

In terms of transparency, we can look at *how McGill is communicating with students* every step of the way. Are students easily able to identify exactly how much money is being spent here, and what it’s going towards? Are students also able to see the concrete steps McGill is taking toward achieving the vague goal of “better mental health services”? If not, then this process might be admirable, but is far from transparent.

These three pillars are crucial to a good financial system, especially in the current campus climate where the administration has lost a lot of trust from students.

Of course, different opinions will abound about whether the money McGill is spending is enough, and what counts as beneficial results, as well as how we define “easy

⁶⁶ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2017*, Montréal: McGill University, 2016. Accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/budget-book/budget-book-archive>, 31.

access” to information. For this report, these things are defined in the most extreme sense. Responsibility, efficiency, and transparency can have no doubts about them.

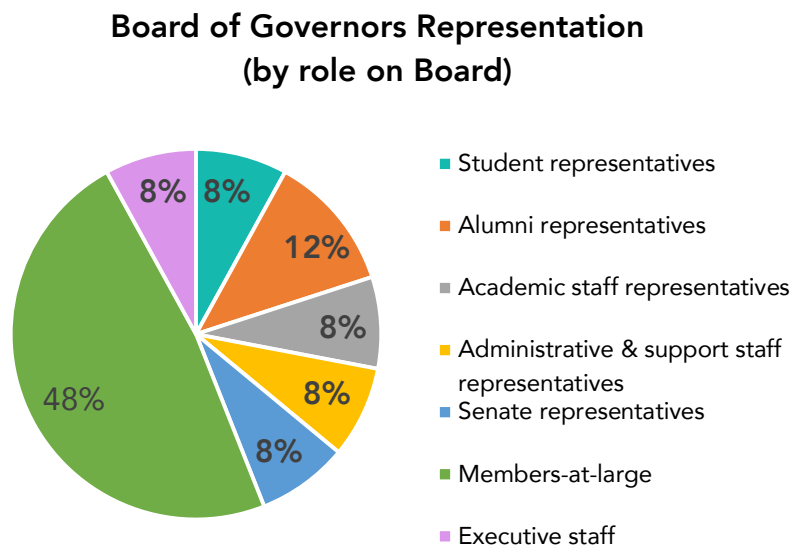
3.5 Governance structure

Austerity and irresponsible financial management don’t happen in a vacuum: they are affected by the culture and history of an institution. For this reason, it’s worth questioning McGill’s governance structure.

Within the capitalist system, it’s ideal for a corporation to make as much money as possible while having as few constraints as possible. To be responsible, efficient, and transparent, an institution would most likely actually have to put effort into doing so. On the contrary, McGill’s management structure does the opposite: it is arranged so McGill can easily resist these qualities. The Board of Governors, as well as the conditions of life on campus, ensure that students are silenced.

Within the Board

The Board of Governors, which is the highest governing body at McGill, is made up of senior administrators, corporate stakeholders, staff, and a couple students. In this context, it’s no wonder that McGill doesn’t care about student demands: we have very little say in the functioning of the university. As students, we have very little presence on the Board, and since this is the highest governing body, it makes sense that our interests are not reflected in McGill’s activities.



The chart above illustrates the composition of the Board, showing that students make up a very small percentage of its members. The members-at-large category, representing almost half the Board membership, is particularly concerning because many of these people come from the corporate sphere outside of the McGill

community.⁶⁷

Outside the Board

Outside the Board of Governors, it *could* be possible for students to have a voice. For example, we can compare this to a non-profit structure: the Board of Directors hosts a meeting at least once a year and the membership vote on important issues and the election of Board members. From there, the Board has to ensure that the organization follows through with the general membership's demands. In this system, even those not on the Board have a say over the functioning of the organization and the collective decisions made are binding. On the contrary, McGill has no such mechanism. There are very few places where students can give feedback in an accessible way, and when feedback is taken, there is no obligation for it to even be considered, let alone implemented, even if the majority of students agree with it.

If money is everything, follow the cash?

McGill isn't a non-profit, and within the context of its hunger for money, it's worthwhile to also look at corporate governance structures. But even here, we find that the governance of a large corporation is more accountable than McGill's structure. For publicly owned corporations, members of the general population (well... the *rich* general population) own "shares" of that company, effectively controlling little tiny pieces of pie. Like McGill and other organizations, these companies also have Boards, but if the Boards don't work effectively, then the company has to bow to the demands of their shareholders—if they don't and enough shareholders are unsatisfied with the management of the company, they will all sell their shares at once, the price of each share will go down because of wonky economic rules like supply and demand, and the company will lose money.

High-demand means they have nothing to lose

Unlike shareholders, students have little to no control. We can protest, write reports, talk to one another, and share things on social media, but because of the nature of the university industry, our voices hold little weight to the men (and women, and... non-binary people? Are there any up in here?) upstairs. University is a commodity with high demand: many people want a piece of university education. And because so many people want it, it means that McGill doesn't have to treat us like jewels. If I get angry and decide to leave, another student will come and take my place, happily. Put it this way: if you run a business and have more customers than you even know what to do

⁶⁷ "Board of Governors: 2018-2019 Composition and Membership," McGill University, accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/boardofgovernors/membership>.

with, it doesn't matter if a few (or even a lot) get angry. Good riddance! The angry ones can leave, and new, non-angry customers can come in.

Transience

Not only is university a high demand industry, but it's also a transient one. McGill has new kids coming in every single year and can expect people to leave after about 4 years (give or take). We are clients and shareholders in a sense, but our shares expire after a while, so it's not worth it for McGill to make them perfect. Even *during* those 4 (or so) years, a bunch of us leave for summers outside of Montréal and semesters abroad.

Precarity

It's also important to mention that students, especially marginalized students, are precarious. Many students can't afford to put a lot of energy into mobilizing against the problems at McGill, and those who do have to put a lot on the line. Trying to create an uproar about university management takes time, money, and security. A lot of students have none of these things: we work, we're in class all day, we don't have a huge disposable income, and everything we do on campus is on display for our professors and colleagues to see, judge us for, and bring into the classroom and into our grades (and sure, maybe *officially* professors can't discriminate against students for their activism or political opinions, but try telling that to the 2 floor fellows who got fired outright for protesting in 2012⁶⁸, or the white, male professor who, just last year, wrote a newspaper column that was vaguely critical of Québec and had to resign from his teaching position at McGill⁶⁹). All in all, even while many students at McGill are extremely privileged in certain ways, many are also precarious in others.

Because university is a high-demand industry and because students are transient and precarious, the shareholder model doesn't apply to McGill. That's not to say that valuable student activism hasn't happened—it definitely has. But the problems with transparency that McGill has *might* not be able to be overcome by student activism alone.

Conclusion

These issues are bigger than just situational austerity. Spending patterns, even outside of financial crises, need to be critically examined, even though this is extremely hard to

⁶⁸ Jessica Lukawiecki, "Controversy over floor fellow dismissals," *McGill Daily*, March 10, 2012, <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2012/03/controversy-over-floor-fellow-dismissals/>.

⁶⁹ Michael Friscolanti, "Why Andrew Potter lost his 'dream job' at McGill," *Maclean's*, March 23, 2017, <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/why-andrew-potter-lost-his-dream-job-at-mcgill/>.

do. McGill's spending on the whole isn't responsible, efficient, or transparent, and this is a serious problem. Moreover, the governance structure that exists here is different than that of a non-profit or a profit-focused corporation and is less transparent than either.

This analysis would not be complete without mentioning capitalism. Capitalism as a system is seriously flawed, and it's worth wondering whether a responsible, efficient, and transparent system can ever exist under it. McGill is driven by profit because profit is what a capitalist world runs on. Capitalism itself is a problem.

In this section we've zoomed out a bit from austerity in a specific context. Austerity is a huge issue, but on a broader level, irresponsible, inefficient, and non-transparent financial management persists at McGill. This is due, at least partly, to the governance structure. And this whole mess exists because of capitalism and the problems it creates.



CONCLUSION

This report is one step towards what will hopefully be a more just future. It has tried to illustrate myths around austerity in general as well as austerity more specifically at McGill, and I've attempted to do this in a way that acknowledges how austerity is influenced because of our economic system as well as how austerity affects different people on different levels.

We've gone from the "basics of austerity" to a more holistic picture of what austerity means for our communities. We've defined austerity in broad terms that make it easier to identify its effects. We've looked at various myths that are furthered by governments and organizations in order to justify austerity, and we've seen a (very) brief timeline of government financial action that has affected McGill.

We've also seen what austerity looks like on the smaller scale of McGill's campuses. Austerity is reflected in issues surrounding labour, student life, and academics, but also much more that we haven't been able to touch on here. Students have been active against austerity in the past and this report is written in the hopes they they will continue to mobilize, especially against the myths that the McGill administration specifically perpetuates.

Finally, we've zoomed out. Austerity exists because of bad financial behaviour, which exists within a faulty economic system. Acknowledging this systemic level of austerity is critical for taking it down.

I've tried to write this report as concisely as possible (although, in order to get every little bit of information, it did end up being long). However, despite being researched and written by one principal person (who had a lot of help along the way), this report should be used by multiple people in the future. It's a collection of knowledge, much of which has been informed by conversations with students at McGill themselves. It's meant for action, not to sit in a dusty filing cabinet.

As mentioned in the introduction, I am a young, very imperfect researcher. I have put a lot of effort into this report, but inevitably gaps and mistakes will be identified. If you see one of these gaps or have something to say about this report at all, don't hesitate to email me at austerityreport2018@gmail.com. I made this email address specifically for this report so that I could be held accountable and contacted easily while still protecting my personal information.

***back
matter***

Glossary

3-for-4 replacement model

In the context of this report, this refers to when McGill hires only 3 new staff for every 4 staff who leave. This allows the number of staff to gradually shrink without McGill looking bad by doing lay-offs.

ASAP 2012⁷⁰

This is one of McGill's strategic plans. ASAP stands for "Achieving Strategic Academic Priorities". Its 3 main strategic priorities are:

1. Advancing McGill's academic success, profile, and reputation for excellence, nationally and internationally, as one of the world's leading research-intensive universities.
2. Achieving a sustained student-centred focus that will enhance the educational, research, and extracurricular life and learning experiences of those studying here at all levels.
3. Managing existing resources and diversifying and optimising revenue sources to ensure maximal impact in support of educational programs, research activities, and community engagement.

Bailout

In the context of this report, a bailout is when a company (often a large corporation) is at risk of going into debt and having to halt its projects, so the government gives it an investment to keep it afloat.

Board of directors

Boards of directors are used in many non-profit organizations. The members of them serve on a volunteer basis and oversee the activities of the organization as well as hold Annual General Meetings where members-at-large of the organization can vote on various motions. These meetings allow the general membership to mandate the Board to do certain things.

Board of governors

McGill's Board of Governors is its highest governing body and oversees the activities of the university. It is composed of members-at-large as well as

⁷⁰ ASAP 2012: Achieving Strategic Academic Priorities," McGill University, accessed June 30, 2018, <https://mcgill.ca/asap/>.

representatives from various groups at McGill. See section 3.5 for details about McGill's governance structure as well as the composition of the Board.

Budget book

This refers to one of McGill's official documents. McGill releases one every year that outlines various priorities as well as concerns for the next fiscal year.

Budget deficit

When companies and governments make budgets, they often look at money in terms of revenues (income) and expenses (spending). There are a bunch of complicated math calculations that go into calculating each of these columns, but in general if the expenses side is larger than the revenues side (i.e. if they're spending more than they're making), that means there is a budget deficit.

Capital

Includes manufactured items and financial instruments (i.e. things that hold wealth such as a stock, a pile of cash, etc.).⁷¹

Confidence

In the context of this report, confidence refers to the idea that investors will only invest in things they believe will provide them with a return. This is especially pertinent in the case of Québec: despite the government's debt, investors have continued to invest which demonstrates that they still believe they will get a return.

Culture Shock

Culture Shock is an annual series of events and workshops geared towards anti-racism and colonialism at McGill. QPIRG (Québec Public Interest Research Group)-McGill and SSMU historically co-sponsored it, but in 2017 SSMU cut funding for it and QPIRG-McGill had to put it on alone, working with a limited budget. This is just one example of austerity being perpetuated by SSMU.

Deferred maintenance

Because McGill's campus is quite large and big (read: settler-colonial), it has lot of buildings that are falling apart. Although many of these buildings need renovations and repairs, McGill often claims it can't afford to do it all, so it will

⁷¹ Ragan, Christopher T.S. and Richard G. Lipsey, *Macroeconomics* (Toronto: Pearson Canada Inc., 2011), 4.

push off the “least urgent” of these. This saves money in the short-term but results in much more dramatic and expensive repairs needed when McGill finally does them.

DPSLL

Stands for the Deputy Provost of Student Life and Learning, heading by Ollivier Dyens for the past few years. The DPSLL is in charge of athletics, enrolment services, the office of the dean of students, student housing, teaching and learning services, and student services.⁷²

Financial statements

A tool used by companies and organizations to keep track of their finances. The financial statements are created every year which track the general revenues and expenses for an organization and are then audited by an accountant to ensure that everything is legal. To the layperson’s eye, these statements will have a bunch of numbers and confusing economic jargon in them. While an important tool, they don’t provide a detailed analysis of an organization’s financial behaviour.

Fiscal year

Organizations and companies track their spending by the year, but the beginning and end of their year isn’t the same as the January-December year. Many organizations start their fiscal year in April and end in March. This varies across industries and countries.

Hexavest

The investment company that manages McGill’s “Fossil-Fuel-Free” fund. As discussed in 3.1, there are many problems with this fund.

Inflation

Refers to the fact that the value of a dollar changes over time and because of the cash supply in the economy. If the government prints more money, the value of each dollar goes down; if there is less cash, the value will go up. Governments struggle to keep inflation low.

⁷² “Student Life and Learning,” McGill University, accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/studentlifeandlearning/>.

Job casualization

Includes many different tactics used to devalue labour, especially through classifying employees as “low-level” and therefore withholding benefits from them.

Neoliberalism

The general economic climate we currently function under. Someone could write their PhD thesis about neoliberalism because it’s so complicated and different people define it differently, but for the purpose of this report it’s the general idea that free-market capitalism works well and is what we should be doing.

OECD countries

OECD stands for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. It is a group of countries with fairly similar economic structures (often those in the global north).⁷³

Precarity

Worker precarity is the fact that casualized employees, especially those who may experience other forms of marginalization, are often put in precarious positions at work. For example, workers may not have contract renewed or might not have guaranteed weekly hours of work which means that their source of income could be taken from them.

Real terms, nominal terms

Because money changes value every year (i.e. a dollar in 2018 is worth much less than a dollar was worth in 1950), economists have to adjust for the change in value. “Real terms” refer to when we do some fancy math to adjust various values for inflation. “Nominal terms” are when we don’t do this. In general, we shouldn’t compare things in nominal terms because they don’t give us an accurate portrayal of someone’s wealth or expenses. For example, if something cost \$50 in 1950, and is still \$50 now, then it would look, in nominal terms, like the price hadn’t changed. However, in reality, that thing had become much cheaper because \$50 in 1950 is actually worth about the same as \$542.28 in 2018.⁷⁴

⁷³ “OECD: Members and Partners,” OECD, accessed June 30, 2018, <http://www.oecd.org/about/membersandpartners/>.

⁷⁴ “Inflation Calculator,” Bank of Canada, accessed June 30, 2018, <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/>.

Recession

A recession is when the economy experiences a slump. For example, after the 2008 market crash, an intense recession followed where there were fewer jobs, less government spending, and more poverty.

Rez Project

An introductory program for students living in McGill residences in their first year. Generally, there is one workshop in the fall about gender, sexuality, and consent, and another in the winter about race and colonialism. It should be noted that the race and colonialism workshop was only added to the project recently and continues to receive backlash. As well, because it happens in second semester while the first workshop happens a few weeks after the school year starts, students are often less receptive.

Risk of default

Defaulting on a loan means that you are unable to pay it back. The risk of default, then, refers to the risk of this occurring.

Royalty

In the context of this report, a royalty refers to a fee that companies in extractive industries (such as mining) would have to pay the government for the right to exploit the land they must use.

Salary freeze

Often used to decrease the cost of labour. If an employer implements a salary freeze, it means that salaries won't be increased for a specified amount of time.

Stepped care

For this report, this refers to the model that McGill's mental health services currently uses. The idea is that someone will start at the lowest step, which is also the cheapest for McGill to provide. For example, someone could start with online therapy exercises. Only if those don't work for the student will they be able to go to the next step, for example group therapy. This model allows McGill to save money but doesn't let students choose the kind of care they want to receive or what works for them.

Subsidies

A package of cash that the government can hand out to corporations and organizations. Sometimes it is used in public services: for example, the government can fund public daycares so that parents can pay less. Often, however, it is used for huge corporations.

Tax bracket

Tax brackets are used to categorize different levels of income so that they may be taxed in different proportions. For example, one tax bracket could be for people who make between \$20,000-\$40,000 per year. Everyone in this tax bracket would pay a certain percentage of tax, let's say 15%. Different tax brackets will have different tax rates. This means that people are paying taxes based on what they are earning. The more tax brackets the government has, the more precise and equitable taxation can be.

Tax evasion

When companies or people purposefully try to avoid taxes, often by illegally misrepresenting their income.

Tuition deregulation

Tuition in Québec is calculated differently for different students, depending on whether they're Québec residents, Canadian residents from outside of Québec, or international students (see Appendix B). When tuition is deregulated, it means that the university can charge whatever tuition rate it wants.

APPENDIX A: The University Budget Structure

McGill uses the “Provostial” model for budgeting—this is common throughout North America. The Provost and Vice Principal (Academic) acts as the chief budget officer.⁷⁵ The budget is created throughout the year.

The budget is comprised of 4 different funds:

1) Operating fund

This is the fund that most things come out of. It consists of unrestricted money that McGill can spend as it sees fit (the administration claims that spending is aligned with McGill’s mission and values).⁷⁶

2) Restricted fund

Also used on a day-to-day basis, but the money in this fund is restricted for certain purposes. For example, research funding comes out of this fund.⁷⁷

3) Endowment fund

This consists of gifts, donations, and bequests, whether or not these have specific (i.e. restricted) aims.⁷⁸

4) Plant fund

Consists of money relating to construction, infrastructure improvements, and property buying.⁷⁹

The budget as a whole is driven by various values that McGill has created in the past. Spending happens in line with the Principal’s priorities as well as other bureaucratic “strategic plans” that have been created. This means that the spending patterns may or may not actually be in line with what students want. Other than past town halls and Board of Governor meetings that are open to the public, students don’t really have a say.

⁷⁵ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2018*, Montréal: McGill University, 2017. Accessed June 30, 2018, https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/files/budget/budget_book_fy2018_final_20170905.pdf, 19.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 20.

APPENDIX B: How Tuition Works in Québec

For students from Québec:

There's a set rate created by the government. Every year this rate goes up by the "rate of increase of disposable family revenue per inhabitant from two years back as published by the Québec Statistics Institute".⁸⁰ So the increase for the 2018-2019 year, for example, will be equal to the percentage increase of disposable family revenue per inhabitant between the years 2015 and 2016. 30% of this increase is paid back to the government and goes into an envelope explicitly for the Québec Student Loans and Bursaries program.⁸¹ It should be noted that relying on macro statistics to determine what individual people have to pay has its problems, since not every family's "disposable income" is the same. This rule also applied to undergraduate students from France who were admitted before the fall 2015 semester.

For Canadian students from outside of Québec

They pay the Québec tuition rate + an "out-of-province supplement" (in French: *forfaitaire*). This supplement is determined so that the total tuition bill for these students is the average tuition paid in the rest of the provinces (excluding Québec). This rule also applied to undergraduate students from France who were admitted as of the fall 2015 semester. The supplement is given back to the Québec government.

For international students

... If their tuition is regulated (the faculties with regulated tuition are changing right now as McGill de-regulated international tuition more and more): They also pay a supplement to McGill. Their tuition rate is set at "the rate approximately equivalent to the average teaching grant received for all international students in the Québec system".⁸² The university can charge 10% more than this, but besides that, this supplement is returned to the government.⁸³

... If their tuition is de-regulated (Law, Management, Science, Engineering, Computer Science, Mathematics, and soon to be more faculties as McGill continues the process of international deregulation): McGill sets whatever tuition it wants and receives no teaching grant from the government.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), *Budget: FY2018*, Montréal: McGill University, 2017. Accessed June 30, 2018, https://www.mcgill.ca/budget/files/budget/budget_book_fy2018_final_20170905.pdf, 16.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

Methodology

This research began in early March of 2018. I was originally hired under the VP External of SSMU, Connor Spencer. The mandate was to create an accessible report about austerity at McGill and in Québec more generally that could then be used in campaigns by SSMU and students in general. Although the contract was originally supposed to end at the end of April, it was extended twice (once to the end of May and then to the end of June) because of the fact that I was hired later than expected and as I began my research I was discovering that it would take more time to write a thorough report. In June Marina Cupido took office as the new VP External and I continued to work under them. I had check-ins with both Connor and Marina every few weeks during the entirety of my contract. I worked an average of 5 hours a week from the first week of March until the end of May, and then an average of 8 hours a week through June. These hours were specified in my contract. I submitted a draft on June 24th, getting feedback from Marina. I then submitted a final draft on June 30th, 2018.

Here is a complete timeline of my working schedule:

1st week of March:

Looking through old documents available from the SSMU VP External's office, compiling any references I could find in there

2nd week of March-1st week of May:

Detailed textual research. I read anything I could find in both French and English both online and in print. I started identifying gaps in formal sources that would need to be filled in by collective knowledge.

May:

More detailed textual research as well as student group and service outreach. I sent emails to several student groups and services asking for their input. Here is a sample email (it varied slightly depending on the group):

Hi there! I'm doing research for SSMU on austerity at McGill and how it affects students. As part of my research I'm reaching out to student groups and services to get insight on how the students they work with are often not prioritized at McGill. I was wondering if [group name] would be able and willing to meet with me to share your knowledge or even answer some questions through email? I've attached a document that I'm giving to student groups that has some information about the project, myself, austerity in general, and the questions I'm asking. If this would be possible or if you have any questions or concerns don't hesitate to email me back at this address!

Thanks so much for all the work you do at McGill!

In solidarity,

Catherine Jeffery

Here is a sample document I attached to that email (again, it varied slightly depending on the group):

Austerity in Québec and in the McGill Context

A bit about this project:

I started this research in early March, hired as the “austerity measures researcher” for SSMU. My task is to write a report about austerity and how it affects students on campus, which we hope can be used in future campaigns and to leverage demands from both the McGill administration and the Québec government. **I'm looking at austerity both from a government perspective (i.e. Québec financial cuts to universities) as well as how, within the McGill context, the administration has dealt with these cuts inappropriately, in ways that disadvantage students further.** I'm also looking at broader questions about how the McGill administration handles its finances even besides austerity: for example, one thing I'm finding is that even outside of “austerity crises” the university's spending doesn't line up with student priorities (or, when it does, it only lines up with privileged and elite students' priorities and neglects marginalized students).

While I've drawn on a lot of written sources and “formal” data for this report, a lot of knowledge exists within students and their own experiences. This is why I'm reaching out to student groups, including services, clubs, and networks that can offer their insight into how the students they work with are often not prioritized within McGill's system. **While a lot of this insight might not relate *directly* to financials or austerity, McGill is a corporation that runs on cash, so everything it does eventually comes back to its budget and financial statements, linking student life to austerity and irresponsible financial behaviour.**

A bit about me (and my positionality):

My name is Catherine Jeffery and I'm an undergrad student at McGill in Gender, Sexuality, Feminism and Social Justice (GSFS) with a Political Science minor. I'm going into my final year, graduating in spring of 2019. I'm a non-binary, queer, mentally ill, upper-middle class white settler student.

A bit about austerity:

Because this project aims to empower students on campus, I'm drafting a specific definition of "austerity" for the report. Right now, these are the sorts of criteria I'm using to define austerity:

- a. A pattern of financial management that involves cutting spending and/or not spending enough, specifically within the areas of social services, education, healthcare, and other programs that benefit the population in general but are often especially important for marginalized (e.g. poor, BIPOC, queer and trans, disabled) people.
- b. Is often perpetrated by governments but can also be internalized by organizations (such as universities) within these governments.
- c. Can be announced officially by the financial managers but can just as easily be unofficial and an ingrained part of society.
- d. Is often pursued with the rhetoric of eliminating debt, running responsible budgets, making the economy "lean", creating smaller government, "re-calibrating" programs and services so they are more "efficient", etc.
- e. An ideological and/or political decision that is made under the guise of "necessity" but very rarely is.
- f. Can be a temporary measure implemented by those in power but is often designed to rewire the economy and society permanently.
- g. Has various negative consequences but overall affects marginalized people disproportionately.

Some questions for your group (all optional):

1. What does your group aim to provide for students? What is your "mission" or "vision" at McGill?
2. What resources do you have access to for your tasks? Where do you get funding and support from, if anywhere?
3. Is there anywhere specific on campus you see the administration failing to prioritize students, especially those you work with? In conversations within your student group, are there common things that often come up? Some examples: cuts/inadequate funding in student services, labour casualization, class and program cuts.

4. Anything specific you want to see in the report? Anyone else you think I should be reaching out to? Any directions you think I should be going in? Anything else at all you want me to know? Any feedback is appreciated!
5. Can I include your group name and logo in the Acknowledgments section of the report? I want to include a list of all the groups and people who gave their time and input to make this successful.

Thank you!

Despite seeking input from student groups, I do recognize that this was a far from ideal time to do it. It would have been ideal to start the input process far earlier.

June:

I finished up the research and got to writing. While researching I'd been putting things into a document with an outline of the report, mostly in bullet points or short sentences. At this point I went back through the whole document and re-wrote every section to be more coherent. During the last week of June, I finished the basic formatting, the backmatter section, and references.

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**Association of McGill University Support Employees
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**Association of McGill University Research
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(AVEQ)**

McGill Black
Students' Network

BSN

Black Students' Network (BSN)



Midnight Kitchen



Walksafe

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