



## Association étudiante de l'Université McGill

*Située sur les territoires traditionnels des collectivités Haudenosaunee et Anishinaabe.*

## Students' Society of McGill University

*Located on Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, traditional territories.*

(514) 398-6800 | [ssmu.ca](https://ssmu.ca) | 3600 rue McTavish, Suite 1200, Montréal, QC, H3A 0G3

# MCGILL STUDENT UNION DEMOCRATIZATION INITIATIVE POLICY

Adopted by way of Referendum: 2021/11/15

Expires: 2026/05/01

[Adopted Motion \(Link\)](#)

## 1. Scope

This Policy shall apply to Directors, Councilors, Officers, Senators, Commissioners, Permanent Staff, and all others involved in Society decision-making processes for the duration of their formal involvement with the Society. It shall be used as a guide for decision-making and planning for the democratization of all student unions at McGill.

## 2. Background and Context

A serious lack of participation by the student body in McGill's student unions persists. Since Fall 2012, turnout in SSMU elections and referenda has never exceeded 32.8%, with mean turnout at 19.6%<sup>1</sup>. Faculty- and department-level student unions show similar trends. Many executive positions go uncontested or unfilled at all three levels. Participation in general assemblies is sparse, with few reaching quorum unless grassroots movements motivate attendance.

In the student press, numerous instances of elected representative misconduct, undemocratic practices, and general student apathy towards their student unions have been documented (**content warning: sexual violence, gendered discrimination, racism, antisemitism**).

### 2.1. Elected Representative Misconduct

Date	Publication	Title
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<sup>1</sup><https://elections.ssmu.ca/past-elections/>  
<https://ssmu.simplyvoting.com/>



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October 2021	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	Action is due against sexism in SSMU <sup>2</sup>
September 2021	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	Sexism and Silence in SSMU: Gender-based discrimination goes unchecked and creates a toxic environment, sources say <sup>3</sup>
Septembre 2020	<i>Le Délit</i>	Un v.-p. de l'AÉUM accusé d'inconduite sexuelle <sup>4</sup>
April 2020	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	Incoming VP-Internal Accused of Sexual Violence <sup>5</sup>
Janvier 2020	<i>Le Délit</i>	Un voyage controversé: Retour sur les événements entourant les voyages gratuits en Israël
November 2019	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	SSMU, AUS, and SUS Leaders Offered Free Propaganda Trip by Pro-Israel Organization <sup>6</sup>
October 2019	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	Open letter on Indigenous affairs at SSMU <sup>7</sup>
November 2017	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	Who does SSMU serve? <sup>8</sup>
October 2017	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	SSMU President must step up, or step down <sup>9</sup>
March 2017	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	Century resigns from MUSA Executive following backlash from SSMU campaign <sup>10</sup>
March 2017	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	The uphill battle to restoring trust in SSMU <sup>11</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/opinion/action-is-due-against-sexism-in-ssmu-100521/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2021/09/sexism-and-silence-in-ssmu/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.delitfrancais.com/2020/09/08/un-v-p-de-laeum-accuse-dinconduite-sexuelle/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2020/04/incoming-vp-internal-accused-of-sexual-violence/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2019/11/ssmu-aus-and-sus-leaders-offered-free-propaganda-trip-by-pro-israel-organization/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/opinion/open-letter-indigenous-affairs-2910/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/opinion/who-does-ssmu-serve-1116/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/opinion/ssmu-president-must-step-up-or-step-down-1031/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/news/century-resigns-from-musa-executive-following-backlash-from-ssmu-campaign-239874/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/opinion/editorial-the-uphill-battle-to-restoring-trust-in-ssmu->



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March 2017	<i>The Bull &amp; Bear</i>	SSMU: An Institutional Failure <sup>12</sup>
Mars 2017	<i>Le Délit</i>	Allégations d'agression sexuelle concernant David Aird et Ben Ger, l'AEUM lève le voile <sup>13</sup>
Mars 2017	<i>Le Délit</i>	L'AEUMCUM annonce la démission de Noah Century <sup>14</sup>
February 2017	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	Students criticize SSMU executives for inaction on David Aird <sup>15</sup>
February 2017	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	SSMU VP External resigns amid allegations of sexual violence <sup>16</sup>
February 2017	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	SSMU pressured to call for Sadikov's resignation under threat from Principal <sup>17</sup>

## 2.2. Undemocratic practices

Date	Publication	Title
September 2021	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	The SSMU BoD's ratification of the Divest for Human Rights Policy is long overdue <sup>18</sup>
April 2021	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	SSMU's BoD should resist, not assist McGill's repression of student activism <sup>19</sup>
March 2020	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	How a SSMU Service Abolished Democracy <sup>20</sup>

<sup>12</sup> <https://bullandbearmcgill.com/ssmu-institutional-failure/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.delitfrancais.com/2017/03/10/allegations-contre-david-aird-et-ben-ger-laeum-leve-le-voile/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.delitfrancais.com/2017/03/16/laemcum-annonce-la-demission-de-noah-century/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2017/02/students-criticize-ssmu-executives-for-inaction-on-david-aird/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2017/02/ssmu-vp-external-resigns-amid-allegations-of-sexual-violence/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2017/02/breaking-mcgill-reportedly-coercing-ssmu-into-calling-for-sadikovs-resignation/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/opinion/the-ssmu-bods-ratification-of-the-divest-for-human-rights-policy-is-long-overdue-08102021/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/opinion/ssmus-bod-should-resist-not-assist-mcgills-repression-of-student-activism04102021/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2020/02/allegations-of-undemocratic-procedures-in-sus/>



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February 2020	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	Allegations of Undemocratic Procedures in SUS <sup>21</sup>
April 2019	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	Students Call for Interim SUS Representative to SUS <sup>22</sup>
March 2019	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	AUS executive team broke constitution, Secretary General finds <sup>23</sup>
February 2019	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	Don't overturn a democratic vote for undemocratic reasons <sup>24</sup>
Février 2019	<i>Le Délit</i>	Tumulte à l'AEFA <sup>25</sup>
February 2019	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	AUS & POLI 339: Secretary General Suspends Exec Vote <sup>26</sup>
November 2017	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	SSMU Board of Directors violates SSMU Constitution <sup>27</sup>
October 2017	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	VP Finance suspended from SSMU Board of Directors: Procedural legitimacy of decision questioned

### 2.3. Lack of participation

Date	Publication	Title
Mars 2021	<i>Le Délit</i>	Les élections de l'AEUM atteignent le quorum de 15% de justesse <sup>28</sup>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2020/02/allegations-of-undemocratic-procedures-in-sus/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2019/04/students-call-for-interim-sus-representative-to-ssmu/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/news/aus-executive-team-willingly-broke-constitution-secretary-general-finds-031219/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/opinion/dont-overturn-a-democratic-vote-for-undemocratic-reasons-1802/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.delitfrancais.com/2019/02/26/tumulte-a-laefa/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2019/02/aus-poli-339-secretary-general-suspends-exec-vote/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2017/11/ssmu-board-of-directors-violates-ssmu-constitution/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.delitfrancais.com/2021/03/22/les-elections-de-laeum-atteignent-le-quorum-de-15-de-justesse/>



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November 2020	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	Better engagement with students can prevent another failed SSMU referendum <sup>29</sup>
March 2020	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	SSMU General Assembly receives lacklustre attendance <sup>30</sup>
Mars 2020	<i>Le Délit</i>	Assemblée générale de l'AEUM: Par manque de personnes, l'AG s'est transformée en forum consultatif <sup>31</sup>
Mars 2020	<i>Le Délit</i>	Temps difficiles pour l'AEFA: La Faculté de Arts n'attire plus l'attention des étudiant·e·s <sup>32</sup>
February 2020	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	SUS general assembly does not meet quorum and supports the AUS <sup>33</sup>
Novembre 2019	<i>Le Délit</i>	Une AG tranquille: L'AEUM n'a pas réussi à atteindre le quorum <sup>34</sup>
November 2018	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	Small Attendance, Big Motions: Fall 2018 SSMU general assembly Poorly Attended <sup>35</sup>
March 2018	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	Uncontested SSMU executive: Show students why you deserved their votes <sup>36</sup>
March 2018	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	Why students don't care about SSMU <sup>37</sup>
March 2018	<i>The Bull &amp; Bear</i>	Low Attendance at Winter general assembly Results in Consultative Forum <sup>38</sup>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/opinion/better-engagement-with-students-can-prevent-another-failed-ssmu-referendum03112020/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/news/ssmu-general-assembly-receives-lacklustre-attendance-031020/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.delitfrancais.com/2020/03/23/assemblee-generale-de-laeum/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.delitfrancais.com/2020/03/23/temps-difficiles-pour-laefa/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/news/sus-general-assembly-does-not-meet-quorum-and-supports-discussion-by-the-aus-021120/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.delitfrancais.com/2019/11/05/une-ag-tranquille/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2018/11/small-attendance-big-motions/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/opinion/uncontested-ssmu-executive-show-students-deserved-votes-03272018/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/opinion/why-students-dont-care-about-ssmu-0311/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://bullandbearmcgill.com/low-attendance-at-winter-general-assembly-results-in-consultative-forum/>



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Mars 2018	<i>Le Délit</i>	Que penser du manque de candidats à l'AEUM? <sup>39</sup>
October 2017	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	Let's really democratize SSMU <sup>40</sup>
Mars 2017	<i>Le Délit</i>	Crise à l'AEUM <sup>41</sup>
Novembre 2016	<i>Le Délit</i>	Assemblée générale, sans assemblée: L'assemblée générale d'automne de l'AEUM n'attire pas le quorum nécessaire de 100 étudiants <sup>42</sup>
April 2016	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	The rhetoric of the reactionary: Understanding the history of student politics at McGill <sup>43</sup>
March 2015	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	End your apathy <sup>44</sup>
September 2014	<i>The McGill Daily</i>	SSMU executives work for us: On apathy and being a good stakeholder <sup>45</sup>
October 2013	<i>The McGill Tribune</i>	SSMU conduct on general assembly an abdication of duty <sup>46</sup>
Février 2013	<i>Le Délit</i>	Une réunion oubliée: Pas d'intérêt pour l'Assemblée Générale de L'AEFA <sup>47</sup>

## 2.4. Bureaucracy and Representation

McGill's student unions have been acting more like corporations than unions, and have abandoned the interests of the members in favour of bureaucratic, representative governance. This has led to the creation of an executive class within our student unions that handles their day-to-day operation. These executives' near-total removal from the members affected by their decisions often leads to actions that do not represent the will of the membership, including compromising with university

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.delitfrancais.com/2018/03/20/que-penser-du-manque-de-candidats-a-laeum/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2017/10/lets-really-democratize-ssmu/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.delitfrancais.com/2017/03/14/crise-a-laeum/>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.delitfrancais.com/2016/11/14/assemblee-generale-sans-assemblee/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2016/04/the-rhetoric-of-the-reactionary/>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2015/03/end-your-apaty/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2014/09/ssmu-executives-work-for-us/>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/opinion/editorial-3/>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.delitfrancais.com/2013/02/12/une-reunion-oubliee/>



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administration at the expense of the student body. Although referenda and general assemblies exist as forms of direct democracy, most members do not participate. This happens when representatives are simply trusted to make the 'best' or 'most representative' decisions for their constituents without the need for formal consultation or a formal mandate given to them by the members they represent.

This is made worse when elections for executives and representatives are uncontested and candidates are acclaimed. The hierarchy in our student unions places them above the rest of the students.

## 2.5. Environment

As McGill's student unions mirror governments, they also mirror their problems. Misconduct by executives and representatives continues year after year, often with no accountability. Our hierarchical student union structures enable and exacerbate abuses of power, resulting in the marginalization and exclusion of the union's own members. This impunity further dampens the willingness of members to become more actively involved in their student unions.

Moreover, this student union hierarchy leads to the consideration of executive and representative positions as those with prestige, exclusivity, and an elite status. This attracts a certain type of student: one more interested in playing politician and furthering their own career and social interests, than one that is actively working to better the conditions of the membership. This fosters a sense of discontinuity with the membership and turns our student unions into social clubs for a select few.

Those who enter positions of student leadership—in the hopes of improving such an environment and the lives of the membership—are often driven out by repeated acts of misogyny, racism, and many other systems of oppression, all of which are often left unaddressed—or made worse—by a hierarchical structure that concentrates power in the self-selected few.

## 3. Framework

This framework is inspired by that of the Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ).

### 3.1. Principles

Democratic member participation in McGill's student unions requires the abolition of the hierarchical structures within them. This includes eliminating representative positions and governing bodies in their current form in favour of direct democratic participation. Our student unions should be directly run by their members, for their members. Only in general assemblies can all members voice their ideas on equal footing, and only there can these voices produce collective decisions which are then binding on the whole student union.



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## 3.2. Assemblies

The base unit of direct democracy should be the general assembly of a department or small faculty. Members of unions at this level have similar experiences at the university, and there are usually already social bonds within the group. Since general assemblies with the entire undergraduate population or for an entire large faculty would be unfeasible and uncondusive to debate and collective decision-making, department- and small faculty-level general assemblies are the reasonable choice for direct democracy in our student unions.

### 3.2.1. Department- and small faculty-level unions

The base unit of direct democracy should be the general assembly of a department or small faculty. Members of unions at this level have similar experiences at the university, and there are usually already social bonds within the group. Since general assemblies with the entire undergraduate population or for an entire large faculty would be unfeasible and uncondusive to debate and collective decision-making, department- and small faculty-level general assemblies are the reasonable choice for direct democracy in our student unions.

### 3.2.2. Delegates' assemblies

Many large faculty-level student unions administratively house department-level student unions. In university- and large faculty-level student unions, these smaller unions would elect delegates to the assemblies of the larger unions. Delegates would be given clear mandates on positions to support without authority to compromise. Power would remain close to the rank-and-file members.

### 3.2.3. Day-to-day operations

Coordinators would run the day-to-day operations of a student union and implement the decisions of the assembly. They would have limited power to make unilateral decisions on behalf of the unions that elected them.

## 4. Mandate

In line with the Internal Regulations of Student Groups, this Policy designates the McGill Student Union Democratization Initiative campaign as an Affiliated Political Campaign of the Society. The Society shall actively support the autonomous McGill Student Union Democratization Initiative campaign, including through funding, outreach assistance, space booking, and task completion through the Campaigns Coordinators and the Vice-President (External Affairs). The Society shall not inhibit the





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activities of the campaign by withholding resources or by interfering in the diversity of tactics it might employ.

## 5. Accountability

All staff and elected representatives of the SSMU are accountable for the implementation of this Policy. To this end, the vision, planning, and decision-making of the Society should uphold the principles, support measures, and framework outlined in this document.

## 6. Expiration

This Policy will be valid until May 1, 2026, when it will be brought back to the membership for renewal.



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