



Association étudiante de l'Université McGill

Située sur les territoires traditionnels des collectivités Haudenosaunee et Anishinaabe.

Students' Society of McGill University

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MOTION REGARDING CHANGES TO THE SSMU POLICY ON ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION AND ACADEMICS 2023-04-06

Submitted for: 2023-04-06

Submitted to:	SSMU Legislative Council	Document no.:	LEG-PUB-MOT-2023-04-06-006
Moved by:	Val Masny <i>Vice-President (External Affairs)</i>	Current Status:	<input type="checkbox"/> FOR APPROVAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> APPROVED <input type="checkbox"/> POSTPONED <input type="checkbox"/> COMMITTED <input type="checkbox"/> NOT APPROVED
Seconded by:	Coco Jie Wang <i>Senate Caucus Representative</i>		

Issue

The current Policy on Accessible Education and Academics does not adequately consider the needs of all students including post-graduate, international and Indigenous students within the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU). With recognition that all students deserve access to education and the ability to afford the current cost of living, there is a need to update the Policy on Accessible Education and Academics so that it better reflects the diversity of McGill students.

Proposed amendments are **highlighted in yellow** or ~~striked through~~.

Background and Rationale

In 2020, the SSMU ratified the Policy on Accessible Education and Academics¹ to reaffirm the principles of SSMU on the matter of educational and academic accessibility, and to outline advocacy efforts to be directed toward both government entities and entities of McGill University. In 2021, the PGSS McGill Funding Working Group released the Graduate funding

¹ SSMU Policy on Accessible Education and Academics 2020-04-02

<https://ssmu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SSMU-Policy-on-Accessible-Education-and-Academics-2020-04-02.pdf?x21981>



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report - AY 20-21² which included several recommendations for advocacy related to increasing the accessibility of graduate level education. As the deregulation of international student tuition has taken effect, there has also been a growing concern in whether or not education is accessible for them. In addition, scholarship on barriers to education for Indigenous students has found that cost of tuition is only part of a larger system of barriers³. Recognizing SSMU's commitment to accessible education and the continued rise in cost of living, there is a need to update the Policy on Accessible Education and Academics to better reflect current knowledge and realities and ensure accessibility throughout post-secondary education, for everyone.

Alignment with Mission

This motion aligns with SSMU's constitutional responsibility of service that mandates SSMU to work to strengthen the educational, cultural, environmental, political, and social conditions of its membership. commitment to the elimination of financial barriers to post-secondary education and advocacy for increased government funding for internship and work opportunities for students as defined in the SSMU Policy on Accessible Education and Academics and SSMU's position on education.

Consultations Completed

This motion includes some of the recommendations from the report from the 2020-2021 PGSS McGill Funding Working Group². The report includes their self-reported financial, housing, and health situations. Additional consultations were done through the semesterly Town Halls of Accessible Education where students at large were invited to discuss their needs and opinions related to the policy alongside Divest McGill and the McGill Law Students' Association.

SSMU's Vice-President (Finance) was consulted on McGill's development and determination of fees, the Vice-President (Finance) role on McGill funding committees, and the ways in which the Vice-President (Finance) could better operationalize the Policy on Accessible Education and Academics. The VP External and University Affairs were also consulted, as

² Graduate Funding report - AY 20-21 <https://pgss.mcgill.ca/document/view/9385/FWG%20Report%2020-21.pdf>

³ Walton et al., 2020 Indigenous University Student Persistence: <https://journals.sfu.ca/cje/index.php/cje-rce/article/view/3975>



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well as the Francophone Affairs Commissioner. Senators, the sustainability coordinator and AMUSE were also consulted.

The Policy was shared with VP Academics of the different faculties within McGill University.

Risk Factors and Resource Implications

This motion poses no risk factors, but has resource implications. Notably, this motion will require the continued support of the Vice Presidents (External and University Affairs) in advocating on and off campus for accessible education.

Should this motion fail to be adopted, the Policy on Accessible Education and Academics will remain as is and will expire in 2025. This will limit SSMU's ability to advocate for all McGill students, especially considering that many students go on to pursue postgraduate studies, a reality currently not provided for in the policy.

Sustainability Considerations

This policy upholds the values of social and economic sustainability by establishing a more inclusive mandate for the Society's advocacy for accessible education.

Impact of Decision and Next Steps

If passed, the amended Policy on Accessible Education and Academics will become a formal policy of the Society and will expire in February 2028. The Policy extensively mandates the Vice-Presidents (External Affairs) and (University Affairs); this advocacy should be undertaken by the current Officers as soon as possible, if this has not already occurred.

Motion or Resolution for Approval

Be it resolved that the Legislative Council approve the amendments to the SSMU Policy on Accessible Education and Academics as outlined in Appendix A.



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Be it further resolved, that the Legislative Council recommend the ratification of the Policy, changes and new expiry date to the SSMU Board of Directors, at their next regular meeting.

Be it lastly resolved, that the Policy on Accessible Education and Academics expire on May 1, 2028.

Results of the Vote

In favour	(12)
Opposed	(2)
Abstain	(1)



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Appendix A : SSMU POLICY ON ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION AND ACADEMICS

1. Preamble and Purpose

All people deserve the right to a quality and accessible education. The security of this right should be one of the primary responsibilities of a student union.

This policy is designed to reaffirm the principles of the Students' Society of McGill University (hereinafter "SSMU") on the matter of educational and academic accessibility, and to outline advocacy efforts to be directed toward ~~both~~ **entities of both government and McGill University.** ~~government entities and entities of McGill University.~~

2. Background

The SSMU recognizes that Western academia is systemically inaccessible. Barriers to education disproportionately and predominately impact members of historically marginalized groups and identities, including, but not limited to: Indigenous students, racialized students, queer students, non-male-identifying students, religious students, students with disabilities, low-income students, first-generation students, **international students, students from foster care,** and student-parents. These barriers serve to perpetuate class structures, as those individuals privileged with a quality education tend toward a higher socio-economic status allowing their children to do the same. The SSMU furthermore recognizes that intersections of the identities outlined above often serve to exacerbate the severity of barriers faced. The SSMU commits itself to dismantling the barriers these students face and combating the systems of oppression they operate within, wherever they present themselves.

The SSMU has historically engaged with the larger fight against these efforts to strip support away from those in need of accessibility measures. In 1989, following the lifting of a 22-year tuition freeze by Robert Bourassa's Liberal government, the SSMU hosted the



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founding congress of the Fédération des Étudiants et Étudiantes Universitaires du Québec (FEUQ)⁴. The SSMU participated frequently with this group for 20 years, arguing for reinvestment in education and fighting further increases to tuition.

In 2005, the SSMU stood with a strike effort organized by the Association pour une solidarité syndicale des étudiants (ASSÉ) when Jean Charest's Liberal government attempted to convert \$103 Million from grant allocations into loans. Most notably, the SSMU stood with ASSÉ, once again striking against Charest's Liberals, as the government aimed to raise tuition by 75% in what became known as the *Printemps Érable* of 2012. Significant portions of this strike movement demanded not only an end to the proposed increase, but a renewed movement toward free education in Quebec.

The SSMU recognizes that the 2012 movement was **imperfect** far from perfect, with groups appropriating one another's voices, and with a culture of sexism, racism, violence, and sexual violence coming from within organising circles. The SSMU commits, in its fight against inaccessibility, to always prioritize the safety and well-being of its Members and to calling out harmful structures in all communities, activist or otherwise.

3. Scope, Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 While the SSMU Policy on Accessible Education and Academics (hereinafter "PAEA") shall serve to benefit primarily the undergraduate population of McGill University, impacts of these efforts on non-undergraduates and non-McGill students shall be an integral consideration in the enactment of this policy.

3.2 The PAEA is designed to exist in tandem with all SSMU and McGill governing documents, in particular, the SSMU Accessibility Policy, SSMU Equity Policy, SSMU Indigenous Solidarity Policy, SSMU Policy Against Unpaid Internships and McGill Charter of Student Rights.

3.3 Unless otherwise indicated, advocacy efforts directed at McGill University are to be carried out primarily by the SSMU Vice-President (University Affairs). Advocacy efforts directed at government entities (municipal, provincial, and federal) are to be carried out

⁴ <https://ssmu.ca/about-us/history/>



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primarily by the SSMU Vice-President (External Affairs).

4. Values and Student Rights

4.1 The SSMU affirms the Union Nationale des Étudiants de France (UNEF) interpretation of a student as a young intellectual worker.⁵

4.1.1 The interpretation is upheld empirically if we look at the intellectual services provided by McGill's students and researchers to the public and private sectors, and corporations' increasing reliance on university research to inform their activities.

4.1.2 This interpretation carries with it the implication that students ought not pay for access to the institution that requires this intellectual labour in exchange for a certification.

4.1.2.1 On the contrary, **interpreting** the student as an intellectual worker reinforces the need to remunerate students for this labour.

4.2 The SSMU recognizes the legitimacy of the McGill Charter of Student Rights on the matters of accessibility. While the SSMU has, and continues to have, grievances with the implementation of the Charter, we will strive to uphold, in particular, the following clauses:

4.2.1 Students have a right to a quality education (Article 18).

4.2.1.1 The University makes every reasonable effort to provide an appropriate environment for learning and assessment activities for the student body, including the provision of safe and suitable conditions for learning and study (Article 18.iii).

4.2.3 The University's administrative decisions and actions that affect students must be taken with due regard to the best interest of the student body (Article 14).

⁵ <http://grenoble.unef.fr/unef-syndicat-etudiant/la-charte-de-grenoble/>



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4.2.4 Students have a right to be free from vexatious conduct displayed by a representative of the University acting in an official capacity (Article 13).

4.2.5 Students have the right to be treated with equality, dignity and respect, including the right to be free from harassment and from discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex or gender, gender identity or expression, pregnancy, sexual orientation, civil status, age (except as provided by law), political conviction, language, ethnicity, religion, social condition, family status, a disability or the use of any means to palliate a disability (Article 10).

4.2.6 Students have the right to complete their graded written course work in either French or English and must be informed of this right in the first week of class (Articles 19 and 21.iv).

4.3 In addition, the PAEA will commit SSMU to affirm and guarantee for its members:

4.3.1 The right to equal access to a quality education, irrespective of identity, background, or individual barriers.

4.3.2 The right to just and timely academic accommodations.

4.3.3 The right to be fairly remunerated for labour required by one's degree program, on top of the costs associated with the relevant course credits, where applicable.

5. External Advocacy

5.1 It shall be the responsibility of the Office of the Vice-President (External Affairs) to defend the values and rights enumerated in this policy to the federal, provincial, and municipal governments, as well as all inter-university federations, in order to advocate for and monitor their implementation.

5.2 In all academic and educational accessibility-related advocacy directed at external bodies, the SSMU shall:



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5.2.1 Oppose non-consensual hikes to tuition costs, including the deregulation of tuition, and support mobilization against them.

5.2.1.1 This shall include defending the rights of international students to accessible education, and opposing and mobilizing against the continual deregulation of their fees.

5.2.2 Advocate for reinvestment in higher education from all levels of government, with the goal of reducing and eventually eliminating all tuition and ancillary fees in favour of alternate financing structures which do not place the burden on students.

5.2.2.1 Work to move away from a neoliberal culture of “user pays” and toward understanding the promotion of the opportunity to access high-quality, accessible education as a public interest and human right.

5.2.2.2 In the short-to-medium term - that is, up to the renewal of this Policy - the Vice-President (External Affairs) or a delegate will also work with student unions, Federations, and solidarity networks to push for reforming of and investment in the Aide Financière aux Étudiant.e.s (AFE) program, as well as advocate for an increase to the minimum funding for graduate education, exclusive of labour wages and tuition amounts, and that this amount is reviewed in context with the actual cost of living every other year.

5.2.3 Ensure the fair remuneration, including security and benefits, of student interns, and to seek recognition from the provincial government that unpaid internships are not substantively different from unpaid labour, and thus serve both to exploit workers and render certain professions inaccessible to low-income families.

5.2.4 Work toward the implementation of a province-wide Open Educational Resource (OER) database with both English and French material.



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5.2.5 Advocate to the provincial government for the expansion of international partnerships such that students from French-speaking Francophone African countries may pay the same tuition as students from France.

5.2.6 Support student unions, Federations, and solidarity networks that share these values and goals.

5.2.7 Considering that the working opportunities of International students and intrinsic to their ability to pursue post-secondary education, advocate so that the federal government

5.2.7.1 Develop specialized skill categories for international students within the framework of the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy, the Student Work Placement Program, and the Canada Summer Jobs program.

5.2.7.2 Amend the Canadian Experience Class (Express Entry) program such that international students are able to count part-time employment experience (while they are full-time students) towards fast-tracked permanent residency.

5.2.7.3 Permanently lift the cap on working hours for international students.

5.3 In accordance with the SSMU Indigenous Solidarity Policy, the SSMU recognizes that both systemic, and primary and secondary education, factors largely act as barriers to Indigenous peoples accessing post-secondary education. Accordingly, resources and efforts must be aimed at addressing these barriers in accessible education prior to students even applying to post-secondary institutions.

This includes both legislative and fiscal support for addressing discrepancies between on-reserve education systems and off-reserve education systems. As such, the SSMU shall:

5.3.1 Call upon the federal government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and



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those First Nations children being educated off reserves

5.3.2 Call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families.

5.3.3 Advocate for the additional funding and reserved spaces necessary at all levels of government needed in order to close the attainment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, including funding through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program, the Quebec First Nations and Inuit Faculties of Medicine Program, and similar programs.

Further, the financial aid programs offered to Indigenous Students must be greatly amended to truly work to dismantle barriers of access to postsecondary education for Indigenous students. As such, SSMU shall advocate for:

5.3.4 the increase the federal budgeted amount for Indigenous student education.

5.3.5 the guarantee of funding for the totality of a student's degree.

5.3.6 more flexibility on how the funding is used to cease promoting an inherently colonial and racist belief that Indigenous students are not able to be financially responsible.

6. University Advocacy

6.1 It shall be the responsibility of the Office of the Vice-President (University Affairs) to defend the values and rights enumerated in this policy to the McGill administration, and to advocate for their implementation and operationalization accordingly.

6.2 In all academic and educational accessibility-related advocacy directed at the University administration, the SSMU shall, in conjunction with the SSMU Vice-President (External) and other applicable SSMU Student Staff, consult the lived experiences of those experiencing academic barriers, and where possible and desired by these students, allow them to self-advocate.



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6.3 McGill highest governing body, the Board of Governors, is a fundamentally undemocratic institution with a minority of voting members being appointed by a committee of the Board. As such SSMU shall:

6.3.1 Support and work in collaboration with political campaigns like Divest McGill to work towards a democratization of educational institutions with a view toward self-governance

6.3.2 Advocate for increased student involvement and empowerment at all levels of governance and decision making within McGill

6.3.3 Advocate that Indigenous peoples should have a formal role in the decision-making processes of the University, such as representation of the Board of Governors and in senior administrative positions.

6.3.4 Support labour unions in their advocacy directed towards the McGill Board of Governors

6.4 Physical and Infrastructural Accessibility

6.4.1 The SSMU recognizes that physical and infrastructural barriers can greatly impede students' ability to feel safe, welcomed, and respected on campus. As such, these barriers may detrimentally impact students' ability to succeed academically. The SSMU hereby commits itself to advocating for:

6.4.1.1 The removal of commemorative names that honour or otherwise glorify problematic historical figures, and/or bring to light the injustices committed by historically problematic figures through advocacy and education

6.4.1.2 The celebration of great McGillians from diverse backgrounds (including, but not limited to BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+LGTBQ2+) going forward when it comes to naming new buildings, etc.

6.4.1.3 The increased implementation of gender-neutral washrooms across campus

6.4.1.4 The provision of free menstrual hygiene products by the University in all women's, men's, and gender-neutral washrooms on campus.



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6.4.2 The SSMU shall also advocate for any physical and infrastructural accessibility measures not specifically enumerated herein, but that align with the values set forth in this policy.

6.5 Financial Accessibility

6.5.1 Many financial barriers faced by students while accessing post-secondary education can be addressed at the University level. As such, the SSMU shall advocate for:

6.5.1.1 Ending the backlog of ~~First Nations-Indigenous~~ students seeking a post-secondary education by providing increased and adequate funding to address financial barriers.

6.5.1.2 Systemically identify and apply for external funding to fund more extensive support services for Indigenous students.

6.5.1.3 A revision to existing merit-based scholarship renewal requirements such that they take into account students' level of extracurricular and community involvement and familial + labor-related responsibilities, in addition to academic performance.

6.5.1.4 The implementation of a clearer and more widely-distributed ban on paid course materials and assessment software (eg. Top Hat polling) where this is not clearly indicated in the original version of the course outline.

6.5.1.5 Increased implementation of Open Educational Resources (OER) in and outside of the classroom, ideally in the place of hard-copy textbooks and coursepacks.

6.5.1.6 A reduction in the annual fee increases faced by international students due to the fact that their tuition is deregulated.

6.5.1.7 Increased aid for international students within the scholarships and financial aid office.

6.5.1.6 McGill to use its platform with external funding agencies to push for an increase in external funding amounts, particularly in social sciences and humanities.

6.5.1.7 To ensure that all external award holders receive some form of "top-up" in recognition of their success in securing external funding

6.4.1.8 That the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies make funding



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information centrally available, in an obvious place, for students applying and looking at programs

6.4.1.9 That funding policies and regulations be standardized across the university, including policies about top-ups and rollbacks.

6.4.1.10 That master's students are included in graduate funding practices

6.4.1.11 the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies to create a transparent process for resolving funding disputes

6.4.2 The SSMU shall also advocate for any financial accessibility measures not specifically enumerated herein, but that align with the values set forth in this policy.

6.5 Pedagogy-Based Accessibility/Accessibility in the Classroom

6.5.1 In all academic and educational accessibility-related advocacy directed at the University administration, the SSMU shall advocate for the:

6.5.1.1 Implementation of a university-wide In-Course Academic Accommodations policy that shall serve to centralize existing policies, codify accessible accommodations practices, and expand the situations for which accommodations are guaranteed

6.5.1.2 Universal implementation of wait lists on all course sections where one is appropriate and able to be added

6.5.1.3 Permanent institutionalization of the First-Time Deferral Pilot Project for final examinations **in all faculties**

6.5.1.4 Revision of the current final exam conflict regulations and formal inclusion of these revised regulations into the **Policy on the Assessment of Student Learning (PASL) University Student Assessment Policy (USAP)**

6.5.1.5 Universal usage of students' preferred names and pronouns, including during convocation ceremonies

6.5.1.6 Mandatory universal accessibility of lecture recordings for all compatible

classes SSMU Policy on Accessible

Education and Academics | 6



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6.5.1.7 Universal usage of subtitles in all in-class and assigned videos

6.5.1.8 Permission and destigmatization of usage of fidget toys in the classroom
Destigmatization of the usage of fidget toys in the classroom

6.5.1.9 Permission of and destigmatization of support animals on campus

6.5.2 In all academic and educational accessibility-related advocacy directed at the University administration, the SSMU shall advocate for the **removal of:**

6.5.2.1 In-classroom bans on the use of laptops or other electronic note-taking and learning devices

6.5.2.2 Required medical notes for academic accommodations

6.5.3 The SSMU will work to ensure that the services offered by the **Student Accessibility and Achievement Office (SAA), previously the** Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD), remain effective, properly integrated into course management, and in and of themselves, accessible.

6.5.3 The SSMU shall also advocate for any pedagogical accessibility measures not specifically enumerated herein, but that align with the values set forth in this policy.

6.6 Accessibility in Academic Programming

6.6.1 In all academic and educational accessibility-related advocacy directed at the University administration, the SSMU shall advocate for the:

6.6.1.1 Expansion of courses offered at McGill that focus specifically on non-Western or Eurocentric content

6.6.1.2 Teaching of Indigenous language classes as credit courses

6.6.1.3 Ability for students to gain transfer credit or advanced academic standing for land-based Indigenous curricula

6.6.1.4 Creation of an Indigenous Studies Department

6.6.1.5 Expansion of Indigenous content within all programs at McGill

6.6.2 The SSMU shall further advocate for Francophone student rights by:

6.6.2.1 Campaigning for students' right to submit written coursework in either French or English.



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6.6.2.2 Raising awareness on the importance of comprehensive and exhaustive course outlines which include a section on Francophone rights, as required by McGill's Charter of Students' Rights.

6.6.2.3 Demanding increased transparency with respect to the grading of coursework submitted in French (i.e. ensuring a fair and competent assessment).

6.6.2.4 Encouraging lecturers to share course readings in French where they exist and are easily accessible.

6.6.3 The SSMU shall further advocate for any academic programming accessibility measures not specifically enumerated herein, but that align with the values set forth in this policy.

7. Reporting and Review

7.1 All Officers responsible for the implementation of this Policy shall report to the Legislative Council on an annual basis regarding the fulfillment of their responsibilities as outlined above.

7.2 In reviewing this policy, Officers shall commit to consulting, at a minimum: SSMU Senate Caucus, Faculty Association-level Vice President Academics (or their equivalents), SSMU Equity Committee, SSMU Indigenous Affairs Committee, SSMU Francophone Affairs Committee, SSMU Environment Committee, Quebec Public Interest Research Group (QPIRG) McGill, the Black Students' Network, Indigenous Student Alliance, Union for Gender Empowerment, Queer McGill, and Climate Justice Action McGill.

7.3 The SSMU Executive shall hold a semesterly town hall to hear student's concerns regarding academic life and this policy.