

Policy on Black Student Advancement and Inclusion

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Association étudiante de l'Université McGill
Students' Society of McGill University

Située sur les territoires traditionnels des collectivités Haudenosaunee et Anishinaabe.
Located on Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, traditional territories.

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Policy on Black Student Advancement and Inclusion

Adoption Date: February 27th, 2025

Expiry Date January 1, 2030

[Link to Motion](#)

1. Preamble

The Policy on Black Student Advancement and Inclusion aims to address the challenges Black students face within the Student Society of McGill University (SSMU) and McGill University at large. It aims to facilitate the creation and maintenance of a supportive environment for Black students while addressing key systemic barriers they face.

Per the “Leadership” section of the Preamble of the SSMU Constitution, the Society is compelled to maintain leadership in matters relating to social justice through undertaking its activities with full respect to human dignity without discrimination based on personal characteristics not limited to race, national or ethnic origin, or colour. Per the same section, the Society commits itself to groups, programs, and activities devoted to the well-being of disadvantaged groups because of these characteristics—cognisant of both direct and indirect impacts¹.

The SSMU similarly has a clear precedent of acknowledging discriminatory structure through the Legislative Council’s adoption of an anti-oppressive mandate in 1989. As descriptive in the motion: all across all its contexts of governance, functioning, and advocacy, the SSMU “*shall promote a functional anti-oppressive environment that fosters a culture of respect and facilitates our mission of service, representation, and leadership*”

Historically, Black students at McGill University have faced systemic barriers that hinder their academic success, inclusion, social experiences and opportunities. These barriers include, but are not limited to, experiences of racism and microaggressions, lack of representation within the SSMU and McGill bureaucracy and administration, and insufficient institutional support. The implementation of a

¹<https://ssmu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/The-Constitution-of-the-Students%E2%80%99-Society-of-McGill-University-2021-11-15.pdf?x74610>

Policy on Black Student Advancement and Inclusion would be designed to address these issues by fostering a campus environment that actively supports Black students, ensuring their voices are heard, and their needs are met to foster an environment of advancement for their experiences.

More than in rhetoric alone, the SSMU has a history of concretely advocating for equity and social justice issues. This commitment has been showcased through the development of formal mechanisms and funding such as the Black equity fund and Black Affairs (BA) Committee, as well as permanent part-time roles for addressing and promoting Black student equity, such as the Black Affairs Commissioner and Black Affairs Coordinator roles, in the past 5 years alone. In continuing this legacy, the Policy on Black Student Advancement and Inclusion will continue to reflect the SSMU's responsibility to provide support for Black students navigating university life, contributing towards a community which addresses key social issues and imbalances.

This policy acknowledges that promoting equity is more than a promise; it is a practice. At McGill and the SSMU, such a practice involves looking beyond surface level challenges in order to dedicate targeted material support to reduce intersectional barriers for Black students and groups.

By implementing this policy, the SSMU aims to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for the community-at-large by working collaboratively across groups and associations to better support the SSMU's Black student members of diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, geographic, or national backgrounds. Through this intersectional approach, this policy will contribute towards the academic and personal growth of the Black student members of the SSMU.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- 2.1. All members of the SSMU, including Directors, Executives, Councillors, staff, committees, affiliated groups, campaigns, and the student body at-large.
- 2.2. Activities and events hosted or promoted by the SSMU.
- 2.3. Written or graphic material published, distributed or endorsed by the Society.
- 2.4. Clubs, Services, and SSMU Representatives to Independent Student Groups.
- 2.5. Any other individuals, student groups or events relating to SSMU activities.

3. Definitions

3.1. Black Students:

A student who self-identifies as Black, African American, or of African descent, including those from the African diaspora. This can include individuals with heritage or ancestry from various regions including, but not limited to, Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, and other parts of the world where people of African descent reside

3.2. Systemic Racism:

Systemic racism is said to occur when racially unequal opportunities and outcomes are inbuilt or intrinsic to the operation of an institution's structures. Simply put, systemic racism refers to the processes and outcomes of racial inequality and inequity in life opportunities and treatment.

3.3. Microaggressions:

Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color².

3.4. Intersectionality:

Intersectionality refers to the framework for understanding how various social identities (such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability) intersect and interact to shape an individual's experiences and opportunities.

² Sue et al. (2019): <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2007-07130-001>

3.5. Systemic Barriers:

Systemic barriers are institutional and structural obstacles that perpetuate inequality and disadvantage specific groups of people.

3.6. Anti-Black Racism:

Anti-Black racism is a specific form of racial discrimination and prejudice directed against Black individuals or individuals who identify as place and communities

3.7. Black Student groups:

Any and student group under McGill faculties and SSMU that aim to serve students identifying as African, Caribbean or Black

3.8. Black Affairs Committee:

The Black Affairs (BA) Committee is a committee under the SSMU that unites the various Black student groups to foster equity and inclusion. The committee plays a role in managing the Black Equity Fund, supporting and streamlining the activities of the student groups, while fostering collectivism and collaboration among them.

3.9. Black Affairs Commissioner:

The Black Affairs (BA) Commissioner is a dedicated representative advocating for the interests of Black students at the SSMU. As chair of the Black Affairs Committee, they actively work to promote equity, inclusion, and a supportive environment for Black students on campus.

4. Policy Objectives

The Black Student Solidarity Policy aims to:

- 4.1. Promote campus wide awareness that highlight the challenges and contributions of the Black students and communities at McGill.
- 4.2. Enhance knowledge of SSMU's current support services and adapt them to better support Black students, ensuring they have access to necessary resources and assistance.
- 4.3. Act as a resource with which the BA Commissioner and other relevant stakeholders such as the Black Student Groups can consult to ensure that the initiatives outlined in this policy continue to effectively address the needs of Black students.
- 4.4. Lobby for change and advocacy within the McGill community to prioritise initiatives that support Black students and address systemic barriers
- 4.5. Ensure accountability and promote action against any injustices experienced by Black students and create formal procedures for consequences for actions that potentially harm their well-being and student experience.
- 4.6. Dedicate resources and support that help reduce intersectional barriers faced by Black students and groups, ensuring that targeted resources are available to those in need.
- 4.7. Partner with the BA Committee to develop a Black Student Leadership Development Program that include mentorship, skill building workshops and other opportunities to prepare students for leadership roles within SSMU and McGill ensuring long- term representation.

5. Context

5.1. At SSMU

5.1.1. While the SSMU has made considerable efforts in promoting diversity and inclusion through various policies, there remain specific issues that disproportionately affect Black students, necessitating more focused and targeted interventions.

5.1.2. The SSMU's existing constitution and policies that help promote diversity and inclusion have laid important groundwork in creating an equitable environment. However, these policies, while broad and inclusive, may not sufficiently address the systemic and intersectional barriers experienced by Black students. Current initiatives may lack the specificity required to effectively tackle issues such as:

- Black students often face underrepresentation in student leadership roles and decision-making processes within SSMU.
- Existing support structures may not fully cater to the unique academic and emotional needs of Black students, leading to gaps in resources and services.
- There may be unaddressed biases in SSMU's practices and programs that inadvertently perpetuate disadvantages for Black students.
- Ongoing feedback from Black students through dialogue and consultations has highlighted a range of concerns that require dedicated attention. Key issues raised include:
 - Students have reported insufficient support to their experiences, including but not limited to financial, academic and, at times, mental health support.
 - Students have reported experiencing subtle forms of racism and microaggressions that affect students' well-being and academic performance.

5.1.3. There is a clear call for increased representation and involvement of Black students in leadership and decision-making roles within SSMU. The gap between the existing policies and frameworks at SSMU and the specific needs of Black students underscores the necessity of a dedicated Policy on Black Student Advancement and Inclusion. This policy aims to bridge this gap by implementing targeted actions and resources that address these systemic and intersectional issues, ensuring adequate support and meeting current student needs.

5.2. At McGill University

5.2.1. McGill University has increasingly engaged in dialogue around racial equity and has made strides toward addressing these issues through various initiatives, including the establishment of the Black Inclusion Success and Strategic Initiatives Working Group (previously known as ABR Working Group). This working group was created in response to growing calls for systemic change and aims to address anti-Black racism through policy recommendations, awareness campaigns, and funding support.

5.2.2. This policy will be designed to complement and enhance McGill University's ongoing initiatives by providing a focused, structured approach to addressing the specific needs of Black students within the SSMU context. This policy will:



- Align with university efforts through supporting and reinforcing the university's broader goals of racial equity and inclusion by implementing targeted actions within SSMU that address gaps identified by the BISSI Working Group and other university initiatives.
- Provide a structured framework for SSMU to engage in and promote Black student solidarity, ensuring that efforts are coordinated and impactful.
- Focus on areas where university-wide initiatives may not fully address the needs of Black students, such as representation in student governance, community-building activities, etc.

6. Framework

The following standards, expectations, and guidelines are established to ensure that the goals of this policy are met effectively and sustainably.

6.1. Implementation

To facilitate the implementation of the Policy every year, the BA Commissioner will develop measurable goals towards Black student advancement and inclusion; these will help track the policy's effectiveness.

6.2. Accountability and Transparency

SSMU will commit to regularly reviewing and reporting on the progress of this policy. This includes publicizing updates, action plans, and outcomes to ensure that both SSMU and McGill University are held accountable for the commitments made to Black students.

6.3. Student-Centered Approach

All initiatives and actions taken under this policy will prioritize the needs and voices of Black students. Regular consultations and engagement with Black student groups and individuals will be conducted to ensure that their input shapes the decisions, resources, and services that emerge from this policy.

6.4. Sustainable Support Mechanisms

SSMU will implement long-term structures that provide ongoing support for Black students, rather than temporary or one-off programs. This includes the establishment of dedicated funding, mentorship networks, and advisory roles that will ensure the longevity and sustainability of the commitments made in this policy.

6.5. Continuous Improvement and Adaptation

The policy will be treated as a living document, adaptable to evolving student needs and societal changes. SSMU will review the policy and make revisions as necessary to remain aligned with best practices in racial equity and anti-racism work. This includes incorporating feedback from the Black student community and ensuring responsiveness to new challenges or gaps identified.

6.6. Collaborative Efforts

This policy encourages collaboration between SSMU, McGill University, student organizations, and external partners. Through joint initiatives and shared resources, the goals of this policy will be pursued in a collective, community-driven manner. Collaboration will also extend to cross-campus partnerships that allow for the pooling of ideas and the scaling of successful programs and practices.

6.7. Equity-Driven Resource Allocation

In order to meet the goals of this policy, SSMU will ensure that financial, personnel, and institutional resources are allocated equitably. Special attention will be given to providing sufficient funds for initiatives that support Black students, ensuring they are not left underfunded or under-resourced in comparison to other initiatives.

6.8 Capacity Building and Education

SSMU will engage in ongoing education and capacity-building efforts to increase awareness and understanding of anti-Black racism among the broader McGill community. This includes mandatory anti-racism training for staff, faculty, and student leaders and integrating anti-racism principles into leadership development programs. These trainings should be reviewed and updated annually, with a focus on both implicit and systemic microaggressions as well as practical strategies for improvements.

7. Advocacy / Promotion / Communication

7.1. University Advocacy

Building on the University's interests in advancing Black student interests through formal and informal advocacy channels, we must ensure that these efforts are aligned with broader racial equity goals. To institutionalize these advocacy efforts, the following actions will be taken:

7.1.1. The Office of the Vice-President (University Affairs or External Affairs) and Black Affairs Commissioner shall establish a formal liaison with the BISSI Committee. This liaison will promote a collaborative working relationship between the Black Affairs Committee and the BISSI Committee, ensuring that both committees are aligned in their efforts to combat anti-Black racism on campus. Regular joint meetings between these committees will be scheduled to discuss ongoing projects, share updates, and identify areas for collaboration.

7.1.2. The Black Affairs Committee, in collaboration with the BISSI working group, shall present a detailed report to the University Administration annually. This report will outline the specific projects and initiatives that the Black Affairs Committee is working on, with a focus on those that intersect with the ABR Committee's objectives. The report can also include recommendations for policy changes and new initiatives that address the needs of Black students.

7.1.3. The Office of the Vice-Presidents (UA or EA) shall ensure that all projects and initiatives related to Black student life, initiated by the SSMU or involving McGill, are developed in direct consultation with Black students and relevant stakeholders. That is, those involved in these projects must actively seek input from Black student communities and organizations at McGill. In essence, the outcomes of these consultations, overseen, if appropriate, by the VP UA and EA offices, will ensure that the University is well-informed on the needs and experiences of Black students while enabling the SSMU to fulfill its mandate of equitable representation.

7.1.4. McGill admin shall collaborate with the faculties and black student groups to ensure reach to the right demographic for events and initiatives launched.

7.2. Campus Advocacy

The following advocacy efforts on campus can be utilized to ensure broad student awareness of, understanding of, and participation in the implementation of the Policy:

7.2.1. VP External Affairs will work with the BA Commissioner to maintain an updated and accessible presence of BA on the External Affairs website. This includes direct links to the BA website, relevant funding links, and committee information reports.

7.2.2. The BA Commissioner and Coordinator shall launch awareness campaigns about this policy, with a particular focus on workshops and educational initiatives. These campaigns will aim to educate the broader campus community about the challenges faced by Black students and the importance of racial equity. Workshops will cover topics such as anti-Black racism, allyship, and intersectionality, and they will be offered regularly throughout the academic year.

7.2.3. The BA Commissioner and Coordinator will collaborate with other student organizations to host events. These events will foster a sense of community among Black students and their allies while also providing opportunities for learning and dialogue. At least 1-2 events per year will be organized, in collaboration with such equity-focused organizations.

7.2.4. The Black Affairs commissioner, in partnership with the Black Student Liaison Officer, will develop initiatives that further the policy's goal of advocacy and support for Black Students. Further this would include ensuring student groups involved have an active participation in the BISSI funding allocated towards their faculty and group.

7.2.5. The BAC, in partnership with the Equity Office, BISSI working group, Black student groups, and University, shall lead advocacy efforts around Black History Month, organising a series of events and initiatives that celebrate Black culture, history, and achievements. This may include workshops, interactive town halls, guest speaker events, and training sessions for executives and commissioners. These activities will be designed to educate the campus community and promote a deeper understanding of Black experiences and contributions.

7.2.6. The BAC, in partnership with other Black student groups, will host discussions with food, where Black students can share their experiences and provide feedback on the University's efforts to support them. These discussions will be held regularly at the BSS and will inform the University's ongoing work to improve the campus climate for Black students.

7.3. External Advocacy

7.3.1. The SSMU recognizes the importance of engaging with external partners to support broader racial equity movements and to advocate for Black student interests beyond the campus. The following actions will be taken to advance these goals:

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7.3.2. Partner with local Black organizations to support broader racial movements. These partnerships will include joint advocacy campaigns and collaborative events that promote racial justice and equity.

7.3.3. Partner with local university student unions to promote advocacy and mobilization around key issues regarding racial equity. This collaboration will include joint initiatives, shared resources, and coordinated efforts to advance racial equity at the institutional and systemic levels.

7.3.4. Actively seek opportunities to participate in broader coalitions and networks that address racial equity and promote Black student solidarity issues, both within and beyond the higher education sector. This includes joining province-wide and national efforts to combat anti-Black racism and promote the well-being and success of Black students.

8. Reporting and Accountability

8.1. The Black Affairs Commissioner in collaboration with the VP (External or University Affairs) will provide bi-annual updates to the Legislative Council on the policy's implementation and updates. The SSMU shall then ensure the report is made available to interested parties and/or stakeholders in an accessible format.