Students are the most financially invested stakeholders on this campus. Each year, the University generates over $1 billion in revenue, with more of this funding coming from students than from any other single source. Each year McMaster receives approximately 40% of its operating budget from tuition, as well as more than 7% from ancillary business units such as Hospitality and Conference Services. Both of these revenue streams are largely funded by undergraduate students, which is why the MSU believes that the University should better align its spending to reflect its role as a student-centered institution.

Later this month, the Board of Directors, on behalf of the MSU, will submit a list of budget recommendations to the University, in order for the 2016-17 budget to better reflect student priorities. The recommendations prioritize three key areas of investment for the University: financial accessibility, increased paid TA training, and increased investment in student space. We propose that some of the costs of these initiatives be defrayed by freezing the salaries of staff on the Ontario Sunshine List at inflation.

Ontario is already the most financially inaccessible province in post-secondary education. Among other financial accessibility measures, the Board of Directors that the University work with the MSU as we actively lobby the provincial government for a fully funded tuition freeze. A freeze would improve financial accessibility for students while protecting institutional excellence and program quality.

Additionally, the Board proposes that the University move its student financial assistance funding away from merit scholarships toward need-based grants. Specifically, we recommend that the University reallocate more than $1 million from the Senate Scholarships and the Hooker Scholarships, as well as over $2 million from the McMaster entrance scholarships. We propose that these funds be redirected to the McMaster bursary program, which would benefit thousands of students in financial need. The MSU believes that TAs play a vital role in education. For this reason, we believe that the University should fund a minimum of three additional hours of paid TA training. This additional training could focus on teaching quality, mental health sensitivity, and other important institutional initiatives. The increased training would cost the University $250,000, representing an increase of only 0.04% of the University’s total staffing expenses.

To pay for these initiatives, we propose that McMaster freeze the salaries of all staff on the Sunshine List: that is, all salaries over $100,000 per year would grow only at the rate of inflation. The University spends roughly $634 million per year, or 61% of its total operating expenses, on faculty/staff salaries, pensions, and benefits. Over five years, a Sunshine List salary freeze would save over $22 million, maintaining annual inflationary increases of roughly 2%. This change would prevent exorbitant salaries from monopolizing the University budget, leaving more funds available to benefit students.

The MSU’s budget submission will be available in full via msumcmaster.ca by the end of the month.