In 2010, the MSU entered into a partnership with Canadian Blood Services (CBS) through the program Partners for Life. In our second year of partnership, there has been a dramatic increase in blood donations from McMaster University. Having blood drives on campus has increased awareness about the importance of donating blood. In 2011 alone, the McMaster community donated over 1000 units of blood at clinics held at our University. We have surpassed our goal two years in a row, which illustrates strong support for blood donation amongst students, staff and faculty. However, everyone is eligible to donate blood.

As an organization that prioritizes student-centric issues, the MSU has a number of services and committees focused on educating and advocating on various social and educational issues, including blood donation. You may already be aware that there are medical and physiological restrictions in place on who can donate blood and when it can be donated. One of the reasons this has become quite controversial as of late, is not just in Canada, but across the world in the United States, Australia and various countries within the European Union – men who have sex with men (MSM).

MSM is a classification of men who engage (or have engaged in the past) in sex with other men, specifically since 1977. Individuals who participate in this behaviour are considered by organizations such as Health Canada to be at high risk for HIV/AIDS, which can be transmitted through blood transfusions. The MSM blood donor controversy is a dispute over Health Canada’s policy in continuing to refuse blood from MSM donors.

This regulation was put in place by Health Canada in 1985, but the advancement to science since that time has been great. In 2011, Canadian Blood Services – the agency that administers blood drives on behalf of Health Canada - committed to evaluating the lifetime ban on MSM donations, explaining that the policy is no longer justified. CBS has signalled their commitment to ask Health Canada to change this policy. The agency has funded a $500,000 grant to research a new policy, which could mean changing the donor criteria to focus on specific high risk sexual activities, rather than a blanket ban.

There are many lobby groups both in Canada and abroad that advocate for a change in policy, which would lift the lifetime blood ban on MSM donors. The MSU is committed to advancing our educational initiatives through leadership from the Student Health Education Centre (SHEC) and the Queen’s Students Community Centre (QSCC). A considerable amount of research has been conducted on both the limitations and necessity of blood donation. Canadian Blood Services has indicated that a change in policy is required, and we support the re-evaluation in an effort to further expand the qualified pool of blood donation candidates.

The reality is every minute of every day someone in Canada needs blood. The McMaster community, through our generous donations have signalled their commitment to this cause, and the MSU will continue to offer education on the topic, while maintaining our strong partnership with Canadian Blood Services.

MSU PARTNERSHIP CRITICAL TO INCREASING STUDY SPACE IN THODE LIBRARY

Last year when I ran for president, I focused a lot on the lack of study space at McMaster. Through the presidential election we were able to make this topic a priority for the MSU and the University. This year students have seen the results of this positive relationship through the renovations to Thode Library, and the decision to make the space 24/7 throughout exams. During the summer and first semester of this year, the bookshelves on the 2nd floor of Thode were moved and 400 additional seats were created for students. This area includes multiple power outlets and comfortable seating.

Over the coming months further renovations will take place on the 6th floor of Mills Library, moving study book stacks to the 5th floor to create additional seating. I look forward to this space being provided to students and we are preparing for the exam period during the second semester, we will be working to provide additional support for students and opening up more space.

In my view, the MSU is here to state the priorities of students and subsequently work to achieve success in addressing those concerns. A student government offers opportunities and support to students in a variety of ways. Offering services is one way the MSU can help students. I am aware of the fact that this issue is still in need of further action.

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The MSU supports Canadian Blood Services, encouraging Health Canada to re-evaluate a controversial policy put into place 27 years ago

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The President’s Page is sponsored by the McMaster Students Union. It is a space used to communicate with the student body about the projects, goals and agenda of the MSU Board of Directors.