



POLICY PAPER

Student Engagement & Retention

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Introduction

For many students, higher education is a means to opportunities for future employment and career prospects, yet many struggle with the challenges that accompany the transition to university and the four-year undergraduate experience. While the emphasis is typically placed on academics as a predictor of future prosperity and success, it is becoming increasingly evident that student engagement, both academically and non-academically, is imperative to completing one's undergraduate studies and achieving success post-graduation.

In this policy, the concept of student engagement primarily refers to active participation in purposeful activities or initiatives that lead to high-quality learning beyond the classroom. This can manifest itself through a variety of opportunities, such as service-learning, on-campus services and activities, and off-campus community engagement initiatives. Engagement is also interconnected with the concept of belonging, which refers to students' feelings of connectedness with the institution. Research suggests that building a sense of belonging or attaining "cultural capital" at one's university is a key factor in student engagement and retention.

The student drop-out rate is concerning, where currently almost 10% of first-year students do not continue onto their second-year at McMaster. For many of these students, the challenges that hinder their educational experience vary. Certain students and student groups historically have been at higher risk for dropping out due to the many barriers that put them at a disadvantage in pursuing higher education. As such, this policy aims to utilize evidence-based research to identify gaps and targeted opportunities for particular focus groups of students, including first-year students, first-generation students, racialized and marginalized students and student groups, and commuter students. Retention within the community is also discussed, with a particular emphasis on fourth-year students who often leave Hamilton after graduation due to a lack of attachment and/or job prospects.

Through this policy, the MSU advocates for greater transparency and efforts by the university towards student engagement on campus and within the broader Hamilton community. Demographic data collection is recommended as a means to identify students at greater risk of dropping out, while greater transparency of available data is recommended in order to increase accountability of the university for student retention. The organization of services available on campus must also be addressed, as their current fragmented and often redundant nature makes it difficult for students to identify the best programs suitable to their unique needs. This can be achieved partly through the centralization of opportunities and the use of technology to improve McMaster's promotional strategy with the goal of increasing student engagement.

Improving student engagement and retention at McMaster will not be an easy feat. It requires a strong commitment from partners at various levels, ranging from individual faculties to community and city partners. Engaging students to become more invested in their university and community beyond their academics presents many challenges, yet innovative solutions have been implemented successfully at universities worldwide to address particular gaps in student engagement. Many examples are highlighted in

this policy with the hope that McMaster can use models of student engagement at other universities to improve its efforts towards student retention.

For many students, McMaster is their foundational step towards building successful lives. It is imperative that the university works to identify and implement strategies that will give each and every student at McMaster equal opportunity to excel academically, socially, personally, and professionally.

Academic Retention Student Drop-Out Rates

Principle: All students should be given equal opportunity to excel academically and socially throughout their undergraduate experience.

Principle: All students at risk for not continuing their studies should have the opportunity to access supports in place tailored to their needs.

Concern: Students face a variety of individual and systemic barriers throughout their undergraduate careers which can affect persistence at McMaster.

Concern: Academic advising offices may not be adequately equipped to offer student-centered support.

Concern: McMaster is not transparent with faculty-specific statistics on dropout rates, which prevents the implementation of focused faculty-level interventions to address specific issues faced by students.

Concern: McMaster currently lacks the ability to identify trends of certain students who may be at greater risk for dropping out.

Recommendation: McMaster should release faculty-specific drop-out or completion rates in their Fact Book to increase the accountability of programs for student success and retention.

Recommendation: Staff in academic advising offices should implement strategies to promote student retention and engage in mandatory training to be able to offer adequate student support.

Recommendation: McMaster should assess the feasibility of and student comfort levels associated with the gathering of demographic data in order to identify trends and propose targeted solutions for specific at-risk groups of drop-out students.

Recommendation: McMaster should assess the feasibility of implementing technology that will help to identify students who are struggling academically through use of specific indicators.

It has been well-established in the literature that building a sense of connection to and belonging at one's institution are key components for student retention.¹ This can have important implications for student retention, especially since feelings of belonging

¹ Vallerand, Robert J., Michelle S. Fortier, and Frédéric Guay. "Self-determination and persistence in a real life setting: Toward a motivational model of high school dropout." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72, no. 5 (1997): 1161-76, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Self-determination+and+persistence+in+a+real+life+setting%3A+Toward+a+motivational+model+of+high+sc+hool+dropout>.

have been shown to influence self-efficacy, which impacts students' coping skills and willingness to remain at an institution.² The literature also suggests that when students feel alienated, they are less likely to attend class and learn.³

The risk for dropping out varies across programs. For example, research suggests that Science students are more likely to withdraw from school than those in Arts programs in their first year.⁴ However, students in Arts programs are more likely to drop out in subsequent years of schooling.⁵ There is also evidence to suggest that students in upper years drop out for different reasons than first-year students, more so for institutional than academic reasons.⁶ Drop-out rates and reasons for dropping out evidently vary by year. Despite these findings, the McMaster Fact Book published annually by the university shares student retention rates only for first-year students, failing to stratify drop-out statistics by faculty, years, or undergraduate programs.⁷

This points to the need for faculty-specific information so that programs facing greater drop-out rates can be identified and a plan of action be developed in response. In order to implement specific interventions that address student retention, it is necessary for this data to be readily accessible. Moving forward, McMaster must collect and publicly share student drop-out and transfer data separated by faculty, programs, and years in its annual Fact Book.

Another barrier to student retention is inadequate or inaccessible academic advising. The direct effects of academic advising on student drop-out rates have been widely reported in the literature.⁸ However, some students have reported that negative experiences with counsellors, such as those who encourage an individual to drop out, have led to feelings of isolation within a faculty. As such, by proactively addressing student concerns, student retention can be improved.⁹ This can be achieved by implementing strategies such as advisor-initiated outreach during peak exam times or spot-checking of student records during slower periods of the year. Student-centered support is essential, as prescriptive models of advising have been shown to be ineffective.¹⁰ The role of an academic advisor must also be clarified early on, as some students may feel the role of advisors is only to assist with course selection. As a result, it is recommended that each university faculty have a mandatory orientation session

² Hong, Barbara SS, Peter J. Shull, and Leigh A. Haefner. "Impact of perceptions of faculty on student outcomes of self-efficacy, locus of control, persistence, and commitment." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 13, no. 3 (2011): 289-309, <https://doi.org/10.2190/CS.13.3.b>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Willcoxson, Lesley, Julie Cotter, and Sally Joy. "Beyond the first-year experience: the impact on attrition of student experiences throughout undergraduate degree studies in six diverse universities." *Studies in Higher Education* 36, no. 3 (2011): 331-352, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903581533>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "McMaster University Fact Book 2017-2018," McMaster University, 2018, <https://ira.mcmaster.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Fact-Book-2018FINALEdition2.0-1.pdf>.

⁸ Drake, Jayne K. "The role of academic advising in student retention and persistence." *About Campus* 16, no. 3 (2011): 8-12, <https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.20062>.

⁹ Orablo, Sue. "The role of proactive advising in student success and retention." The EvoLLLution, last modified February 6, 2017, <https://evollution.com/attracting-students/retention/the-role-of-proactive-advising-in-student-success-and-retention/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

for academic advising for students. McMaster should also ensure adequate training for staff in order to provide student-centered solutions.

Additionally, studies have indicated that online support through learning analytics and data collection which individualize one's educational experiences can increase student success and retention.¹¹ Some of these systems involve data collection on student characteristics and activity from a university's e-learning and physical environments. Data collection related to student engagement can include card swipes into buildings and library use. Moreover, demographic data can provide insight into socioeconomic background and other factors which may place a student at higher risk for dropping out.¹² This information can be analyzed in relation to the data collected from the virtual learning environment such as log-ons to a student portal and grades.¹³ Research into such data collection has linked it to increased student success in individual courses, which then leads to a rise in overall student retention.¹⁴ With this in mind, McMaster should look into the use of demographic data collection to identify trends for certain students who may be at risk for dropping out.

McMaster currently lacks a similar technology to be able to identify students that may be at risk for dropping out. One such system, piloted at Victoria University in Melbourne, integrates an attendance tracking tool using indicators such as the amount of log-ons to a student portal in conjunction with student grades to identify students who may be at risk for dropping out.¹⁵ Professors can then set certain parameters to be able to identify which students may be in need of greater support based on their performance with the online system.¹⁶ As such, it is recommended that the university assess the feasibility of introducing technology which can identify students at risk for poor academic performance and subsequent drop-out. Consultations with teaching assistants suggest that the existing Avenue to Learn framework is able to track attendance, which could be used as a starting point from which to launch this technology.

Victoria University also gives audio and video feedback regarding assignments to help personalize interactions between students and staff and professors, a key factor in student engagement.¹⁷ A similar system implemented through Purdue has shown increased student and professor satisfaction with their courses as well as improved academic performance.¹⁸ It is therefore recommended that McMaster should assess the

¹¹ Arnold, K. E., Pistilli, M. D. "Course signals at Purdue: Using learning analytics to increase student success." ACM International Conference Proceeding Series (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1145/2330601.2330666>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Victoria university elevates student engagement and retention," Desire2Learn, last modified 2018, <https://www.d2l.com/resources/videos/victoria-university-elevates-student-engagement-and-retention>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "Victoria university elevates student engagement and retention," Desire2Learn, last modified 2018, <https://www.d2l.com/resources/videos/victoria-university-elevates-student-engagement-and-retention>.

¹⁸ Arnold, K. E., Pistilli, M. D. "Course signals at Purdue: Using learning analytics to increase student success." ACM International Conference Proceeding Series (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1145/2330601.2330666>.

feasibility of implementing and further innovating a similar kind of technology. Earlier exposure to this kind of technology is associated with greater benefits, so exposure among first-year students and other groups at risk for dropping out is imperative.

First-Year Student Retention

Principle: All incoming students should have access to necessary services, such as peer mentorship, financial relief, academic, health and wellness support, and community-building programming, to allow for a smoother transition into their undergraduate studies.

Principle: McMaster should aim to retain all students who are willing and able to carry on their studies.

Concern: Nearly ten percent of McMaster students do not re-enroll following the first year of their studies.

Concern: The transition from high school to first year presents unique financial, academic, social, and cultural challenges that can adversely influence the retention rate of students without appropriate support.

Recommendation: McMaster should expand existing university-wide and faculty-specific support services to span for the full post-secondary experience in order to provide continuity to students' academic, personal, and professional development.

Recommendation: McMaster should increase the outreach and funding of programs that focus on community development, social integration, and self-development, and help promote positive transitions of first years through services within the Student Success Centre.

Recommendation: McMaster should launch a first-year experience study to collect data on reasons for student drop-out and implement intervention strategies that target at-risk students through the Student Success Centre and other appropriate university services.

The transition from high school to first year can present unique academic and social opportunities and challenges for many students as they learn how to integrate themselves into a larger university environment. One study focussed on the first few weeks of college demonstrated that more than employment opportunities or academic adjustment, initial social adjustment was positively related to increased probability of completing a Bachelor's degree.¹⁹ Another study on first-year student engagement—defined as time spent studying, time spent in co-curricular activities, and a global measure of engagement in educational practices—found a positive relationship between student engagement and academic achievement in first year as well as persistence to second year.²⁰

¹⁹ Woosley, Sherry A. "How important are the first few weeks of college? The long term effects of initial college experiences." *College Student Journal* 37, no. 2 (2003): 201-208, <https://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=googlescholar&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA103563744&sid=googleScholar&asid=c9792ff2#>.

²⁰ Kuh, George D., Ty M. Cruce, Rick Shoup, Jillian Kinzie, and Robert M. Gonyea. "Unmasking the effects of student engagement on first-year college grades and persistence." *The Journal of Higher Education* 79, no. 5 (2008): 540-563, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2008.11772116>.

Various factors, including faculty and peer support, have been shown to significantly relate to first-year students' intention to persist and second-year retention.²¹ However, results from McMaster's 2017 National Survey of Student Engagement reveal several shortcomings in these aspects. When first-year students were asked how often they spoke with career plans with a faculty member, 43% responded "never."²² 60% also responded "never" when asked how often they have worked with a faculty member on activities other than coursework (i.e. through student groups).²³ With almost 10% of McMaster first-year undergraduate students not continuing their studies to second year, it is imperative for McMaster to take action to improve first-year student engagement and retention.²⁴

Currently, there are few resources that support students in a continuous manner during their undergraduate careers, with most services and administrative offices having segmented focuses for new students. For instance, whereas the Student Success Centre offers services such as the Undergrad Writing Centre or Peer Tutoring Network, individual program and faculty offices have similar peer mentorship and academic support services. As a result, the fragmented nature of programming available can become overwhelming for new students seeking support. This is common whether it concerns academic support, administrative support, career counselling, or mentorship. Additionally, the lack of specificity among the services offered can hinder students' ability to gain discipline-specific advice on career or professional development.

When students have interacted with academic advisors, faculty members, student services staff (i.e. career services or student activities), and other administrative staff and offices, typically around one-third report that they have had good experiences.²⁵ As such, there is clear value in improving first-year student experiences on campus through better streamlining of available services across the university. Such services should also be improved to allow for continuity beyond first year, so that students can continue to gain guidance from familiar advisors or staff as they move into the upper years of their degree. McMaster should aim to allocate funding towards programming that encourages collaboration between the Student Success Centre and faculty offices to better facilitate accessible and on-going career counselling, peer-to-peer mentorship, and continuous personal and professional development opportunities that compound on one another.

First-year student engagement can also be increased by advertising heavily during Welcome Week and early months of the fall term, as new students seek resources for support. Additionally, the orientation package that students receive from McMaster when they are accepted should include a pamphlet that clearly lists all available

²¹ Morrow, Jennifer, and Margot Ackermann. "Intention to persist and retention of first-year students: The importance of motivation and sense of belonging." *College Student Journal* 46, no. 3 (2012): 483-491, <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/prin/csj/2012/00000046/00000003/art00003>.

²² "McMaster University NSSE 2017," McMaster University, 2017, <https://ira.mcmaster.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/NSSE-2017-McMaster-Report.pdf>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "McMaster University Fact Book 2017-2018," McMaster University, 2018, <https://ira.mcmaster.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Fact-Book-2018FINALEdition2.0-1.pdf>.

²⁵ "McMaster University NSSE 2017," McMaster University, 2017, <https://ira.mcmaster.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/NSSE-2017-McMaster-Report.pdf>.

campus resources for academic support, peer support, and campus events and activities, each with short descriptions so that students are aware of what services are available for particular needs. By better advertising preventative measures, McMaster can prevent the need for increased one-on-one remedial support.²⁶

McMaster recognizes the importance of a successful first-year transition, as outlined by the first-year experience policy.²⁷ As part of the broader goal to lead students to successful career and academic futures, McMaster should collect meaningful data on students' experiences transitioning into university. This means conducting large-scale, multi-staged studies to assess the impacts of various first-year focused programming. The data collected pertaining to students' experiences with transitioning into university should also be publicly accessible in order to inform all stakeholders, including prospective students, about the opportunities and successes of the university's programming. This effort should assist in outlining existing gaps in the current programming in order to develop and implement solutions to improve the much needed social support.²⁸

First-Generation Students

Principle: All first-generation students should have equal opportunity to excel on campus without being hindered by the many barriers they typically face.

Principle: All first-generation students should feel that their unique backgrounds are both represented and acknowledged within the university.

Principle: All first-generation students should be provided with appropriate resources to become more integrated on campus and in the broader community.

Concern: First-generation students are often from low-income, minority backgrounds, which can lead to many barriers that can deter students from becoming engaged with their institutions.

Concern: First-generation students are at an increased risk of not completing a post-secondary degree.

Recommendation: McMaster should offer additional opportunities for work geared towards first-generation students through targeted opportunities within the Work-Study program.

Recommendation: The provincial government should expand the Ontario First Generation Bursary under OSAP in order to address the financial barriers first-generation students typically experience.

²⁶ Harris, P. J., S. A. Campbell Casey, T. Westbury, and G. Florida-James. "Assessing the link between stress and retention and the existence of barriers to support service use within HE." *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 40, no. 6 (2016): 824-845, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2015.1014316>.

²⁷ "Policy on the First Year Experience (Orientation and Transition) for Undergraduate Students," McMaster University Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines, <https://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/First-Year-Experience-Policy.pdf>.

²⁸ Wilcox, Paula, Sandra Winn, and Marylynn Fyvie-Gauld. "'It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people': the role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education." *Studies in higher education* 30, no. 6 (2005): 707-722, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070500340036>.

Recommendation: McMaster should develop a strategic master plan through the Student Success Centre to combat the barriers that prevent first-generation students from fully participating and engaging with activities that cultivate success in university.

At McMaster, first-generation students are defined as students whose parents or legal guardians have not attended a post-secondary institution. Studies have found first-generation students are more likely to come predominantly from backgrounds of low socioeconomic status.²⁹ These students report lower ratings of belonging, greater stress, and lower use of available campus services as compared to non-first-generation students, which can have adverse implications for student retention and completion of their post-secondary degrees.^{30,31} First-generation students are also less likely to be socially and academically engaged in their universities, and may suffer from experiencing a shift in their sense of identity from home to university.^{32,33} Research has also found that first-generation students are at a significantly increased risk of not persisting to degree attainment in post-secondary education.³⁴

In 2017-2018, first-generation students comprised almost 23% of McMaster's Fall full-time student enrolment, which suggests that a significant proportion of McMaster students may need extra support to improve their engagement and sense of belonging on campus.³⁵ A survey conducted by the Student Success Centre of 150 first-generation students in April 2018 revealed that 74% identified their common needs to include the following: financial assistance, academic support, career and education planning, social connections, and parental understanding.³⁶

Since increased financial aid has been shown to assist in the persistence of first-generation students, it is important to identify opportunities that can alleviate the

²⁹ Bui, Van T. "First-generation college students at a four-year university: Background characteristics, reasons for pursuing higher education, and first-year experiences." *College Student Journal* 36, no. 1 (2002): 3-11, <http://psycnet.apa.org/record/2002-02801-001>.

³⁰ Stebleton, Michael J., Krista M. Soria, and Ronald L. Huesman Jr. "First-generation students' sense of belonging, mental health, and use of counseling services at public research universities." *Journal of College Counseling* 17, no. 1 (2014): 6-20, <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1882.2014.00044.x>.

³¹ Costello, Margaret. "The first generation college student experience: A case study." *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice* 7, no. 1 (2016): 62, <https://doi.org/10.5430/jnep.v7n1p62>.

³² Gary R. Pike and George D. Kuh, "First- And Second-Generation College Students: A Comparison of Their Engagement and Intellectual Development," *Journal of Higher Education* 76, no. 3 (2005): 276-300, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2005.11772283>.

³³ Banks-Santilli, Linda. "The unique challenges of a first-generation college student." Quartz, published June 3, 2015, <https://qz.com/418695/the-unique-challenges-of-a-first-generation-college-student/>.

³⁴ Chen, Xianglei, and C. Dennis Carroll. "First-Generation Students in Postsecondary Education: A Look at Their College Transcripts. Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis Report. NCES 2005-171." *National Center for Education Statistics* (2005), <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005171.pdf>.

³⁵ "McMaster University Fact Book 2017-2018," McMaster University, 2018, <https://ira.mcmaster.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Fact-Book-2018FINALEdition2.0-1.pdf>.

³⁶ "First Generation Student." McMaster University Student Success Centre, last modified 2018, <https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/academic-support/first-generation-student/>.

financial stress faced by first-generation students.^{37,38} By offering opportunities to relieve students of their financial distress and addressing other known determinants of success, McMaster can increase the overall engagement of first-generation students. Thus, creative solutions can be achieved through the university's Work-Study program, currently offered to students under the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). This may manifest through job postings that are exclusively available to students who are first-generation and of low-income in order to ensure there is an opportunity to offset costs of university tuition and living. McMaster can further assist students through expanding its First Generation Bursary program by advocating to the provincial government for increased funding under the OSAP First Generation Bursary, which currently only amounts to a maximum of \$3,500 for students and is also dependent on the university's distribution of the funding.³⁹

Additionally, first-generation-specific programming is currently facilitated through the Student Success Centre with one full-time staff member holding this responsibility as a role beyond their primary role as a career advisor. With a team of student staff and volunteers, there are events aimed towards supporting first-generation students. Two sets of survey data with the Student Success Centre measured that in the Winter 2017 term, 42% of first-generation respondents answered that they had not engaged in any programming facilitated by the Student Success Centre, with this increasing to 60% in the Winter 2018 term.⁴⁰ In these data sets, roughly 75% of first-generation students indicated that they believe they have unique needs from their peers who are not first-generation students.⁴¹

While this data have not been tested for significance, there is a clear need for McMaster to address the factors that these students have indicated as priorities. The top five most common needs identified by respondents in order of response frequency are assistance with: career advice (78%), education planning (73%), paying for university (69%), managing personal finances (56%), and helping parents/guardians understand the realities of university such as stress, cost, workload, student support, and extra-curriculars (55%).⁴²

Although many students indicate that they have unique needs, 42% of students have also indicated that they would not be more likely to access specific resources and/or events simply because they are targeted to first-generation students.⁴³ As such, McMaster should dedicate a strategic plan for the development of new retention strategies aimed specifically at first-generation students. For example, Missouri State University (MSU) used the results of their 2012 National Survey on Student

³⁷ Lohfink, Mandy Martin, and Michael B. Paulsen. "Comparing the determinants of persistence for first-generation and continuing-generation students." *Journal of College Student Development* 46, no. 4 (2005): 409-428, <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2005.0040>.

³⁸ Somers, Patricia, Shawn R. Woodhouse, and James E. Cofer Sr. "Pushing the boulder uphill: The persistence of first-generation college students." *Naspa Journal* 41, no. 3 (2004): 418-435, <https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.1353>.

³⁹ "Ontario First Generation Bursary." Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, accessed October 25, 2018, <https://www.osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPPortal/en/A-ZListofAid/PRDR017895.html>.

⁴⁰ "First Generation Survey." McMaster Student Success Centre, 2017-2018 (unpublished).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Engagement (NSSE) to identify patterns and trends in first generation student success.⁴⁴ One of their findings was that first-generation students reported their overall experience as lower than non-first generation students. As a result, in 2014, MSU began reporting and sharing first-generation data (i.e. demographics, retention and graduation rates, etc.), with findings revealing a 10% lower rate of retention for first-generation students as compared to non-first-generation. The university subsequently implemented initiatives beginning in 2014-2015, including the administration of a First-Year Foundations Peer Leader program and regular surveys throughout the year, and saw an increase in first-generation student retention from 72% in 2014-2015 to 80.6% in 2015-2016.⁴⁵

Similarly, University of California San Diego, in order to improve the “cultural capital” of first-generation students, recently rolled out a program that pairs them with peer and professional “success coaches,” who use regular check-ins to provide first-generation students with tips such as studying methods, academic opportunities, and upcoming deadlines.⁴⁶ This program has also found to increase academic and student satisfaction rates. In fact, after merely two years of its implementation, the university reported that students who actively participated had higher grade point averages and fewer incidences of academic probation than students who did not.⁴⁷

Both of these examples point to the importance for McMaster and the Student Success Centre to take on the responsibility of further studying the experiences of first-generation students at McMaster in order to develop more sustainable and impactful programming that can better address the key issues they face and improve their retention and engagement on campus.

Commuter Students

Principle: The distance from campus faced by commuter students should not negatively impact their sense of belonging on the university campus.

Principle: All commuter students should have equitable and accessible opportunities to engage with the greater McMaster community.

Concern: The distance of commuter students from campus can prevent them from developing social connections or building a sense of belonging on campus.

Concern: Feeling disconnected and disengaged from campus can increase the risk of dropping out among commuter students.

Recommendation: All McMaster academic staff, such as professors and teaching assistants, as well as advisors and representatives of campus services should actively promote

⁴⁴ Darabi, Rachele, Kelly Wood, Tracey Glaessgen, and Mark Biggs. “First-Generation Strategies to Improve Student Success and Retention.” Missouri State University, published February 13, 2017, <http://sc.edu/fye/events/presentation/annual/2017/handouts/CI-187%20First%20Generation%20Strategies%20to%20Improve%20Student%20Success%20and%20Retention.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Freeling, Nicole. “Cracking the code on first-gen college student success.” University of California, published July 31, 2018, <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/cracking-code-first-gen-college-student-success>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

opportunities in an effort to engage commuter students on campus and within the Hamilton community.

Recommendation: McMaster should create a centralized social hub for commuter students in order to mitigate the disconnect between commuter students and the campus.

Recommendation: The Off-Campus Resource Centre (OCRC) should work to more effectively promote campus opportunities to commuter students in an effort to increase social integration of commuter students at McMaster.

Recommendation: The OCRC should work to increase resources for commuter students as well as off-campus students.

It is suggested that students' sense of belonging within the university campus is one of the most important factors affecting drop-out and transfer rates.⁴⁸ Belonging can be defined as the level of connection a student personally feels with the institution, as well as the general experiences of different identities in relation to the large-scale community beyond the university campus. This sense of belonging is essential to the satisfaction, well-being, and retention of students. In the most recent Your City Survey, results found that 52% of commuter students at McMaster that completed the survey felt they either did not want, or did not have any reason to remain on the campus after their classes had finished.⁴⁹ This is concerning, especially because increased engagement further helps to foster a better sense of belonging among students, and in turn can raise voluntary engagement from students.

While engaging and retaining students at a university is a continuous process that requires fostering a sense of belonging among students, commuter students are at greater risk of feeling disconnected from their university. More specifically, out-of-city commuters often feel disconnected from the surrounding campus community. A sense of community is largely fostered through and requires feelings of membership, integration within the community, as well as influence over outcomes within the community. As students living in on-campus and near campus neighbourhoods are consistently in close proximity with other students and the McMaster campus, it enables them to develop a sense of identity and belonging on campus and within Hamilton. Conversely, as commuter students often feel disengaged or do not identify with their university and the city that it is located in, it subsequently has an adverse influence on their retention rate, thereby increasing their risk of dropping out.⁵⁰ Thus, it is imperative that commuter students should be given equal opportunity to build meaningful connections with other students, faculty members, and the broader community in Hamilton.

⁴⁸ Thomas, Liz. "Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change." *Paul Hamlyn Foundation* 100 (2012), <https://www.phf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/What-Works-report-final.pdf>.

⁴⁹ "Your City Survey." McMaster University, 2017 (unpublished).

⁵⁰ Thomas, Liz. "Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change." *Paul Hamlyn Foundation* 100 (2012), <https://www.phf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/What-Works-report-final.pdf>.

A Toronto study found that commuter students tend to strategically pick courses in order to minimize time commuting.⁵¹ Commuter students often grouped their classes into a few days of the week, which minimizes the time that they are able and willing to spend on campus and consequently has a negative impact on their engagement with the university. The study demonstrated that students felt adversely impacted by the length of their commutes, feeling as though they have significantly less time to take part in social events, clubs and extracurricular activities. Due to the time spent away from campus, commuter students often hold jobs, gym memberships, and other daily and weekly activities away from campus. On average, commuter students are more likely to work more hours a week than their non-commuter peers. This often places much of a commuter students' identity, as well as their social support systems, farther from campus. Thus, it is vital for McMaster to develop initiatives targeted towards improving the sense of belonging for commuter students through better academic and social integration.

Research found that commuter students are as equally engaged in academics as non-commuter students.⁵² Academic integration and in-class time becomes an important platform that individual faculties can use to engage with commuter students. Commuter students benefit immensely from interactive learning, often referred to as student-centred learning. This entails the use of discussion and group learning as a basis for material taught in class. Through a model of student-centred learning, students are given a space to have conversations with peers, and engage more directly with course material.⁵³ This can play a role in increasing student motivation and can help students feel more comfortable in their academic environment.⁵⁴ As active engagement is important to the connection of students to their peers and their university experiences, it is imperative that commuter students are able to engage with active learning environments. McMaster should encourage the integration of interactive learning within its classrooms, as it is an effective strategy to increase a sense of importance and belonging among commuter students, as well as promote important engagement skills among students.⁵⁵

There are also important strategies for social integration of commuter students outside of the academic sphere. Due to the disconnect commuter students often feel, research recommends the creation of centralized hubs for commuter students on campuses.⁵⁶

⁵¹ "An overview of early findings." StudentMoveTO, published April 2016, http://www.studentmoveto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/StudentMoveTO.Handout_4Uni.v2.pdf.

⁵² Nelson, Danielle, Kaustav Misra, Gail E. Sype, and Wayne Mackie. "An Analysis of the Relationship between Distance from Campus and GPA of Commuter Students." *Journal of International Education Research* 12, no. 1 (2016): 37-46, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1088600>.

⁵³ Thomas, Liz. "Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change." *Paul Hamlyn Foundation* 100 (2012), <https://www.phf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/What-Works-report-final.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Bloomquist, Eric S. "Developing a sense of belonging for commuter students: A mixed methods study." *University of Nebraska Education Department of Student Research*, (2014), <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsedaddiss/177/>.

⁵⁵ Nelson, Danielle, Kaustav Misra, Gail E. Sype, and Wayne Mackie. "An Analysis of the Relationship between Distance from Campus and GPA of Commuter Students." *Journal of International Education Research* 12, no. 1 (2016): 37-46, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1088600>.

⁵⁶ Burlison, Mary Beth. "Nonacademic commitments affecting commuter student involvement and engagement." *New Directions for Student Services* 2015, no. 150 (2015): 27-34, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20124>.

These hubs should work to address challenges to social integration in commuter student experiences, as well as actively promote opportunities for involvement within the university. The importance of a centralized social hub for commuter is an important way to build membership and identity with the campus. University College, a college for students at the University of Toronto, established a commuter student centre on the campus.⁵⁷ It is built similarly to a residence common area with a kitchenette, a lounge, a study space, as well as a group study. McMaster holds a similar program, the Mac/One program, run by the Housing and Conference services.⁵⁸ This pairs first-year student to a residence building and gives first-year students access to a home base on campus. As such, it is recommended that a similar program be designed for commuter students in all years so that they can also have access to a home base on campus.

While various programs exist within the McMaster community to foster social integration among commuter students, their lack of centralization as well as a lack of promotion may adversely impact the engagement of commuter students. The Off-Campus Resource Centre (OCRC) can work to bring off-campus and commuter students together to encourage social bonds. Additionally, the OCRC primarily focuses on off-campus housing.⁵⁹ With no specific resource focused on commuter students, unlike the Commuter Student Centre at the University of Toronto, it is recommended that the Off-Campus Resource Centre be expanded to include resources for commuter students across all years, especially those who live outside of Hamilton. In order to be representatives of off-campus and commuter student needs, it is important that the OCRC promotes opportunities for social integration of commuter students within the broader McMaster community.

Racialized and Marginalized Students and Student Groups

Principle: Marginalized student groups should have equitable access to student success and satisfaction on campus, in lieu of the existence of structural barriers faced by marginalized students and student groups.

Concern: The existence of institutional barriers to engagement faced by racialized and marginalized students and groups can negatively affect student satisfaction.

Concern: An inhibited sense of belonging within the university and community can negatively impact student success and satisfaction.

Concern: Due to structural barriers, marginalized and racialized students are less likely to interact with academic faculty.

Concern: Racialized and marginalized student groups face disproportionate amounts of drop-out rates.

⁵⁷ "Commuter Student Centre" University College, accessed October 25, 2018, <https://www.uc.utoronto.ca/csc>.

⁵⁸ "Everything You Need to Know About Mac/One." McMaster University Housing & Conference Services, accessed October 25, 2018, <https://housing.mcmaster.ca/living-off-campus/mac-one/>.

⁵⁹ "Off-Campus Resource Centre." McMaster University, accessed October 25, 2018, <https://macoffcampus.mcmaster.ca>.

Recommendation: The Equity and Inclusion Office should work to foster more open and substantive communication between academic faculty and marginalized and racialized student groups at McMaster through increased inclusive social and academic workshops.

Recommendation: All student-facing staff and faculty members should receive anti-oppressive practices training to be more cognizant of the structural barriers that racialized and marginalized student groups face in order to achieve more effective and beneficial engagement.

Recommendation: McMaster should incorporate Prior-Learning Assessments, in an effort to bridge the gap between marginalized and non-marginalized students in regards to institutionalized learning and engagement, through encouraging, recognizing and legitimizing non-institutional forms of knowledge.

Fostering a sense of belonging for students on campus is essential to the success and satisfaction of student lives, positively impacting student retention rates.⁶⁰ The positive integration of students in both the academic and social landscape is one of the greater indicators of student retention. However, marginalized and racialized student groups have historically faced barriers of structural and institutionalized discrimination. The historical and cultural development of university institutions work to the privilege of majority groups in society, and can be difficult for racialized and marginalized students to navigate. They are faced with microaggressions, systemic barriers to social integration. These negatively affect their level of engagement with the university and the broader community, which in turn increases their risk for dropping out.

The under-representation of marginalized and racialized identities within academic faculty can deter marginalized students from engaging with their professors, teaching assistants and other faculty members.⁶¹ Open communication is imperative to increasing academic integration of marginalized and racialized students, which can subsequently raise student belonging and retention. Studies find that marginalized and racialized students often face barriers to open communication with predominantly white, cis-gendered male staff.⁶²

For this reason, equity-based practices should be instilled in order to effectively increase the sense of comfort and belonging of marginalized students and student groups. It is important for faculty and university staff to understand the role they can play in counteracting structural barriers faced by marginalized student groups.⁶³ An increased awareness of social inequalities is best fostered through proper training. The Equity and Inclusion Office should work to develop safe spaces created for the purpose of increasing quality engagement between academic staff and racialized and

⁶⁰ Thomas, Liz. "Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change." *Paul Hamlyn Foundation* 100 (2012), <https://www.phf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/What-Works-report-final.pdf>.

⁶¹ Blume, Amabda K. "Diversity-Related Experiences and Academic Performance Among Ethnic Minority College Students." *Utah State University* (2016), <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/5089/>.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Harper, Shaun R. "Race-conscious student engagement practices and the equitable distribution of enriching educational experiences." *Liberal Education* 95, no. 4 (2009): 38-45, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ871320>.

marginalized students. Alongside this, all student-facing staff should participate in anti-oppressive practices training.⁶⁴ By helping professors better understand the experiences of marginalized student groups and identify best practices in engaging with marginalized students, this will lead to more substantive communication between faculty and marginalized students, a key factor to instilling identity-conscious equity, and increasing engagement and retention.⁶⁵

Engaging and retaining marginalized students also involves acknowledgement of individual differences, such as differences in experiences based on intersecting identities. However, there is a lack of opportunity that allows marginalized students to bridge their lives as students with their social experiences. McMaster should consider the adoption of Prior-Learning Assessments (PLA), alternatively known as Recognition of Prior-Learning Methods. PLAs are created in an effort to foster academic and social integration of students within the academic landscape.⁶⁶ PLAs allow students to bring forward prior formal and non-formal knowledge to an application process, where the institution is then able to assess whether this knowledge is sufficient to replace a pre-existing course or credit. This serves as an important acknowledgement of institutionalized barriers to education, as well as legitimizing non-formal means of education.

To increase the effectiveness of all presented recommendations, it is imperative to reiterate the importance of demographic data collection. In order to better understand gaps in student satisfaction and belonging for marginalized and racialized students, as well as in an effort to create more tailored and effective retention strategies, McMaster should move towards effective demographic data collection.

Graduating Students: Post-Graduation

Principle: All graduating students should be able to access resources to secure meaningful post-graduate education or professional opportunities in Hamilton.

Principle: All students should feel a sense of belonging within the city that goes beyond education and employment.

Principle: McMaster and the City of Hamilton should strive to retain all graduating students who are willing and able to pursue a career within Hamilton.

Concern: Graduating students may not be exposed to professional recruitment opportunities that offer a successful transition into a relevant field of work.

Concern: Many graduating students feel that work opportunities within Hamilton are not available due to a lack of promotion.

⁶⁴ Pierre, Danielle. "365 Days of Black Education," Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, published February 29, 2016, https://www.ousa.ca/blog_365_days_of_black_education.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Rogers, Rhianna C., and Michele Forte. "Effectively Engaging Marginalized Students in Prior Learning Assessment: A Case Study." *PLA Inside Out: An International Journal on Theory, Research and Practice in Prior Learning Assessment* 5 (2016), <https://plainsideout.org/index.php/home/article/view/91>.

Concern: Students with negative experiences related to issues such as safety and affordability of student housing are less likely to desire to work and live within Hamilton after their graduation.

Concern: Students who face financial barriers and do not acquire successful transitions into their relevant field of work post-graduation are particularly at risk of experiencing financial distress.

Concern: Many graduating students have expressed a desire to remain in Hamilton only if employment opportunities are available, rather than out of a sense of community or belonging.

Recommendation: The City of Hamilton should address efforts to improve student engagement and retention through the Hamilton Youth Strategy and the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Task Force.

Recommendation: McMaster should create more high-impact career-development programming for graduating students through better integration of the Student Success Centre with individual career services offices across faculties.

Recommendation: The City of Hamilton should work to better advertise job opportunities to graduating students via career fairs, as well as develop tangible goals with the university to increase retention rates of students within the community.

According to the most recent Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey (OPSSS), 71% of McMaster students indicated that they do not plan to work in Hamilton in the year after graduation.⁶⁷ Additionally, based on the results of the most recent Your City Survey, students have slightly improved their perceptions of Hamilton as a city to work or study in following their undergraduate degrees, with 49% of students indicating that they would consider remaining in Hamilton, an increase from 40% in 2015.^{68,69} However, one-third of the survey participants responded that their decision to remain in Hamilton after graduation depended on several factors such as safety, affordable housing, and post-graduation career opportunities. Many also indicated that deterrents to remaining in Hamilton include the lack of opportunities to grow, as well as a lack of attachment to the city.

In the Your City Survey, 95% of students indicated that affordability of housing is important to their decision to live in Hamilton and 92% indicated that they would be interested in living in Hamilton after graduation provided that employment opportunities are available.⁷⁰ Thus, there is clearly a gap that needs to be addressed in order to incentivize students to remain in Hamilton. This is especially important since retention of graduates within a city is shown to correlate with the strength of its

⁶⁷ "Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey." McMaster University, 2017 (unpublished).

⁶⁸ "Your City Survey." McMaster University, 2017 (unpublished).

⁶⁹ "Your City Survey." McMaster University, 2016, <https://www.msumcmaster.ca/advocacy/policies/research-reports>.

⁷⁰ "Your City Survey." McMaster University, 2017 (unpublished).

economy; this is related to the opportunities available in these cities and the career progression that they offer to graduating students.⁷¹

The City of Hamilton released their Economic Development strategy for 2016-2020 and included the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Task Force to address some concerns surrounding employment and economic development.⁷² In this, the City could have included the development of an action item that addresses the gap between University-based and city-based efforts to retain students in Hamilton. In the 2010-2015 Economic Development Strategy, the City of Hamilton proposed the establishment of the Mayor's Student Advisory Committee based on the Ontario Undergraduate Students Alliance Municipal Affairs research, yet this never saw fruition.⁷³ Given that more than 60% of McMaster Students attend from outside of Hamilton, addressing the issue of student retention in the city must still be a top priority.⁷⁴ New to Hamilton is the Hamilton Youth Strategy, a project aimed at the engagement of youth between the ages of 14-29.⁷⁵ Through this project, which involves numerous agencies in the city, the City can engage specifically with McMaster students and employment agencies to address the identified needs for retention of post-graduates.⁷⁶ In particular, the City must ensure that student employment is a priority as it moves forwards with consultations within the planning stage of its Youth Strategy in order to highlight the needs of McMaster students to remain in Hamilton beyond their undergraduate careers.

In order to incentivize the 20% of students who indicated they would not opt to live in Hamilton following their graduation, McMaster should work alongside city partners to better advertise the opportunities within the city.⁷⁷ 30% of students indicated that there is a lack of advertising with regards to co-op opportunities, volunteer placements, and internships within the Hamilton community, all of which are fundamental to developing connections to the community.^{78,79} Additionally, 16% of respondents to the OPSSS indicated that employment opportunities need the most improvement.⁸⁰ However, Workforce Planning Hamilton's Labour Market stated that in 2015, of the 24,660 vacant job postings online, 5439 job postings were for university-educated individuals. This clearly demonstrates that there needs to be a stronger connection between students and employers within the city.

⁷¹ Piazza, Gabriele. "Student flock to cities - but how can they retain graduates?" CityMetric, published November 27, 2017, <https://www.citymetric.com/politics/students-flock-cities-how-can-they-retain-graduates-3508>.

⁷² "Economic Development Strategy 2016-2020." City of Hamilton, 2016, <http://www.investinhamilton.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Hamilton-2016-2020-Ec-Dev-Action-Plan.pdf>.

⁷³ "Economic Development Strategy 2010-2015" City of Hamilton, 2010, <http://www.investinhamilton.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Hamilton-EcDev-Strategy2010.pdf>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Youth Strategy." City of Hamilton, 2018. <https://www.hamilton.ca/city-initiatives/strategies-actions/youth-strategy>

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ "Your City Survey." McMaster University, 2017 (unpublished).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Cnaan, Ram A. et al. "Motivations and benefits of student volunteering: Comparing regular, occasional, and non-volunteers in five countries." *Departmental Papers (SPP)*, (2010), https://repository.upenn.edu/spp_papers/153/.

⁸⁰ "Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey." McMaster University, 2017 (unpublished).

Additionally, 42% of fourth-year students who responded to the NSSE responded “probably yes” when asked if they would attend McMaster again if they could start over, with 13% responding “probably no.”⁸¹ This suggests that there is room for improvement in the experiences of students through their undergraduate studies. The City of Hamilton and McMaster must act as catalysts to retain the skills that undergraduate students develop over the course of their education and engagement within Hamilton. McMaster should thus encourage Faculty Career, Co-op and Experiential offices to collaborate with the City of Hamilton through the Job Portals available on OscarPlus. Once job postings have been made available to students, adequate resources must be utilized to promote these opportunities effectively to students on campus. Using social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and Youtube appropriately can aid in producing increased engagement with students who are exploring opportunities to live and work in Hamilton. Capitalizing on the centrality of OscarPlus should be a priority for the Student Success Centre so that McMaster can enhance opportunities for students to seek work in Hamilton following graduation.

On-Campus Engagement: Services & Faculties University Offices and Inter-Faculty Engagement

Principle: All students should be aware of and have easy accessibility to available resources, services, and courses on campus.

Concern: Existing support services at McMaster, including academic, health-related, or faculty offices, are often underutilized by students due to a lack of awareness.

Concern: A lack of collaboration between faculties on campus hinders students from engaging with students from a diversity of academic backgrounds.

Recommendation: Faculty offices should gather student perspectives about improvements to academic and social supports (i.e. workshops) to ensure that students are offered appropriate services matched to their needs and interests.

Recommendation: McMaster should allocate increased funding towards interfaculty collaboration through establishing a grant program.

Recommendation: There should be more communication across faculty offices of their services, such as research opportunities, to provide greater opportunity for collaboration between students enrolled in different programs.

While university offices are established for the well-being of students, the difference in services offered across these offices can lead to differences in the types and amounts of opportunities available to students in different programs. All students should be aware of and have equal accessibility to available resources, services, and courses available on campus. However, students are often unaware of the services and courses available to them, which may prevent them from being able to access the appropriate resources necessary to fulfill their learning goals. The Faculty of Health

⁸¹ “McMaster University NSSE 2017,” McMaster University, 2017, <https://ira.mcmaster.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/NSSE-2017-McMaster-Report.pdf>.

Sciences website currently has a list of all courses with their respective course outlines on one page.⁸² Such centralized information should be standardized across all faculties. As well, all undergraduate programs should be conducting annual or biannual program reviews that gather student input about services offered so that they can best incorporate student perspectives and match services to student needs.

Interdisciplinary learning is also essential to student engagement as it provides an opportunity for students to gain more diverse perspectives on key societal issues, as well as build a stronger culture of collaboration on campus. Currently at Harvard University, collaboration between different university institutions is promoted through allocated funding.⁸³ Students and faculty members are able to apply for a grant towards the creation of interfaculty initiatives, such as research working groups or conferences.

McMaster can employ a similar process by allocating money to fund startup projects between different faculties. Currently, at a university program level, interfaculty collaboration has also seen improvements with the establishment of the Integrated Biomedical Engineering & Health Sciences program or the Integrated Business and Humanities program.^{84,85} However, students not enrolled in these programs are at a disadvantage, and should instead have the opportunity to participate in projects and initiatives that exist as partnerships between faculties. These projects can be similar to the IMPACT (Interdisciplinary, Mentorship, Practice, Applied, Community, Transformative) Initiative on campus, which is an interdisciplinary collaboration that has brought together undergraduate and graduate students from Engineering, Biology/Science, Occupational Therapy and Medicine, as well as McMaster alumni, community healthcare partners, and volunteer clients since 2011.⁸⁶ In 2016, the IMPACT team presented a poster on the successful implementation of large-scale partnerships.⁸⁷ Faculties across McMaster could leverage the experience of the IMPACT team, for example, to increase interfaculty partnerships on campus in order to enable more students across faculties to engage and work with one another.

Student Success Centre

Principle: All students should be aware of and provided with the resources to ensure their academic and non-academic success on campus.

Principle: Volunteer mentorship opportunities should be available to both interested mentors and mentees to help enrich the experiences of both upper-year and first-year students

⁸² "Course Outlines," McMaster Bachelors of Health Sciences (Honours) Program, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://bhsc.mcmaster.ca/course-outline/>.

⁸³ "Provost Fund for Interfaculty Collaboration," Harvard University, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://provost.harvard.edu/provost-fund-interfaculty-collaboration>.

⁸⁴ "Integrated Biomedical Engineering & Health Sciences." McMaster University, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.eng.mcmaster.ca/ibiomed>.

⁸⁵ "Future Students." McMaster Integrated Business & Humanities, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://future.mcmaster.ca/programs/ibh/>.

⁸⁶ "The IMPACT Initiative." McMaster Faculty of Engineering, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.eng.mcmaster.ca/programs/impact>.

⁸⁷ Kajiura, Lovaye, Elizabeth Hassan, Robert Fleisig, and Brenda Vrkljan. "Implementing Partnerships that have IMPACT." *Research on Teaching & Learning Conference 2017*, 2017, https://www.eng.mcmaster.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/impact_abstract_1.pdf.

Concern: Currently, services at the Student Success Centre, including Academic Coaching and the Undergrad Writing Centre, are being underutilized.

Concern: There are a limited number of positions available and a highly competitive application process for students who wish to mentor lower-year students.

Recommendation: The Student Success Centre should conduct a comprehensive year-end review and publicize its results annually in order to analyze the use of its support services, as well as to determine necessary improvements that can benefit individual students.

Recommendation: The Student Success Centre should commit to creating more Student Success Leader positions.

The Student Success Centre offers a variety of academic support, personal growth, and professional development services that many students do not utilize.⁸⁸ At the University of Calgary, to improve utilization of similar services, a peer volunteer program was established where students can volunteer their time to assist students in a variety of resources.⁸⁹ These students also provide a perspective to staff members about where improvements can be made to their Success Centre.⁹⁰ Conversely, existing support services at McMaster, including academic, health-related, or faculty offices, are often underutilized by students due to a lack of awareness. In fact, volunteer experiences with the Student Success Centre's Academic Coach program have shown that a very low number of students actually ask for help, despite university-wide surveys demonstrating that students believe they would benefit from more academic and non-academic supports.⁹¹

The Student Success Centre should advertise their services more efficiently by targeting resources that would most benefit students in certain years. This can be achieved through a more comprehensive year-end review to survey student use of academic and professional services and supports in order to identify gaps and opportunities in the services currently offered. As well, student use of these services is often not known publicly, which may potentially mean that resources are not being targeted to the right needs. As such, the Student Success Centre should publicly publish the results of such a comprehensive year-end review in order to be more transparent in identifying and implementing program recommendations based on student input.

Peer mentors can also be a very valuable asset to students who are struggling, and have been identified as a key determinant in student retention, as well as personal and professional development.⁹² Peer mentees benefit from these relationships through improved academic performance and enhanced social integration, while mentors are

⁸⁸ "Home - Student Success Centre." McMaster Student Success Centre, accessed November 1, 2018, <https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/>.

⁸⁹ "Peer Helpers." University of Calgary Student Success Centre, accessed November 1, 2018, https://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/contact_us/peer_helpers.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ "McMaster University NSSE 2017," McMaster University, 2017, <https://ira.mcmaster.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/NSSE-2017-McMaster-Report.pdf>.

⁹² "Why is peer mentoring important?" University of Louisville, last updated 2018, <https://louisville.edu/graduate/mentorcenter/for-students/why-is-peer-mentoring-important>.

able to improve interpersonal skills.⁹³ Having recently gone through similar experiences, peer mentors are uniquely situated to be able to offer support to younger students.⁹⁴ Students are concerned, however, that there is a lack of access to mentorship positions on campus. The Student Success Centre offers Student Success Leader positions, which gives students the opportunity to develop leadership skills and engage in professional development activities by providing support to other students. The SSC website states that over 300 students apply to about 170 positions.⁹⁵ This makes the application process highly competitive to become a volunteer. Thus, it is recommended that the Student Success Centre work on increasing the amount of these positions as students should not be turned away from positive and mutually beneficial volunteer opportunities.

Intra-Faculty Engagement

Principle: Faculty members should be more engaged in the student experience.

Principle: Students can benefit from greater interaction with faculty members, typically through a mentorship role, beyond the classroom.

Principle: All students should have access to student spaces on campus where they can study, engage in discourse with classmates, and relax.

Concern: There are currently a lack of formal programs on campus that enable professors to mentor students.

Concern: There is a lack of transparency regarding the use of teaching and learning grants awarded to faculty members at McMaster.

Concern: Students often feel a sense of disconnect or lack of belonging due to limited student spaces and buildings dedicated to specific faculties on campus.

Recommendation: McMaster should consult faculty members for feedback on improving faculty-student engagement.

Recommendation: McMaster should assess the feasibility of implementing a mentorship program between professors and students.

Recommendation: McMaster should publish data on how teaching and learning grants are used in their annual Fact Book.

Recommendation: McMaster should consult individual faculties and faculty societies at McMaster as stakeholders in the development of new buildings on campus to ensure there are spaces dedicated to their students.

The feelings of inclusion fostered by engagement with one's faculty are imperative to student retention. When students feel connected, respected, and included in their

⁹³ Leidenfrost, B. et. al. "Peer mentoring styles and their contribution to academic success among mentees: A person-oriented study in higher education." *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning* 19(2011), pp. 347-364, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2011.597122>.

⁹⁴ Williams-Nickelson, Carol. "The benefits of peer mentoring." American Psychological Association, accessed November 3, 2018, <https://www.apa.org/gradpsych/2007/11/matters.aspx>.

⁹⁵ "Leadership Development." McMaster Student Success Centre, last updated 2018, <https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/personal-growth/leadership-development/>.

environment, it fosters a stronger connection to an institution.⁹⁶ Research shows that by being challenged and provided with the appropriate amount of support, university students are motivated to reach their potential.⁹⁷ High-quality student-centered learning and teaching has been shown to be a key component of preventing student drop-out.⁹⁸

As the amount of students in large classes increases, students may begin to feel a disconnect with their professors. There is extensive literature to suggest that when faculty members take an interest in students' academic progress, the end result is increased student satisfaction and aspiration towards further career development.⁹⁹ In some instances, student-faculty interaction has a greater influence on student social-emotional functioning than academic performance.¹⁰⁰ The effects of informal social interactions have also been shown to increase student persistence at an institution.¹⁰¹ Student-faculty mentorships create relationships that are mutually beneficial for staff and students, which can lead to increased academic performance and retention.¹⁰² This is a partnership in which faculty can provide advice to students in any year of university and provide guidance on academic, professional and social issues.

Even with this research, studies show that professors only spend between two to six percent of their time mentoring students, and there is currently a lack of mentorship opportunities between students and faculty members at McMaster.¹⁰³ In order to implement such a system, it would be essential to define the mentor role and set expectations, determining whether the mentorship would relate to research or teaching.¹⁰⁴ Through adequate student and faculty consultation, the nature of the mentorship, either formal or informal, must be defined, and the necessary resources to implement such a system must be identified.¹⁰⁵ Ryerson University, for example, conducted consultations with professors to improve student engagement with course

⁹⁶ Vallerand, Robert J., Michelle S. Fortier, and Frédéric Guay. "Self-determination and persistence in a real life setting: Toward a motivational model of high school dropout." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72, no. 5 (1997): 1161-76, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Self-determination+and+persistence+in+a+real+life+setting%3A+Toward+a+motivational+model+of+high+sc+hool+dropout.>

⁹⁷ "Engagement insights: Survey findings on the quality of undergraduate education." National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), last modified 2015, http://nsse.indiana.edu/NSSE_2015_Results/pdf/NSSE_2015_Annual_Results.pdf#page=5.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Komarraju, Meera, Sergey Musulkin, and Gargi Bhattacharya. "Role of student-faculty interactions in developing college students' academic self-concept, motivation, and achievement." *Journal of College Student Development* 51, no. 3 (2010): 332-342, <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0137>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Campbell, Toni A., and David E. Campbell. "Faculty/student mentor program: Effects on academic performance and retention." *Research in higher education* 38, no. 6 (1997): 727-742, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024911904627>.

¹⁰² Wilson, Lynn D. "Faculty mentorship and first year students at the Yale School of Medicine: reflections and perspective." *The Yale journal of biology and medicine* 77, no. 5-6 (2004): 155, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2259124/pdf/15989745.pdf>.

¹⁰³ Olwell, Russell. "Moving Beyond 2 Percent." Inside Higher Ed, last updated 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2017/01/24/why-mentoring-students-so-low-faculty-agenda-and-what-can-be-done-about-it-essay>.

¹⁰⁴ Law, Anandi V. et. al. "A checklist for the development of faculty mentorship programs." *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 78, no. 5 (2014): 98, <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe78598>.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

content.¹⁰⁶ Similar research and feedback should be collected at McMaster so that barriers to mentorship, such as time constraints of faculty members, who must spend a certain amount of time conducting research, can be identified and addressed.¹⁰⁷ It is recommended that McMaster assess the feasibility of implementing a faculty mentorship program.

Furthermore, challenging students should be an important feature in the design of academic programs, such that students are retained and remain engaged.¹⁰⁸ Research shows that active learning pedagogies which feature discussion and real-world application capitalize on student motivation and increase student retention.¹⁰⁹ According to the McMaster University Academic Plan, the university aims to create a culture which offer incentives and rewards for those who help McMaster achieve its academic goals.¹¹⁰ This includes the provision of academic grants to professors in order to champion pedagogical improvements to the existing courses at McMaster. It has been noted, however, that the university is not transparent regarding how these grants are used. The MacPherson Institute, currently responsible for awarding teaching and learning grants, is undergoing a review this year. The findings of this report can prove essential to determining gaps and opportunities for improvement. With this in mind, it is recommended that McMaster increase transparency regarding the distribution and use of learning grants by publishing more frequent reports and data detailing the use of these grants and the effectiveness of implemented strategies used by holders of the grants.

Lastly, there has been concern about the limited availability of student spaces dedicated to certain faculties on campus. The physical environments found on campus create room for social and learning interactions for students. It has been noted that spaces dedicated to individual faculties enable students to collaborate and interact with other students and student leaders, encouraging greater involvement and belonging on campus.^{111,112} Research into spaces such as libraries and recreation centres have shown that these spaces are essential to creating an integrated community of

¹⁰⁶ Schwartz, Michelle. "Increasing faculty-student engagement." Ryerson University Learning & Teaching Office, accessed November 3, 2018, <https://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/lt/resources/handouts/FacultyStudentEngagement.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷ Ziker, John. "The long lonely job of homo academius." *The Blue Review*, published March 31, 2014, <https://thebluereview.org/faculty-time-allocation>.

¹⁰⁸ "Engagement insights: Survey findings on the quality of undergraduate education." National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), last modified 2015, http://nsse.indiana.edu/NSSE_2015_Results/pdf/NSSE_2015_Annual_Results.pdf#page=5.

¹⁰⁹ Gasiewski, Josephine A., et. al. "From gatekeeping to engagement: A multicontextual, mixed method study of student academic engagement in introductory STEM courses." *Research in Higher Education* 53, no. 2 (2012): 229-261, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-011-9247-y>.

¹¹⁰ "McMaster University Academic Plan." McMaster University, accessed October 17, 2018, <https://www.mcmaster.ca/newsevents/acadplan.htm>.

¹¹¹ Cox, Andrew M. "Students' experience of university space: An exploratory study." *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 23, no. 2 (2011): 197-207, <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/81261/1/IJTLHE953.pdf>.

¹¹² Harrington, Kim D. "Community on campus: the role of physical space." Georgia State University, 2014, https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/epse_diss/92.

individuals by fostering feelings of social belonging.¹¹³ As such, student spaces foster connections to the school and other students, which promotes retention at an institution.

The concern here is that many students do not feel as though there are specific spaces for them on campus. Student consultation shows that smaller faculties do not have lounge spaces or offices where students study and relax with other individuals in their program. Larger faculties may experience a similar issue in that there is not enough room to accommodate the amount of students who may wish to use these spaces. As a result, McMaster should continue to consult students in the construction of new buildings and spaces on campus, and make an active effort to increase the amount of spaces dedicated to particular faculties on campus. This can be achieved by reaching out to faculty societies who can then gather data from the student body, ensuring that students are important stakeholders in the process of creating these spaces.

Promotion of University Events

Principle: Students should be aware of campus events and campaigns at McMaster to improve student engagement beyond the classroom.

Concern: While McMaster currently does engage in social media campaigns for promotions, this needs to be improved by including how students can become involved at McMaster and within the community.

Concern: Currently, campus events are not found on a centralized platform within the McMaster community.

Recommendation: McMaster should expand its current social media outreach by promoting the advertisements of events and available resources within the current McMaster University MUSST application for smartphone devices.

Recommendation: McMaster Communication and Public Affairs should re-evaluate the organization of the Daily News website and email updates to improve student engagement.

It is highly reported that the use of technology increases student engagement.¹¹⁴ For example, Queensland University implemented a personalized video technology for prospective students to provide a better perspective if the school was the right choice for them. The development of this program required an extensive background in student data about what students wanted to see or how they could become better engaged. A major component is how students are receiving their communication and whether they are receiving this information at the correct time and through the right medium.¹¹⁵ McMaster has a variety of campus events, ranging from academics to athletics and other extracurriculars, yet students are often unaware despite the use of various social media campaigns for promotions. As a first step, a student survey by

¹¹³ Miller, John J. "Impact of a university recreation center on social belonging and student retention." *Recreational Sports Journal* 35, no. 2 (2011): 117-129, <https://journals.humankinetics.com/doi/abs/10.1123/rsj.35.2.117>.

¹¹⁴ Moreno, Hugo. "Higher Education Goes Digital, Deepening Student Engagement." *Forbes*, published December 19, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesinsights/2017/12/19/higher-education-goes-digital-deepening-student-engagement/#46a0dfa74c44>.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

McMaster might be helpful to gauge student perspectives on improving current promotions.¹¹⁶

Texas A&M University at Galveston has implemented a mobile application for students to use before they start their first semester.¹¹⁷ This application includes an integration of academic support, student activities, student timetable, and campus news among other features. Similarly, identified by Modo Lab Teams as the most innovative app for student engagement, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's mobile app, called CarolinaGo, was developed as a collaboration between the university's Information Technology Services department and a small student team.¹¹⁸ Designed to meet student needs, the app has proven successful in engaging students since its launch in 2014.¹¹⁹ Currently being used by over 10,000 members of the campus community, it provides students, faculty and staff with easy access to resources such as campus events, bus routes, and dining options in the community.¹²⁰ Students can further use it to view class schedules, add or drop classes, and view financial aid information.

Currently, the McMaster University Safety, Security, and Transit (MUSST) application for smartphone devices highlights campus resources such as the Emergency First Response Team and Student Walk Home Attendant Team, as well as transit times and cab numbers.¹²¹ McMaster should expand its current social media outreach by promoting the advertisements of campus and community events and available services and resources by expanding the purpose of the MUSST application for smartphone devices. This can be done by, for example, including a real-time schedule about current events occurring at McMaster and in Hamilton, as well as options to register and/or purchase tickets. University Technology Services can maintain the application and hire students through the Work-Study program to ensure that the application is functioning properly and consistently being updated.¹²² This will also be a learning opportunity for McMaster students to take ownership of student engagement, similar to the student team that developed CarolinaGo.

It would also be beneficial for McMaster Communication and Public Affairs to expand its Daily News through this application, which currently only presents events on its online calendar, a resource that students may not be using or be aware of. For example, students could receive a push notification for weather inclements. There could also be

¹¹⁶ "Trends in Higher Education Marketing, Recruitment, and Technology." Hanover Research, published March 2014, <https://www.hanoverresearch.com/media/Trends-in-Higher-Education-Marketing-Recruitment-and-Technology-2.pdf>.

¹¹⁷ Hoff, Joe. "Engaging Students with a Mobile App." Educause Review, published March 30, 2015, <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2015/3/engaging-students-with-a-mobile-app>.

¹¹⁸ Modo Lab Teams. "The Best University Mobile Apps of 2016." Modo, published April 11, 2017, <https://www.modolabs.com/blog-post/best-university-mobile-apps-2016/>.

¹¹⁹ "CarolinaGo: Mobile App." University of North Carolina Information Technology Services, accessed November 14, 2018, <https://its.unc.edu/project/carolinago-mobile-app-created-for-unc-chapel-hill-by-students/>.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ "McMaster's new safety app is a MUSST have!" McMaster University, accessed November 15, 2018, https://security.mcmaster.ca/crime_prevention_safetyapp.html.

¹²² "University Technology Services." McMaster University, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.mcmaster.ca/uts/>.

an alert option for students to subscribe to updates about events that they are interested in, such as sporting events. Similar to the CarolinaGo app, the implementation of this app should also be accompanied with regular feedback gathered from students in order to improve the user interface and identify opportunities for increasing student engagement at McMaster and in the Hamilton community.

Off-Campus Engagement

Off-Campus Course Components

Principle: All students should have the opportunity to explore the community beyond the campus through off-campus course components in order to build a stronger sense of belonging and engagement.

Principle: All students should be familiar and comfortable with the HSR transit system, which will allow them to expand the number of opportunities available to them beyond campus.

Principle: Students should feel comfortable and safe to explore the diverse activities available around the city.

Concern: Students do not feel safe taking the HSR alone as there is stigma labelling some areas of the Hamilton community as unsafe.

Concern: Students can find it difficult to go to or return from off-campus classes on time for their next class.

Concern: Currently, students may be hesitant to enrol in off-campus courses as they are unaware of the logistical requirements.

Concern: There are currently not enough service-learning courses which integrate community engagement and student learning across many McMaster faculties.

Recommendation: Classes that include off-campus components should include directions with a map to the course location, as well as other logistical information, in the course syllabus.

Recommendation: Courses with an off-campus community engagement component should plan leaving points for students to gather together and take the HSR for certain courses and events within the broader Hamilton community.

Recommendation: Off-campus courses should account for travel time into how long each class is held.

Recommendation: McMaster should use student feedback to decide on best times in the day for particular off-campus courses.

Recommendation: McMaster should standardize all undergraduate programs by incorporating a component of community engagement within the educational mandate and mission statement of all faculties in order to provide all students equal exposure to such opportunities.

Recommendation: McMaster should increase funding to the Student Success Centre and the Office of Community Engagement to create more service-learning programs in the Hamilton community based on community engagement principles.

Recommendation: The Office of Community Engagement should consult with students to continue to identify innovative strategies (i.e. community engagement certificates, Alternative Reading) to implement community engagement as a key part of the university experience.

At McMaster, there are over 25,000 students that are enrolled in various undergraduate programs.¹²³ Research has shown that when students feel a part of both the university and the broader surrounding community, they are more inclined to pursue employment post-graduation and remain in the community. Furthermore, findings show that students have a higher quality of life when they participate in off-campus events and classes.¹²⁴ Off-campus courses and course components are educational activities that can be presented in several forms, including practicums, internships, field trips, and classes scheduled at locations not found on the main campus grounds.¹²⁵ Off-campus engagement can be increased through courses by pushing students to go out into the community for data collection, for example. This differs depending on the type of course but may include capturing photos of different locations in the community and environmental consideration in the community.¹²⁶

By encouraging students to go off-campus, it can make them become more aware of the opportunities and influential programs that are available to them. Community-based experiences foster professional communication and create unique learning opportunities, which can complement students' education and allow them to build lifelong learning skills.¹²⁷ Other universities, such as the University of Waterloo, highly value off-campus engagement as it allows students to gain the most out of their learning by strengthening their knowledge, thereby encouraging student retainment for the future.¹²⁸

Off-campus courses are mandatory in certain faculties at McMaster, such as the Faculty of Nursing, which encourages students to become comfortable with using public transportation to get around the city. For example, the Faculty of Nursing provides students with extra support to travel to downtown Hamilton for classes. However, currently, over 40% of McMaster students are not involved in any off-campus

¹²³ "McMaster University Fact Book 2017-2018," McMaster University, 2018, <https://ira.mcmaster.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Fact-Book-2018FINALedition2.0-1.pdf>.

¹²⁴ Nakagawa, Kazumasa et. al. "Benefits of off-campus education for students in the health sciences: a text-mining analysis." *BMC Medical Education* 12, no. 1 (2012): 84, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6920-12-84>.

¹²⁵ "Guidelines For Holding Classes And Related Educational Activities Off Campus." University of Wisconsin-Madison Office Of The Provost, accessed November 1, 2018, <https://provost.wisc.edu/academic-policies-and-guidelines/guidelines-for-holding-classes-and-related-educational-activities-off-campus/>.

¹²⁶ "Teaching Outside The Classroom." Vanderbilt University, accessed November 1, 2018, <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/teaching-outside-the-classroom/>.

¹²⁷ Nakagawa, Kazumasa et. al. "Benefits of off-campus education for students in the health sciences: a text-mining analysis." *BMC Medical Education* 12, no. 1 (2012): 84, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6920-12-84>.

¹²⁸ Community-Based Learning | Centre For Teaching Excellence." University of Waterloo Centre For Teaching Excellence, accessed October 20, 2018, <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/community-based-learning>.

engagement courses.¹²⁹ Additionally, recent survey results indicate that 10% of students are not completing their degree at McMaster because they want a different campus culture and city.¹³⁰ As such, McMaster may be missing out on an opportunity to engage and retain students as a result of the limited amount of student participation. By increasing the number of off-campus course activities, McMaster can simultaneously increase student engagement by fostering connections with community-based partners, introduce them to more hands-on and collaborative learning, and foster a sense of belonging and attachment to the broader community.

Many students often avoid enrolling in off-campus courses, or courses with off-campus components, due to uncertainty about logistical requirements. As such, McMaster should require all courses with off-campus components to incorporate logistical information, including the travel time required, accessibility needs, and transport routes, within the course syllabus. This will allow students to factor these requirements into their decision when they are enrolling for courses, which may encourage more students to consider off-campus courses if they are aware of these details. Additionally, another concern often raised by students is related to safety when travelling beyond the main campus. To ensure student safety, students enrolled in off-campus courses should have specific leaving points allocated by McMaster to encourage travelling in groups and becoming familiar with the community.

Other concerns that arise regarding off-campus courses include available space to accommodate certain lecture sizes, travel time, and timings of scheduled courses. To address the concern of available space, McMaster can look into renting opportunities for smaller halls that allow students to access learning spaces in different areas of the city. Travel time for such courses should be accounted for in the time scheduled by the Registrar's Office, so that students are able to make it back to campus on time for their other commitments or courses. McMaster should also consult students for feedback to decide on best times for off-campus courses before courses are scheduled by the Registrar's Office.

Another student concern relevant to off-campus engagement is that certain faculties place a greater emphasis on service learning opportunities. Service learning refers to a form of community-engaged experiential education in which volunteering for an organization is a key part of the learning experience.¹³¹ This is used to enhance student learning by fostering personal connections and directly ties the principles learned to academic content.¹³² There is much evidence to support the benefits of service learning in higher education, such as increased civic engagement and student satisfaction, as well as heightened organizational and interpersonal skills.¹³³

¹²⁹ "Your City Survey." McMaster Students Union, accessed November 1, 2018, <http://www2.hamilton.ca/NR/rdonlyres/2E47E08B-74DF-4822-9336-07C6B05A9488/0/Dec12Item61presentation.pdf>.

¹³⁰ "Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey." McMaster University, 2017 (unpublished).

¹³¹ Lane, Savannah. "Benefits of service learning." *Reason and Respect* 3, no. 2 (2008): 3, <http://docs.rwu.edu/rr/vol3/iss2/3>.

¹³² Chupp, Mark G., and Mark L. Joseph. "Getting the most out of service learning: Maximizing student, university and community impact." *Journal of Community Practice* 18, no. 2-3 (2010): 190-212, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2010.487045>.

¹³³ Ibid.

This pedagogical approach is integrated into programs such as Nursing and Health Sciences, but not others. According to the Office of Community Engagement, McMaster currently offers a Community Engagement Foundations Course (CMTYENGA 2A03), which provides 40 students with the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to engage in the community effectively. Moreover, the newly developed Integrated Business and Humanities (IBH) undergraduate program requires students to enroll in a community engagement course in their first year of study to prepare them for upper years. Students are also able to specialize and graduate with an Interdisciplinary Minor in Community Engagement, launched in 2016-2017. Aside from these opportunities, there is still little actual engagement within the Hamilton community. The university has created a guidebook on how professors can implement community engagement within their courses, and has begun providing grants to professors who choose to follow through with this approach.^{134,135} It is recommended that McMaster continue these efforts to increase the amount of service learning opportunities available across all faculties.

Through the Office of Community Engagement, McMaster must continue to form strategic partnerships with off-campus organizations to establish a greater array of available volunteer opportunities for students. McMaster should also make a commitment to ensure that a service-learning approach is integrated into the mission statement of all faculties on campus. In order to achieve this, McMaster should increase funding to the Student Success Centre and Office of Community Engagement to create more service-learning programs in partnership with the Hamilton community, the municipal government, and other city partners. This can be achieved by increasing the amount of Community-Campus Catalyst grants which encourage faculty, students, and staff to develop and strengthen partnerships with the community.¹³⁶ When developed, these programs will embody key community engagement principles which have started to be explored in the framework outlined by the Office of Experiential Education.¹³⁷

It is important to acknowledge the efforts of the university towards improving civic engagement. Among the other developments mentioned, McMaster also introduced the President's Award for Community Engaged Scholarship, approved in 2018.¹³⁸ Other strategies for civic engagement include an "Alternative Spring Break" such as those

¹³⁴ "Annual Report." McMaster Office of Community Engagement, last updated 2017, <https://community.mcmaster.ca/docs/>.

¹³⁵ Preston, Sandra et. al. "Incorporating community-engaged education into courses: A guidebook." McMaster University, accessed October 14, 2018, <https://experiential-ed.mcmaster.ca/resources/faculty-resources/faculty-manual-guidebook-updated-version.pdf>.

¹³⁶ "Community-campus catalyst grant." McMaster Office of Community Engagement, accessed October 14, 2018, <https://community.mcmaster.ca/macconnect/about/about-us-home/community-campus-catalyst-grant>.

¹³⁷ Preston, Sandra et. al. "Incorporating community-engaged education into courses: A guidebook." McMaster University, accessed October 14, 2018, <https://experiential-ed.mcmaster.ca/resources/faculty-resources/faculty-manual-guidebook-updated-version.pdf>.

¹³⁸ "Annual Report." McMaster Office of Community Engagement, accessed October 14, 2018, <https://community.mcmaster.ca/docs/>.

offered at the University of Toronto and McGill University.^{139,140} The McGill program involves five days of volunteering and engaging with the community during reading week, with structured reflection on how to continue engagement efforts in the Montreal community. The program offered at the University of Toronto cites benefits such as a deepened sense of community, interpersonal collaboration, and contributions to students' co-curricular records.¹⁴¹ Student consultations have also shown interest in a community engagement certificate which can be awarded to students for completing certain course requirements that align with community engagement principles. Therefore, it is recommended that the Office of Community Engagement McMaster continue to develop new and innovative strategies in consultation with students, through breakout workshops or feedback forums, which promote engagement in the Hamilton community.

Volunteering with the Hamilton Community

Principle: Student retention in the city should be strengthened by a diverse array of volunteer opportunities during undergraduate studies and post-graduation.

Principle: All students should be able to access service learning volunteer opportunities through their undergraduate programs, which can increase student satisfaction with learning and foster civic engagement within the community.

Concern: Students are unaware of which community organizations and institutions across Hamilton offer volunteer positions and how to apply to these positions.

Concern: There is no centralized platform where students can search for volunteer opportunities, both within the university and the greater Hamilton community.

Concern: Faculties at McMaster place different levels of emphasis on the importance of community engagement through volunteering, leading to unequal opportunities for students to participate in such experiences across Hamilton.

Recommendation: The Office of Community Engagement, Student Success Centre, and the City of Hamilton should collaborate to centralize all volunteer opportunities on a single platform for more effective outreach to interested students.

Recommendation: McMaster should promote the activities of the Office of Community Engagement and Student Success Centre through a more effective social media strategy and website improvements.

Recommendation: The Office of Community Engagement should be making efforts to systematically increase partnerships with local Hamilton institutions to help provide a wider array of volunteer opportunities.

¹³⁹"Alternative Spring Break." McGill University Social Equity and Diversity Education Office, accessed October 14, 2018, https://mcgill.ca/equity_diversity/community-engagement/asb.

¹⁴⁰"Alternative Reading Week." University of Toronto Centre for Community Partnerships, accessed November 3, 2018, <https://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/ccp/stu-alt-week>.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

Student engagement with the community through volunteer opportunities helps to address key issues that affect citizens within a city.¹⁴² For example, an appreciation of social justice issues, fostered through one's university experiences, can be applied to the context of the Hamilton community in order to drive city development. In addition to this, there are many benefits derived from community engagement at the individual level, such as improved physical and psychological health, self-confidence, as well as personal empowerment and improved social relationships.¹⁴³ A LinkedIn study has shown that volunteering can also help students in their careers, with 41% of hiring professionals indicating that volunteer experience is just as valuable as work experience.¹⁴⁴ This reciprocal relationship has been identified by McMaster, which has put forth a "Forward with Integrity" plan to improve community engagement.¹⁴⁵ As part of its strategic goals for the next decade, McMaster has made a commitment to enhancing connections with the local, national, and global communities.¹⁴⁶

Even with these efforts, results from the most recent Your City Survey show that students find the university does not encourage identification of municipal issues or promote volunteer opportunities effectively.¹⁴⁷ One-third of respondents stated the university does not effectively engage students in municipal issues, and another one-third indicated that they did not know.¹⁴⁸ The current systems in place function in isolation of one another, resulting in many separate websites each promoting similar volunteer opportunities with different organizations or groups. These websites include the Office of Community Engagement, the Student Success Centre, and OscarPlus. There are currently on-campus and community volunteer opportunities posted on the Student Success Centre website, as well as on the website of the Office of Community Engagement. The platform of OscarPlus is not widely used by students and in need of improvements, as there is currently a section for volunteer opportunities which has no postings.

The disconnect in terms of students accessing volunteer opportunities can also be attributed to the ineffective promotion of events and services which are currently offered. For example, the Student Success Centre runs a volunteer and career fair each year in which Hamilton companies and volunteer organizations participate to recruit students, yet student engagement with events on campus appears to be low. In addition, the Office of Community Engagement offers a wide variety of resources for student involvement in the community, which goes largely unnoticed. Their current Facebook page has 185 likes, despite servicing over 25,000 undergraduate students.

¹⁴² "Community transformation." Council of Ontario Universities, accessed October 14, 2018, <http://cou.on.ca/key-issues/social-economic-impact/community-transformation/>.

¹⁴³ Berg-Weger, Marla, et. al. "Not Prepared to Care" and "Raising the Bar: Case Examples of Building University-Community Partnerships in Gerontological Social Work Research." *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* 50, no. 1-2 (2007): 21-38, https://doi.org/10.1300/J083v50n01_03.

¹⁴⁴ "13 websites that will match you with the perfect opportunity to make a difference." The Huffington Post, last updated December 6, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/13/volunteering-websites_n_4551665.html.

¹⁴⁵ "Community engagement: Forward with integrity." McMaster University, accessed November 3, 2018, <http://fwi.mcmaster.ca/community-engagement/>.

¹⁴⁶ "Annual Report." McMaster Office of Community Engagement, accessed October 14, 2018, <https://community.mcmaster.ca/docs/>.

¹⁴⁷ "Your City Survey." McMaster University, 2017 (unpublished).

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

The website currently in use is laid out well, but could also be improved. Relevant sections that could be added include a Volunteer Profile section, which could outline student experiences in the community and include photos, such as that at Wilfrid Laurier University.¹⁴⁹ As such, the implementation of effective promotional strategies is recommended, which includes creating an event page for the Student Success Centre Volunteer and Career Fair and making improvements to the Office of Community Engagement website, in conjunction with an improved social media strategy by both services. The website could also provide a link to a volunteer platform with centralized volunteer opportunities.

In comparison to McMaster, York University has a single platform where volunteer organizations can log into one framework to post available opportunities.¹⁵⁰ Students are also able to log into this portal to access these posted volunteer opportunities. A similar platform used at Ryerson University sends students updates when new volunteer opportunities become available.¹⁵¹ Other volunteering sites help match volunteers with specific skill-sets to organizations in need of those skills (i.e. spreadsheet use, communication skills).¹⁵² Opportunities can also be organized on the basis of the type of community work and the population with which individuals want to be working (i.e. children, animals, elderly). It is therefore recommended that McMaster work in collaboration with the City of Hamilton and community partners to centralize all volunteer opportunities into one platform, as well as continue to build partnerships with other community partners to identify more opportunities for volunteering available to students. This can be achieved through the existing framework of OscarPlus. Improvements to this forum should be advertised through McMaster's social media channels so it can become a widely-used student resource.

Community Engagement: Showcasing Hamilton

Principle: All students, regardless of their program, should have access to a wide variety of local experiences to better integrate them into the Hamilton community.

Principle: Students should be made aware, through avenues outside of social media, of events happening within Hamilton.

Principal: Student groups on campus should be given the opportunity to host events off campus without having cost be a major barrier.

Concern: Students are unaware of the services and events currently being offered by the Office of Community Engagement.

Concern: Events held by the Office of Community Engagement start on the hour, leading many students to either attend late or leave events early because they have class.

¹⁴⁹ "Volunteering at Laurier." Wilfrid Laurier University, accessed October 14, 2018, <https://students.wlu.ca/work-leadership-and-volunteering/volunteering/index.html>.

¹⁵⁰ "Career Centre." York University, accessed October 16, 2018, <http://careers.yorku.ca/online-system/>.

¹⁵¹ "Volunteer Link." Ryerson University, accessed October 16, 2018, <https://www.ryerson.ca/studentlife/leadership/volunteer-link/>.

¹⁵² "Catchafire- Skills based volunteer matching." Catchafire, accessed November 3, 2018, <https://www.catchafire.org/>.

Concern: The costs associated with renting or accessing event spaces off-campus deter services and clubs from holding events within the broader Hamilton community.

Concern: Many of the events hosted by the Office of Community Engagement are held in-person during the day, which can be inaccessible for many students due to multiple commitments on campus or elsewhere.

Recommendation: The Office of Community Engagement should more effectively promote events happening in Hamilton through collaboration with student groups on campus.

Recommendation: The Office of Community Engagement should start events at the :20 minute mark as this is when students are finished their class and this will encourage them to attend information sessions and events on their breaks.

Recommendation: McMaster University should offer Student groups a discounted rate when renting out McMaster-owned properties, such as McMaster Innovation Park and the David Braley Health Sciences centre, to incentivize students to explore the broader Hamilton community.

The Office of Community Engagement is a service at McMaster that aims to create stronger community ties between the university and the Hamilton community through events held throughout the year.¹⁵³ Despite their current efforts, students are often unaware of the work of the Office of Community Engagement.¹⁵⁴ This is a clear indication that the Office of Community Engagement is not fulfilling its own directive to the best of its abilities.

The Office of Community Engagement should restructure the way it currently promotes events to students to increase the number of individuals aware of their services. Their promotional strategy should include more videos and class talks as they are proven, based on how the MSU promotes, to be more effective than traditional posters. It is also recommended that the Office of Community Engagement run a “Highlights” campaign that spotlights different locations, restaurants, and natural spaces around Hamilton in order to encourage students to pursue activities within the broader Hamilton community. Additionally, the Office of Community Engagement should conduct more class talks to directly reach out to students. Such class talks can take up a person’s time, but there are groups on campus, such as the MSU Municipal Affairs committee or the Student Community Support Network, that may be interested in assisting the Office of Community Engagement with their promotions as it falls under their portfolios as well. The Office of Community Engagement should take advantage of such student groups on campus as they have a strong presence within the student body.

The Office of Community Engagement hosts numerous events throughout the year for students, but currently the structure lacks effective turnout rates. The events that are held for students start at inconvenient times, which deters many from attending; if a student has class from 2:30-3:30 and 4:30-5:30, there is a low likelihood that they

¹⁵³ “Community Engagement @ McMaster.” McMaster Office of Community Engagement, 2018, <https://community.mcmaster.ca/macconnect/about/about-us-home>.

¹⁵⁴ “Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey.” McMaster University, 2017 (unpublished).

would attend an event from 3-4 as it wouldn't be an effective break for themselves and they would be missing half of the event if they choose to attend. It is thus recommended that the Office of Community Engagement organize their events to begin at the :20 mark as that is when many students will be finishing class. Starting events at the :20 mark incentivizes more students to attend as they can stay for their entire break, rather than showing up 25 minutes late.

Election Engagement

Polling Stations

Principle: All McMaster students should have access to a polling stations on campus during elections occurring during the school year.

Concern: Due to a busy schedule, many students lack the time to travel to a polling station, which are often not in convenient locations.

Concern: Many first-year students move to Hamilton one month before municipal elections and are thus not as familiar with the locations of off-campus polling stations.

Concern: The misconception that students do not vote and therefore do not need a polling station on campus further discourages many students from voting.

Recommendation: The City of Hamilton should operate a satellite poll on campus for every municipal election to ensure voting is accessible to all students.

Recommendation: The federal government should continue to offer satellite polls on campus for every federal election.

Recommendation: If provincial elections are called before May, the provincial government should offer satellite polls on campus.

A polling station on campus is extremely beneficial to ensure that all students have equal opportunity to participate in the election process. In the 2006 municipal election, the City of Hamilton organized a polling station on McMaster's campus for the first time but chose not to do so again for the 2010, 2014, and 2018 elections.¹⁵⁵ The decision to not implement another polling station on campus was due to alleged low voter turnouts, which is unsubstantiated as there is no concrete data illustrating that minimal amounts of students showed up. Previously, when the city implemented a poll on campus, the only students eligible to vote at that location were students living in residence.¹⁵⁶ As many of these students are first-time voters who have moved to Hamilton a month before polls open, they are often unsure of the voting process and are less likely to be engaged with the election.

To address the concern of a low voter turnout for a campus poll, the City of Hamilton should input satellite polls on campus for future election cycles. A satellite poll is a voting booth in which students can vote for any candidate who is running in any ward within Hamilton. October is a busy time for many students, as this is when midterm examinations are held; therefore, a polling station on campus would incentivize

¹⁵⁵ Reilly, Emma. "City Pulls McMaster Polling Station." The Hamilton Spectator, published October 14, 2010, <https://www.thespec.com/news-story/2173556-city-pulls-mcmaster-polling-station/>.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

students to vote as they would not have to travel far. For the 2018 municipal election, Western University implemented a polling station on campus for students to vote. This was a successful attempt to engage with students and provide them with an accessible location to vote.¹⁵⁷ When the 2022 municipal election occurs, there will be three new residence buildings at McMaster, housing a combined total of 1800 students, a substantial increase in the population. The demographic of students will be substantially larger and more diverse by the 2022 municipal election, which is why the City should implement a satellite poll on campus to ensure all students have an accessible location to vote on election day.

Ranked Ballot

Principle: All students should have the opportunity to vote using a ranked ballot system.

Concern: Many students become overwhelmed by the number of candidates running in an election and have difficulty choosing one option.

Concern: Candidates can win an election by getting less than 50% of votes in the current system, meaning that some candidates may have gotten the most votes, but they are not who a vast majority of their constituents wanted.

Recommendation: The City of Hamilton should adopt a ranked ballot system for all elections.

Recommendation: The provincial and federal governments should look into voting reform and alter the voting system based on the public's feedback.

For all electoral cycles, Canada uses a first-past-the-post system. This means that the winner of an election is the individual who acquires the highest amount of votes, rather than a majority of votes. Hamilton should implement a ranked ballot system, which refers to voters being given the opportunity to preferentially score all candidates running on the ballot. This process is beneficial to students as it ensures that the winner of the election is a candidate that they feel best represents them, rather than a person they did not vote for. For example, in the 2018 municipal election, Ward 1 had 13 candidates running for City Council.¹⁵⁸ As students can only choose one option, this can deter many from voting on election day due to stress deriving from not knowing which sole candidate deserves to sit on the Council. Giving students the option to preferentially vote gives them the chance to write down the few candidates that they believe would represent them well. In addition, a ranked ballot system ensures that the winner of any election wins by majority. In the 2014 municipal election, Ward 1 candidate Aidan Johnson won his seat on City Council by receiving 34% of the votes in the ward. Despite receiving the highest number of votes in comparison to other candidates, 66% of voters still voted for another candidate to win.¹⁵⁹ To establish an equitable system in which the candidate who wins receives the highest amount of constituent votes overall, Hamilton should adopt a ranked ballot system.

As of 2018, London became the first city to adopt a ranked ballot system; Cathy Saunders, London city clerk, stated that the entire system ran smoothly and there were no issues when it

¹⁵⁷ Chang, Danny. "Why You Should Care about October's Municipal Election." The Western Gazette, published October 1, 2018, https://westerngazette.ca/opinion/why-you-should-care-about-october-s-municipal-election/article_58eb967a-c578-11e8-9ecb-fbf988df0821.html.

¹⁵⁸ "2018 Election Results." City of Hamilton, published October 23, 2018, <https://www.hamilton.ca/municipal-election/election-results/2018-election-results>.

¹⁵⁹ "2014 Election Results." City of Hamilton, published October 23, 2014, <https://www.hamilton.ca/municipal-election/election-results/2018-election-results>.

came to counting ballots on election night.¹⁶⁰ Kingston and Cambridge are also currently running referendums to determine if they should switch to a ranked ballot system for the 2022 municipal election.¹⁶¹ Across Ontario, there are individuals who are pushing for a switch to a ranked system, with many cities beginning to consider it. It is thus believed that a ranked ballot system will make voting for students significantly easier, and ensure that all elected officials are chosen by a majority of their constituents to represent them on City Council.

Advertising

Principle: All students should have easily accessible information regarding municipal elections within the City of Hamilton.

Concern: There were numerous dead links on the City's twitter account and the election section of their website during the 2018 municipal election.

Concern: The page containing information regarding candidates' websites and contact information was not updated in a timely manner.

Concern: Information regarding elections tends to be geared towards long-term residents, with little being done by the City to engage students.

Recommendation: The City of Hamilton should ensure that all links posted on social media and on their website continue to work throughout the election process.

Recommendation: The City of Hamilton should ensure that their website is updated consistently with correct information on all the candidates.

Recommendation: The City of Hamilton should hire students during election cycles to help plan and strategically promote elections.

Recommendation: The City of Hamilton should promote the option to amend the voters' list prior to election day.

For every municipal election, the City of Hamilton organizes a social media campaign to encourage all residents of Hamilton to vote. During the 2018 municipal election, the links being posted on social media did not work. This led to many students not being given accurate information regarding where to vote and information on candidates. It is imperative that the City ensure all links being posted on social media are up to date for a fair and democratic process of elections. In addition, under the 'elections' tab on the City of Hamilton website, candidates' campaign information and social media handles were not updated with accurate information throughout the campaign. In wards where there are a high number of candidates—in 2018, ward 1 had 13 candidates running for city council—the City of Hamilton's website is typically the first place voters will go to find information. If the website is not updated or maintained, many students will not be able to find out candidates' platforms or contact information. The City of Hamilton should be checking their elections page

¹⁶⁰ Stacey, Megan. "London City Clerk Praised for Smooth Shift to Ranked Ballots." The London Free Press, published October 24, 2018, <https://lfpres.com/news/local-news/london-city-clerk-praised-for-smooth-shift-to-ranked-ballots>.

¹⁶¹ Kupfer, Matthew. "Ranked Ballots a Reality for 1st Time in Ontario Municipal Elections." CBC, published September 3, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/ranked-ballot-voting-2018-ontario-municipalities-1.4807196>.

daily to ensure all candidates' websites and social media handles are updated.

During the 2018 municipal election, the MSU ran its usual MacVotes campaign to inform students on where, how, and when to vote. While being a great resource, it should not solely be on the MSU to deliver this information to students. There was minimal effort put forth by the City to involve students with the election, aside from a few general posters put up in the Westdale and Ainslie Wood neighbourhoods.¹⁶² For future elections, the City of Hamilton should hire and consult students during election cycles to increase engagement from students. There is precedent that students are increasingly becoming engaged with municipal politics; Binkley United, where students from McMaster residences and nearby neighbourhoods vote, saw a 20% increase in voter turnout for the Ward One councillor compared to 2014.¹⁶³ This increase in voter turnout has a strong correlation to the MacVotes campaign. Students know the best way to promote to other students, which is why it is crucial to hire students and consult students' groups when creating a promotional strategy as they have personal insights regarding what will be effective.

A major barrier for many students is not being informed regarding the electoral process, especially for those in first and second years as many of them have never had the opportunity to vote. As students are not permanent residents in Hamilton, many of them had to amend the voter list to vote in the 2018 election. On election day, many students came to the MSU office and the MacVotes table in MUSC looking for voter amendment forms. The City of Hamilton should promote the option to amend the voters' list during all municipal election cycles. Ensuring that this is promoted prior to election day gives students the opportunity to collect all their required documentation before heading to the polls and reduces the amount of time needed to vote.

¹⁶² Dhesi, Sasha. "Getting Students to Vote." *The Silhouette*, published September 27, 2018, <https://www.thesil.ca/getting-students-to-vote>.

¹⁶³ "2018 Election Results." City of Hamilton, published October 23, 2018, <https://www.hamilton.ca/municipal-election/election-results/2018-election-results>.