



MEMO

From the office of the...

Clubs Administrator

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Aditi Sharma, Clubs Administrator
SUBJECT: Club Responses to SRA Questions
DATE: July 16, 2019

Dear Assembly,

Since the last SRA meeting, certain questions were posed to a few clubs in order to gain clarification on their activity and impact on McMaster. As such, I had reached out to the following clubs, emailing them with the questions I had received from the SRA.

1. McMaster CSSA
2. **McMaster Chinese News Network**
3. **McMaster Chinese Professional Association/Society**
4. **MELD Student Association**
5. **MacDonald Society**
6. **Controversial Text (CON-TEXT) Discussion Club**
7. MMHA: McMaster Men's Health Association
8. Tackling MisInformation (TMI) McMaster
9. McMaster Association for Sports Concussions

Given that clubs are generally not very active in the summer and the short timeline to respond, I only received a few responses from the clubs which are **bolded** above. I have outlined their responses in this memo.

NOTE: Please note that as a supplement to this memo, I have also attached the YEAR PLANS for the following clubs: Sports Concussions, Controversial Texts, MacDonald Society, Men's Health & Tackling Misinformation. These clubs were a few whose events/impact may not have been clear through their cover letters.

McMaster Chinese News Network

1. *Did your club executive approve of contacting the Chinese consulate and signing this statement in response to Feb. 11 MSA/MMPJ event? If yes, what did you hope to achieve? How would you respond to these concerns?*

Yes, we did authorize it, we inform the Consulate that we are not seeking guidance or being asked to report. Rather, as a news interest group on campus, we need more voices to enrich our objective reports. Without knowing the specific facts of Xinjiang, we need to get a response from the Consulate General in order to better provide some facts and explanations to the editors of our community. And this is the same as our original intention to contact MSU and the school fair and equal office.

2. *The statement issued has raised concerns of intimidation and harassment against students who wish to exercise their right to freedom of expression on campus (example: MSA/MMPJ statement: <https://www.facebook.com/MacMPJ/photos/a.202869809821236/2111967688911429/?type=3&theater>). How would you respond to these concerns?*

Freedom of speech is our number one priority. We appreciate the cultural background of free expression and abide by the relevant regulations of the school to ensure freedom of speech. We did not interfere in the activities. The Chinese students who protested at the scene did not contact us before the event, nor were we appointed by us. The joint statement we authorized later was to express the position of most Chinese students. This is also our exercise of the right to freedom of speech.

3. *The statement issued has also raised concerns of surveillance, particularly amongst Chinese students, who fear that being reported to the Chinese government for attending or organizing political events on campus could get them into trouble with the Chinese government, endanger family in China, and ultimately stifle their ability to express themselves freely (example: Silhouette article :<https://www.thesil.ca/students-basic-rights-under-threat>). How would you respond to these concerns?*

We believe that a single email will not adversely affect a student's personal safety and free expression. We reiterate that we are only student associations, not

government agencies. The safety and interests of all students, including our Chinese students, are our top priorities.

McMaster Chinese Professional Association/Society

1. *Did your club executive approve of contacting the Chinese consulate and signing this statement in response to Feb. 11 MSA/MMPJ event? If yes, what did you hope to achieve?*

We did authorize to sign on the above mentioned the document with solely purpose of seeking official response regarding the issue of XinJiang in order to provide comprehensive response to the issue being arisen. The only aim we were trying to achieve was to provide the facts to the Chinese international students who are currently seeking their undergraduate and graduate academic career in McMaster, which does not involve any factor of politics but only the element of knowing and equity.

2. *The statement issued has raised concerns of intimidation and harassment against students who wish to exercise their right to freedom of expression on campus (example: MSA/MMPJ statement: <https://www.facebook.com/MacMPJ/photos/a.202869809821236/2111967688911429/?type=3&theater>. How would you respond to these concerns?*

We McMaster Chinese Professional Society is a strong supporter of freedom to speech that we appreciate the free will of express their opinions based on the different cultures we are originating and also admire that McMaster is defending this right of the member of McMaster. For us MCPS, regarding approving the support on the statement that has mentioned above is also our methods of expressing our statement which is also a living example of execution of our rights of speech freedom.

3. *The statement issued has also raised concerns of surveillance, particularly amongst Chinese students, who fear that being reported to the Chinese government for attending or organizing political events on campus could get them into trouble with the Chinese government, endanger family in China, and ultimately stifle their ability to express themselves freely (example: Silhouette article :<https://www.thesil.ca/students-basic-rights-under-threat>). How would you respond to these concerns?*

Regarding the concerns for external surveillance, us MCPS is clearly stating that we are solely an academic group of foreign scholars who are aiming to enhance the adeptness of Chinese international student here in McMaster. Any political declaration, movement will not be related to MCPS.

4. *Has your club previously contacted or been contacted by the Chinese consulate in Toronto, or any other representatives of the Chinese government, regarding any matter other than the Feb. 11 MSA/MMPJ event featuring Rukiye Turdush?*

No, We have not contacted with or been contacted with Chinese consulate regarding any matter that includes the same issue we are mentioning. Once again, MCPS want to clearly state that we are solely an academic group of foreign scholars with the aim of making McMaster more like a home for Chinese international student by creating harmonic and lawful atmosphere for them.

5. *On Feb. 13, what considerations were taken into account that led to the issue of a “severe condemnation” of the Feb. 11 MSA/MMPJ event featuring Rukiye Turdush?*

As mentioned in the statement, for us, the most important goal is to get to the fact, where the difference regarding the knowing reality between the above listed clubs and the event holders are greatly different.

6. *The Chinese consulate and McMaster Chinese Graduate Students Society (from your Feb. 13 statement) are both bodies outside of the MSU, as defined by section 4.2 of the Clubs Operating Policy. What is the nature of your relationship with these two organizations?*

No, there are not relationships between MCPS and the above mentioned club. Once again, MCPS want to clearly state that we are solely an academic group of foreign scholars with the aim of making McMaster more like a home for Chinese international student by creating harmonic and lawful atmosphere for them.

MELD Student Association (MSA)

1. *Did your club executive approve of contacting the Chinese consulate and signing this statement in response to Feb. 11 MSA/MMPJ event? If yes, what did you hope to achieve? How would you respond to these concerns?*

The Meld Student Association (MSA) agreed to sign the “Joint Statement” on February 13, 2019. We learned about the content of the MMPJ presentation and learned that the majority of Chinese students questioned and dissatisfied with the content of the report. We finally agreed to sign a joint statement to show our position and support the rational refutation of voice. (MSA has not contacted The Chinese Consulate in Toronto)

2. *The statement issued has raised concerns of intimidation and harassment against students who wish to exercise their right to freedom of expression on campus (example: MSA/MMPJ statement: <https://www.facebook.com/MacMPJ/photos/a.202869809821236/2111967688911429/?type=3&theater>. How would you respond to these concerns?*

We attach great importance to and support students' right to exercise their freedom of speech. We apologize for the irrational protests that took place during the presentation, and we also do not want to see students behave in a way that interrupts the conduct of the presentation to express their refutation of the content. But after investigation, we found that the students who interrupted the lecture site were not members of any one of the five students association that signed the joint statement document. The behavior was issued by a very small number of international students and was not directly related to our joint statement. I strongly believe that MSA should not be responsible for the person who disrupted the lecture on the spot. If similar incidents occur in the future, we will pay attention to strengthening publicity work and reminding students to express their opinions in a rational and peaceful way.

3. *The statement issued has also raised concerns of surveillance, particularly amongst Chinese students, who fear that being reported to the Chinese government for attending or organizing political events on campus could get them into trouble with the Chinese government, endanger family in China, and ultimately stifle their ability to express themselves freely (example: Silhouette article :<https://www.thesil.ca/students-basic-rights-under-threat>). How would you respond to these concerns?*

MSA is a student group composed of students. None of the members belong to MSA is a government employee. Our behavior never led by the Chinese government. We are very concerned about the safety of our students. We will try

our best to help Meld students, not only provide academic help. We are convinced that this statement will not have any negative impact on international students (the time to contact the consulate in the news report is on the afternoon of February 11th. But in the "Joint Statement", MCCNN verified with the consulate was on the morning of February 12. In this news, the snippet of the quoted Washington Post refers to the event that occurred on February 11th when the international student self-issued try to communicate with the consulate.) In fact, Chinese students do not monitor each other as mentioned in the news report. I do not understand why the news report has such prejudice against China and Chinese students.

4. *Has your club previously contacted or been contacted by the Chinese consulate in Toronto, or any other representatives of the Chinese government, regarding any matter other than the Feb. 11 MSA/MMPJ event featuring Rukiye Turdush?*

Meld Student Association has not contacted any representative from the Chinese Consulate in Toronto/Chinese Government. This includes not only the activities on MMPJ on February 11.

5. *On Feb. 13, what considerations were taken into account that led to the issue of a "severe condemnation" of the Feb. 11 MSA/MMPJ event featuring Rukiye Turdush?*

We reiterated that the spontaneous protests and condemnations of students who took place on February 11 was not directly related to the joint statement.

We learned that some of the international students were dissatisfied with the content of the presentation and we decided to state our position. The content of the joint statement is not directed at any individual. The content of the statement is that we condemn the behavior that attempts to violate international law, split or violate the territorial sovereignty of another country.

6. *The Chinese consulate and McMaster Chinese Graduate Students Society (from your Feb. 13 statement) are both bodies outside of the MSU, as defined by section 4.2 of the Clubs Operating Policy. What is the nature of your relationship with these two organizations?*

MSA has no direct relationship with The Chinese consulate and McMaster Chinese Graduate Students Society. In the MELD program, the proportion of foreign

students from China in the total number of students each year is more than 98%, so we have a certain level of communication with CSSA. The signing process of the joint statement on February 13 was that MSA received an invitation from the former president of the CSSA and our former president finally agreed to authorize the signature.

MacDonald Society

1. *How similar is this club to other 'MacDonald' societies (such as the MacDonald Cultural and Historical Society of Canada)?*

I cannot say how similar this club is to The Macdonald Cultural & Historical Society, as we are not affiliated with this group. I'd like to point there are other groups that sound similar to the name 'Macdonald Society', such as The Sir John A. Macdonald Society, based in Hamilton. The name was chosen for the club to play off the name of other organizations, an example being The John Locke Society.

2. *How will the MacDonald Society celebrate Canadian heritage while acknowledging the genocide of indigenous folks in Canada?*
 - a. *What will the MacDonald Society do to work towards reconciliation?*

This club is not explicitly political, and we intend on avoiding sensitive topics that might disrupt the purpose of the club. Our intention is to welcome First Nations peoples to the club and take their input on the issue of reconciliation into account. Our goal is to form a consensus within the club before making any official statements.

3. *Is there another name the club could take on as Sir John A. MacDonald held values that supported the idea of an Aryan race and preservation of said race in Canada as cited in the third session of fifth parliament (1885) - [links provided]*

After considering the information that you have provided on Sir John A. Macdonald, we have decided to rename the club to the **'The McMaster Dominion Society'**, referring to Canada's history as a dominion under the British crown. We understand the sensitive nature of this topic, and we will make a concerted effort not to perpetuate discrimination at McMaster.

4. *Several clubs this past year attracted significant controversy, as seen in articles in the Silhouette and the supplementary report provided to the SRA. How do you plan on avoiding similar controversy?”*

I don't know about the controversies you are referring to. There could be a number of reasons that a club could attract controversy. The McMaster Dominion Society intends on keeping a professional, lawful and respectful composure at McMaster. If there are any particular rules you think could be inadvertently broken by our club, feel free to let me know.

5. *What does the club define as Canadian language and Canadian religion? In the same realm, what is your club's outlook on Canadian culture—other than First Nation specific culture, I'd struggle to place one identifier over Canadian culture as a multinational nation.*

The Canadian government recognizes English and French as the official languages of Canada. Our club also recognizes these languages as such. Additionally, we feel as though the languages of the First Nations people have a prominent place in Canadian history and deserve recognition.

The Canadian government does not recognize an official religion, and neither does our club. However, we do recognize how some religions, especially Anglicanism and Catholicism, have played an important role in shaping Canadian history and culture. On the topic of Canadian culture - It is true that Canada is a multinational country. However, our club holds the conviction that Canadian identity overall is unique and identifiable, both distinct from other national identities but also complementary with them.

6. *There is history of a similar club at the University of Toronto who have attracted attention due to their ideological stance which many consider extremist, these groups may cause distress to students in the community, does this club have any association with the one at the University of Toronto, if so, to what extent?*

I do not know what clubs you are referring to, and I can promise you that we are not associated with any external groups or clubs. Especially extremist groups. Furthermore, the McMaster Dominion Society has no official political ideology. The only agenda we do proscribe to is advancing an interest in Canadian culture.

Controversial Text (CON-TEXT) Discussion Club

1. What texts will this club be discussing and why will they be discussing said texts?

We have chosen texts in philosophy, sociology, religion and science that bring to light a novel idea that leaves room for questions and discussion. 'Meditations of René Descartes' is a good representative of the sorts of passages (about 1 page) that will be read and reflected upon during our sessions. To guide the discussion, executive members ask pre-made questions based on the passage read. For instance, the first meditation of René Descartes focuses on the sources of knowledge and argues that all sources of knowledge can be doubted. Example follow-up questions would include:

- Is there a reliable source of knowledge? What makes the source reliable?
- Should everything be doubted?
- Do we need information (a source of knowledge) to believe in something?
- Would you believe in something just because someone reliable said it? What factors would make the person reliable and why are these factors important?

2. How will this club ensure that they are not creating a space for hate speech?

We have a zero tolerance policy for any sort of hate speech, discrimination, name-calling, yelling or any other form of bullying. These rules will be carefully outlined at the beginning of each session and the conversations will be facilitated by executive club members to assure order. As well, during the first session, we will ask all members to sign an agreement, clearly stating that they will not participate in any form of bullying/discrimination/hate-speech. Any violation of the aforementioned rules will immediately result in the removal of the person from the conversation and from the session.

3. What is this club's overall objective with discussing controversial texts?

One of the club's objectives is to promote friendship and build stronger relationships amongst people from different backgrounds. This will be done through identifying common grounds and focusing on the forgotten similarities between various perspectives. Our second objective is to promote mental health within members by allowing individuals to speak freely and without fear of judgement about their opinions. Furthermore, the safe space would also allow them to get exposed and explore ideas that they cannot necessarily discuss within their family or friend groups. Lastly, we aim to improve our members' critical thinking skills through analyzing, articulating and discussing ideas. We believe that there should be a safe

space, where traditionally controversial subjects can be discussed analytically without debate, argument or the need to convince. We have noticed that many clubs are segregated by race or religion and the only space for conversation is in the form of a debate. Our club aims to encourage students to think critically about difficult topics and discuss respectfully their ideas and opinions with others.

I strongly recommend ratifying the majority of clubs such that the MSU Clubs Department can move forward with our activities for the year. If there are still concerns about certain clubs, it would be better to bring your questions directly to them. A sit-down discussion with them would be more beneficial and time conducive. This will allow both parties to communicate clearly and not feel rushed in expressing questions and concerns.

Best,

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