



REPORT

From the office of the...
AVP Services

TO: Members of the MSU Executive Board
FROM: The AVP Services, the Services Committee, and the Vice-President Administration
SUBJECT: CLAY Services Review
DATE: February 25th, 2020

Dear Members of Executive Board,

The follow report is a review of the MSU Creating Leadership Amongst Youth (CLAY) Conference. Due to the Student Choice Initiative (SCI) enforced by the provincial government earlier this year, funding for MSU services deemed “non-essential” have been impacted. Unfortunately, this has led the Executive Board to reassess the purposes of non-essential MSU services and ultimately freeze CLAY operations for 2020. Though the Student Choice Initiative is currently deemed unlawful, it is important to continue this work in light of ongoing deficits, financial ability, and whether or not they continue to fill a gap in the McMaster Undergraduate Community.

The goal of this report is to provide as much information as possible on the CLAY conference so that a decision can be made regarding the future of this service. The following report will discuss the conference mission and look critically at a cost vs benefit analysis, conference engagement, community relations, alternative ways to achieve the conference goals, and recommendations going forward.

Conference Mission and History

CLAY is a 3-day, 2-night leadership conference held annually for high school students. As stated in its Operating Policy, the purpose/mission of CLAY is:

“To provide high school students with the opportunity to attend a leadership conference with the aim of developing and improving their leadership skills, facilitated by university students acting as peer mentors” (1.1).

In order to achieve the purpose, CLAY must aim to maintain the following objectives:

“Develop leadership skills for all of those involved; Provide dynamic and innovative leadership programming and entertainment; and Provide an opportunity for future student leaders to interact with current student leaders at McMaster” (2.1.1-2.1.3).

The conference is run entirely by McMaster undergraduate students. The conference was founded in 1992 by the MSU as an opportunity to foster strong relationships

between students and the surrounding community. Over 20 years this conference has been able to reach numerous students due to its unique approach to celebrating and recognizing what it means to be a leader. Currently, the conference is overseen by one Part-Time Manager who is assisted with planning by 10 service executives. Around 60 volunteer staff (split up as Leadership Developers (LD), Leadership Developer Events (LDE), and Media Team) are hired to help facilitate sessions and activities throughout the CLAY weekend. Overall, this service operates for ~70 MSU members and ~100-150 non-MSU members.

Cost of Conference

The following graph depicts a comparison between the “planned” and “actual” cost of the CLAY conference over the span of 9 years in 2019 Dollars. The orange line on the graph represents the amount of money the MSU plans to spend on CLAY each year. While the grey line represents how much the conference actually ended up spending in that respective year. Based on the data shown in this graph, it is evident that the actual cost of conference has been higher than what the MSU planned to spend most of the time. In fact, over this 9 year span the total amount of money the MSU planned to spend was **\$148, 279.61**. However, CLAY has actually costed **\$204, 596.49** between 2011 and 2019. This is a difference of **\$57, 021** that was not planned to be spent on conference. While there are two years where the actual cost was below the planned cost, it is clear that this conference is leading the MSU to lose money. When exploring options to decrease conference spending, it became clear that **location** and **delegate cost** are the most malleable places to make price changes significant enough to impact the actual cost. Camp Trillium, where conference has been located for the past 3 years, has the lowest market cost to host CLAY and ensure that its mandate is fulfilled. In addition, if delegate fees were to be increased, in an effort to reduce spending, it will likely result in less delegate attendees due to the larger financial barrier to accessing CLAY.



Engagement with Conference

Two years ago, surveys were created for a past CLAY review. The following data comes from delegate surveys which were released in 2018. **Fig. A)** depicts activities ranked as *highest importance* when delegates were asked to rank the following CLAY experiences in order of importance. For the most part, these CLAY experiences are equally enjoyed amongst delegates, with a highest preference for interacting with others. **Fig. B)** depicts a comparison when delegates were asked to indicate the number of hours spent doing extracurriculars in school before and after attending CLAY. Looking at the data, there appears to be some increase in the amount of involvement after attending CLAY, however the numbers are not drastically different. **Fig. C)** depicts delegate responses when asked how often they interacted with staff volunteers outside of conference. The data highlights that while contact between LDs and delegates continued after conference, it was not frequent. Furthermore, when asked if they would recommend the conference to a friend, **over 93%** of delegates said yes! Finally, when asked to rank the impact of various session themes majority of survey responders, **74.2% to be exact**, ranked “The different between mental health and mental illness and stigmas associated with them” in either of their top two spots.

Fig. A)

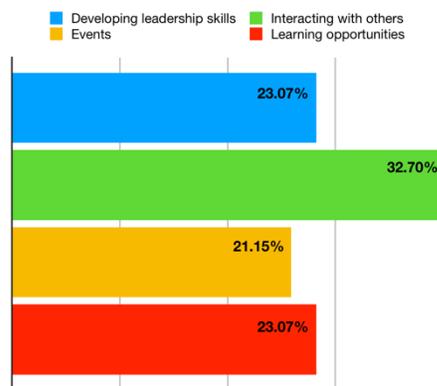


Fig. B)

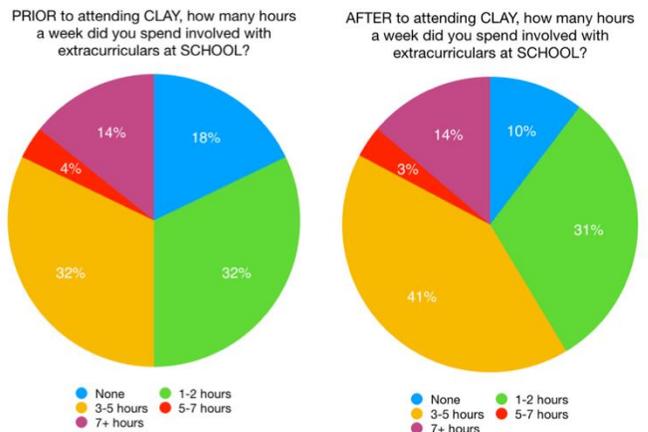
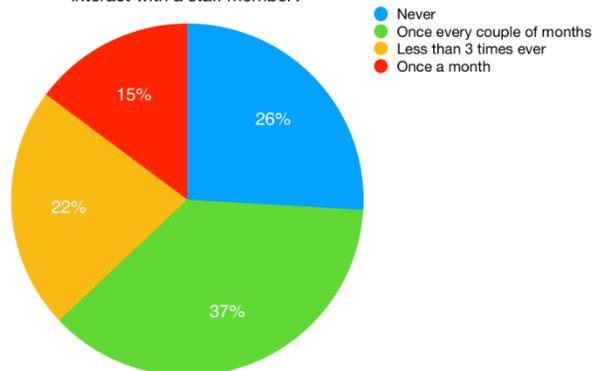


Fig. C)

After CLAY, how often did you reach out/interact with a staff member?



The data clearly indicates that delegates are enjoying their involvement with CLAY, these specific experiences are not exclusive to this particular conference. In our local community there are a variety of opportunities where youth can interact with one another to develop leadership skills. While delegates and volunteers have mostly positive experiences with this service, engagement is low. Less than 80 MSU members are hired to volunteer with the service each year and folks who are intended to make up the majority of CLAY attendees (delegates) has been decreasing each year. In 2016 there were nearly 200 delegates in attendance, whereas this past year, CLAY 2019, there was just over 100 delegates total. When comparing this to the previous cost analysis, it is evident that if the delegate fee were to be increased it could result in even less engagement internally and externally.

Community Landscape

One of the unique aspects of CLAY is the community relationships it has built over 27 years. More recently CLAY has worked with Empowerment Squared, Pathways, Boys & Girls Club, The Space, and the YMCA to sponsor delegates to attend conference. In addition to CLAY, these organizations help to get students involved with other programs as well. Some of these include McMaster summer camps and City of Hamilton summer services programs. Additionally, a similar youth leadership conference, The Central Ontario Leadership Seminar (COLS), runs annually (at the University of Toronto Mississauga) on the same weekend as CLAY. COLS specifically is for grade 10 students, and high schools across Ontario select and sponsor students to attend. While these opportunities may not be CLAY, it is clear that there are similar initiatives in our community that function in a similar way to the conference.

Cost v. Benefits Analysis

Through a critical analysis of cost and engagement for CLAY, it is quite clear that the cost of conference outweighs the benefits. Firstly, the conference itself only serves around 70 MSU members each year. That being said the gap for youth leadership opportunities is already being filled in the Hamilton community through the opportunities listed above and countless others that happen throughout the year. It is worth noting that the benefits of CLAY are outside the scope of what students are paying for, in fact with around 23,000 undergraduate students this service only benefits approximately **0.3% of MSU members** each year. While it is important to support members of nearby communities, supporting students is the MSU's primary responsibility. It can be difficult to support both of these groups under strict cost cutting directives such as SCI. Which has led us to reassessing the relationship between the cost and benefit of CLAY as a service within the MSU.

Other Ways to Achieve Conference Mission

We have discussed a bursary program for youth leadership. This bursary would strive to recognize the diverse qualities that make up student leaders and help sponsor them to take part in various initiatives, such as the opportunities previously listed. The decision making involved with this bursary would be planned by the VP Finance and VP Admin. In creating this youth leadership bursary, the MSU can maintain community relationships built through the operation of CLAY from 1992 to today and still give back to youth in the Hamilton community.

Recommendations

1a) The MSU should rescind the Operating Policy for the Creating Leadership Amongst Youth (CLAY) Conference

When looking at the data it is clear that the actual costs of conference is quite high and more than the MSU anticipates each year. This has resulted in an unplanned loss of nearly \$60,000 across 9 years. In addition, there is no rational way to significantly decrease costs that does not breach the mandate or create significant financial barriers, especially with engagement numbers decreasing annually.

In addition, the CLAY only directly effects 60 MSU members each year. Though the services does phonemical work with youth in the HGTA area, the benefits it brings back to the McMaster Undergraduate community are minimal. In addition, we have seen more youth conference take place in the HGTA, filling the gap of you engagement and empowerment.

In a time of financial disparity, we need to ensure that the student money we are spending goes directly towards supporting McMaster students here on campus. I hope it is evident in this report that the high and unpredictable cost of CLAY outweighs the benefits to MSU members. it is evident that it is in the best interest of the MSU and its members to rescind the operations of the CLAY service.

1b) The MSU should create a bursary program for local youth leadership opportunities

This program would be put in place for youth in and around Hamilton as a way to give back to the local community. It would strive to provide high school students the opportunity to take part in initiatives similar to CLAY in the absence of the service.

Warm Regards,



Sarah Figueiredo
Vice President (Administration)
McMaster Students Union
vpadmin@msu.mcmaster.ca



Martino Saliccioli
Associate Vice-President: Services
McMaster Students Union
avpservices@msu.mcmaster.ca