



# REPORT

*From the office of the...*

## Associate Vice-President: Services

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TO: Members of the Executive Board  
FROM: AVP Services and the Services Committee  
SUBJECT: MSU Spark Service Review  
DATE: March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020

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Dear Members of the Executive Board,

The following report is a review of the MSU Maroons service conducted by the Associate Vice-President: Services. This report will critically examine Maroons by looking at the service's mission, history, structure, and engagement. The report also takes a look at similar groups within the McMaster community and at other post-secondary institutions to see examine how the Maroons compare and contrast. Compiling all of the information, the report is concluded with recommendations made by myself, the committee, and the Vice-President Administration to enhance the function and experience of the MSU Maroons service.

### **Mission and History**

The MSU Maroons is service that works to connect the undergraduate student population to the McMaster Students Union and the rest of the McMaster community. As stated in its Operating Policy, of purpose of MSU Maroons is:

*"To promote spirit and McMaster pride amongst McMaster undergraduates; To facilitate leadership opportunities for students; To represent the McMaster Students Union at campus events" (1.1-1.3).*

In order to achieve its purpose, MSU Maroons must aim to maintain the following operating parameters:

*"The Maroons shall be a completely student-run service of the MSU dedicated to increasing the level of leadership, school spirit, and pride; The Maroons shall facilitate a leadership committee for students to plan and execute events that promote school spirit and pride on the McMaster campus; The Maroons shall work with the Shinerama Coordinator to provide support and volunteers for the Shinerama campaign and during all of Welcome Week" (2.1-2.3).*

Traditionally, the MSU Maroons have been involved in numerous campus and MSU events/initiatives. Ultimately, this service functions to help assist other services and promote what the MSU does to the undergraduate student population. Since the MSU Maroons is the only service that directly focuses on engaging undergraduate students with MSU/campus initiatives, as well as representing the MSU at these events, their involvement helps to ensure there are a sufficient number of volunteers and that students are engaged and attend. The following is a list of the most common initiatives MSU Maroons volunteers with annually (note this list is not exhaustive):

- Concerts
- large scale events
- May @ Mac
- Setting up Clubsfest and Sidewalk Sale
- Homecoming community clean up
- MSU bike auction
- Financial Transparency Tabling (as well as support other Board initiatives)
- the FCC “trick or eat” event
- Assisting the education team with local community campaigns (door hanging initiative)
- The Spark/Horizons/CLAY applicants workshop
- Presidential Election tabling
- Welcome Week Support including creating free swag bags that are handed out during Welcome Week and supporting the Vice-President Administration with programming facilitation
- MSU General Assembly Support
- MSU Shinerama Support

Additionally, the Maroons also run their own events which include (note this list is not exhaustive):

- Coffeehouses
- The Pumpkin Hike (partnered with a local elementary school)
- Free intramural
- Exam care packages
- Skate night

- Facilitating spirit and energy at home basketball, volleyball, and football games.

### **Service Structure**

As outlined in the Operating Policy, this service is entirely run by students. Currently, MSU Maroons is overseen by one Part-Time Manager, the Maroons Coordinator, who is assisted with service planning and facilitation by 6 executives. These executive roles include one Volunteer Coordinator, one Events Coordinator, two Athletics Coordinator, one Promotions Coordinator, and one Public Relations Coordinator. The PTM and 6 executives make up the Maroons Leadership Team.

Together, the LT hires approximately 40 general Maroons representatives to have a team consisting of 50 overall reps. Each executive position on the LT has a different job to be achieved throughout Welcome Week and the school year. All 6 of the LT members are responsible for leading a small group of maroons during Welcome Week called pods.

*The Volunteer Coordinator* is responsible for overseeing Maroons general rep volunteers, maintain communication with the team, and creating schedules/sign-up sheets for Welcome Week/the school year.

*The Events Coordinator* is responsible for contacting campus/community partners to organize events for the MSU maroons to facilitate and volunteer at.

*The Athletics Coordinators* are the primary contact for the Athletics and Recreation department, they organize Maroons presence at sports games and free intramurals.

*The Public Relations Coordinator* is responsible for creating promotions for Maroons specific events for all undergraduate students and working with the Promotions Coordinator to ensure effectiveness with service media.

*The Promotions Coordinator* has a very similar function to the PR Coordinator, with the exception that the role focuses more on content creation.

With all of these positions in mind, it is worth noting in this current LT structure that there is no position related to fundraising, despite the fact that the maroons are tasked to support the MSU Shinerama campaign. In addition, the MSU already has a designated individual who holds a role which focuses on and content creation and videography for the union and its services, Maroons included.

### **Community Landscape**

Taking a look at similar initiatives within the McMaster community and at other Ontario post-secondary institutions, it is clear that there are initiatives similar to the Maroons but do not function the exact same way. For example, MSU Campus Events hires a small number of Events and Promotions staff each year to help

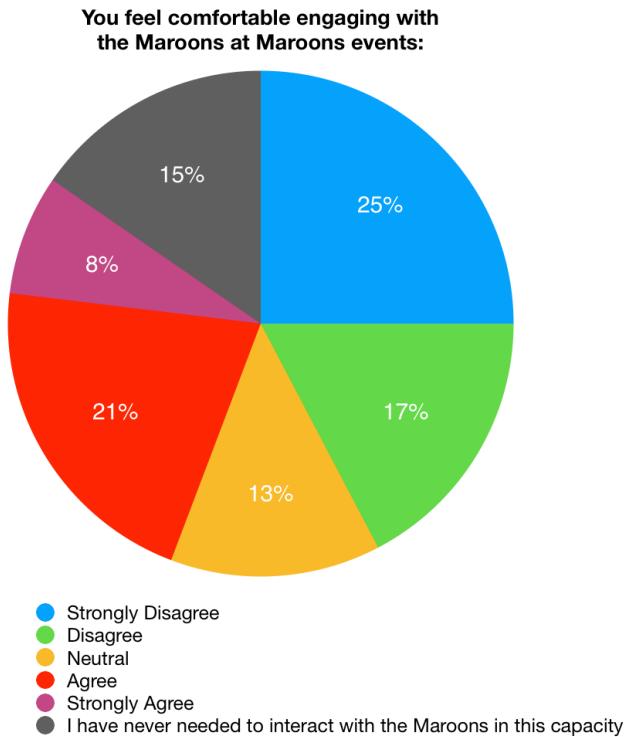
assist with event facilitation. These are paid positions, unlike the general representatives on the Maroons, which are volunteer positions. Compared to the Events and Promotions staff, the MSU Maroons provide a much larger number of team members who have the ability to do similar work to campus events staff. In the current climate of the Student Choice Initiative it would not be achievable to hire more paid staff to work with Campus Events, that is where MSU Maroons comes into the picture. This service is available help to provide support to Campus Events staff during large scale events during Welcome Week and the school year.

Furthermore, when looking at other post-secondary institutions, there is no other school that provides an initiative that exactly resembles the MSU Maroons. The most similar is the Purple Spur Society at the University of Western Ontario. On Western's website it states that this club is, "The largest club at Western whose mandate is to maintain and foster the Spirit of Western, support varsity athletics, and facilitate social interaction among all Mustangs." When reading the description of this club it seems that it has similar goals to the MSU Maroons, in that they run events for charity and encouraging school spirit. However, when looking at this club's social media pages it appears that there is somewhat of a party culture, which is not a direction the Maroons should take. Research into other post-secondary institutions was conducted (Brock University, Queen's University, Wilfred Laurier University, Mohawk College, Trent University, York University, and University of Toronto to name some), however none of the schools offered a service that was similar to the Maroons or offered unique aspects that could be incorporated into the service.

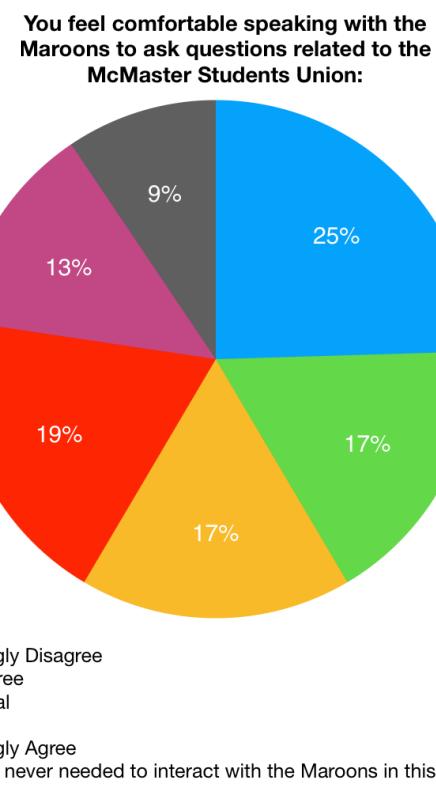
### **Service Engagement**

Throughout January and February surveys were open for MSU members to share their thoughts towards MSU Maroons, there were 54 responses. The following data comes from the M3ac Feedback Series Survey about the MSU Maroons:

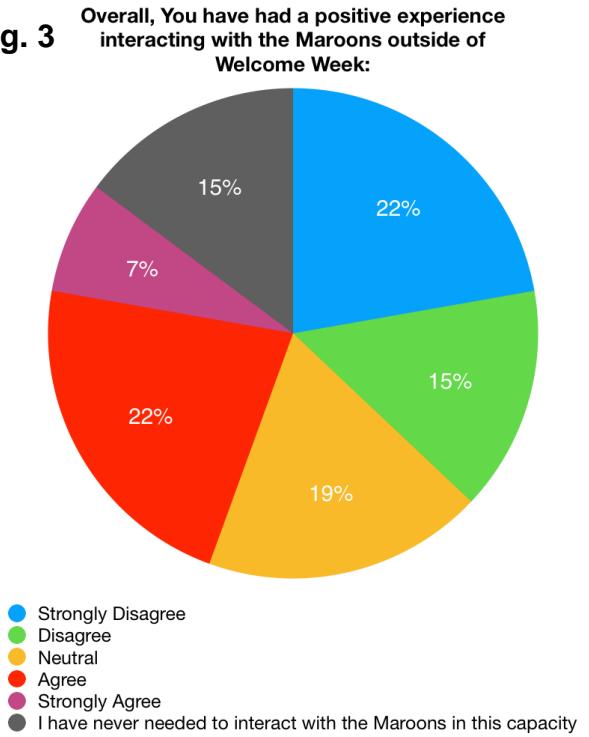
**Fig. 1**



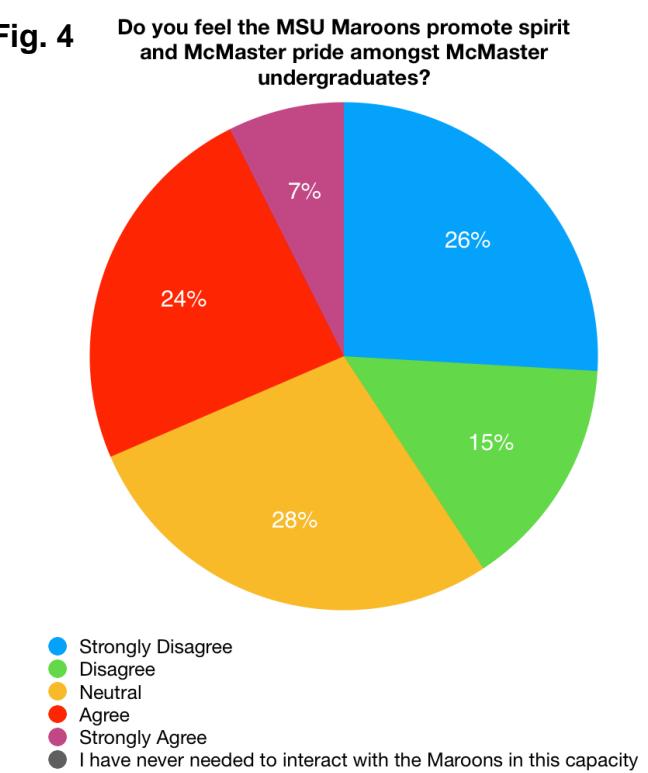
**Fig. 2**



**Fig. 3**

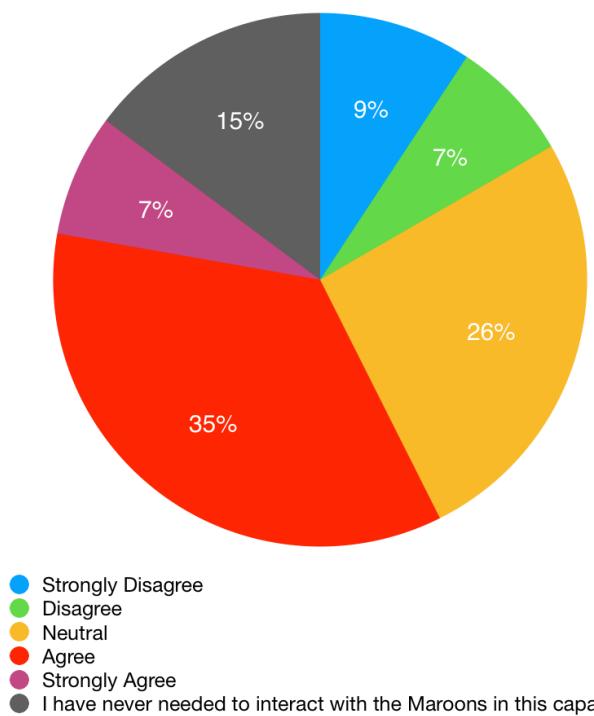


**Fig. 4**



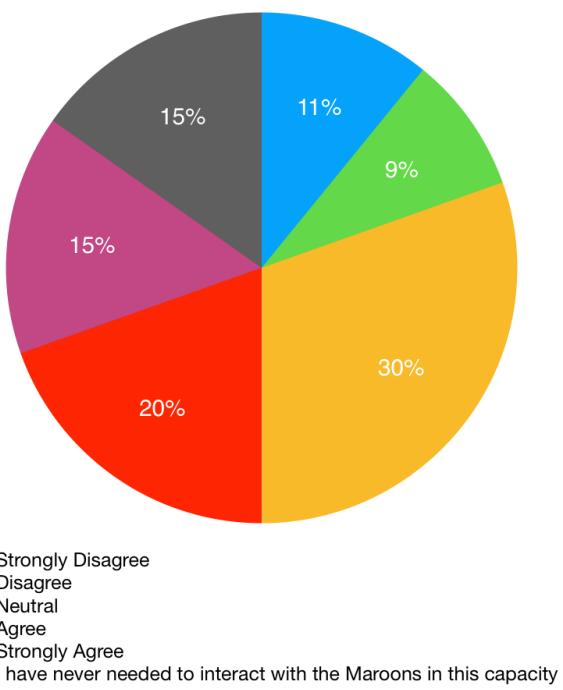
**Fig. 5**

When you asked a question to a Maroon Representative, they were able to provide you with a sufficient answer:



**Fig. 6**

When you asked a question to a Maroon Representative, they were engaged and listened:

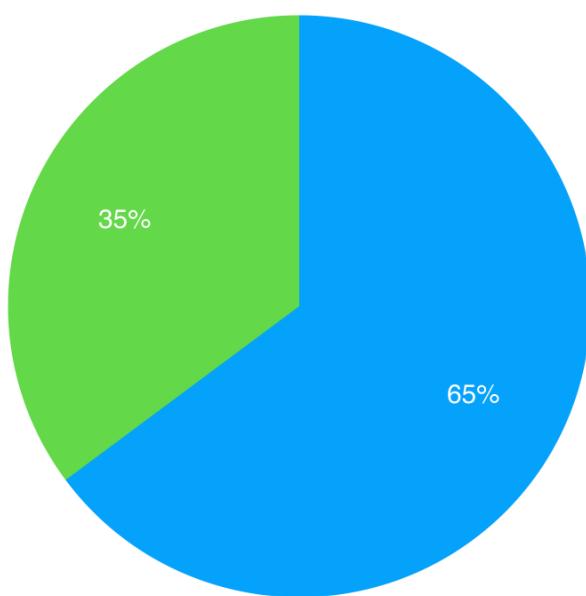


**Fig. 7**

Have you ever interacted with a Maroons volunteer or executive member, in their capacity as a representative of the Maroons?

● Yes

● No



Looking at the graphs, it is clear that the student body has a wide variety of opinions towards this service.

**Figure 1 and Figure 2**, address comfort levels students have when interacting with Maroons representatives. In Fig. 1, roughly 30% of responders indicated that they felt comfortable engaging with Maroons at their events, whereas nearly 40% responded saying they did not. Fig. 2 asks responders a similar question, if they feel comfortable asking Maroons representatives questions related to the MSU. Similar to Figure 1, just over 30% of folks responded saying they felt comfortable with this interaction, whereas around 40% said they did not.

**Figure 3 & Figure 4** address more questions similar to the previous ones. Fig. 3 states “Overall, you have had a positive experience interacting with the Maroons outside of Welcome Week”. Approximately 30% of responders agreed with this statement and nearly 35% disagreed. In Fig. 4, responders were asked to indicate if they feel that MSU Maroons promote McMaster spirit and pride. Just over 40% of responders disagreed with the statement and just over 30% agreed. Ultimately, Figures 1, 2, 3 & 4 directly ask survey responders to address their own personal perceptions of MSU Maroons. This information is extremely useful and informative to have in the instance of a service review. Knowing that personal perceptions of an MSU service are not overwhelmingly positive can help to generate service recommendations that aim to benefit students by reshaping the scope of the service.

**Figure 5 & Figure 6** ask students to address how well Maroons actually performed in their role as a representative, opinions aside. Fig. 5, asks students if Maroons reps were engaged and listened when they asked a question. Approximately 35% of responders indicated that they agreed with the statement and 20% stated that they disagreed. Additionally, in Fig. 6 students were asked if the representative was able to provide a sufficient answer to the question they had. Just over 40% of responders said that they agreed with the statement and roughly 15% said they disagreed. The information in Figures 5 & 6 indicated that the MSU Maroons volunteers are effectively doing their job to help the undergraduate student body.

Furthermore, many of the additional comments from survey responders address the fact that they are unaware of what the Maroons actually do. As previously stated, the MSU Maroons help out with numerous initiatives on campus. These responses indicate that there must be an increased effort to engage and demonstrate to students what this service really does. Moreover, multiple comments address a sense of “cliqueiness” associated with the service. This may be a contributing factor to some of the perceptions of this service.

Finally, demonstrated in **Figure 7**, it is worth noting that 35% of responders said they never interacted with a Maroons representative/executive in the capacity of

their role. As such every question speaking to interaction with the Maroons should have at least a 35% of the survey sample should indicate that they have not interacted with the service in that capacity. It is also important to note this survey has very little attrition.

When examining this statistic, and organizing the data based on this particular response, it is clear that some of the data may depict inaccurate numbers. This is important to keep in mind when assessing Figures 1 through 6 as folks who indicated they never interacted with a Maroons representative responded to questions related to perception of the service. More specifically they responded by agreeing and/or disagreeing with particular statements and did not choose the “I have never needed to interact with the Maroons in this capacity” option.

Ultimately, the survey data demonstrates that MSU Maroons representatives are attentive to the needs of students and are in fact willing to offer help/support in a way that students find effective, however the perceptions of the service and comfort levels are not as positive. This can be attributed to multiple factors that have come about recently, as well as a known “cliqueiness” linked to volunteers.

It is clear that the purpose of the Maroons is still needed, and from the survey results it is also evident they have a great ability to communicate key information about the MSU to a large audience. It's also clear that there is more room to grow for the service, and they must work on building trust with the MSU population.

## **Recommendations**

Compiling all of the information has led to these 8 recommendations. They are split up into 4 different aspects. Changes to the general rep team structure, changes to student engagement, changes to service structure, and rebranding.

### **Changes to the General Rep Team Structure**

**1a) The Maroons should continue to reduce their team size to 50 overall reps**

**1b) continue to implement a 60% new and 40% returner ratio where possible**

By maintaining this number of reps as well as the ratio of new to returning reps, the service can ensure that it is engaging new students and bringing in a new cohort of reps each year as the ratio aims to hire more new reps rather than returning ones. This could potentially lead to the reintroduction of first-year

maroons to try and engage more new students, while this did not work very well in the past it may be an option to reconsider.

### Changes to Student Engagement

#### **2) The MSU Maroons should hire an additional Events Coordinator designated to run charity events, including charity events during welcome week**

Due to the freezing of MSU Shinerama, and in an effort to give more of a role to the MSU Maroons, the service should hire an additional Events Coordinator to take on the facilitation of charity related events. This individual can work with the Welcome Week Faculty Coordinator and the Residence Orientation Planner to choose a charity to fundraise for during Welcome Week. With the introduction of this position the MSU Maroons can take on the charity fundraising aspect, that Shinerama previously had, during Welcome Week and the school year. This means that the MSU Maroons can work with Campus Events and Welcome Week planning committees to volunteer for the annual Charity Casino event, as well as plan a short fundraising event during Welcome Week that will not be used towards the faculty/residence cup awards. In consultation with the Services Committee and Welcome Week planning committees that the Vice-President Administration sits on, the idea of this position was well received. Furthermore, the introduction of this position should see to the removal of section 2.3 of the operating policy (see more in recommendation 7).

#### **3) The MSU Maroons should reintroduce the Maroons Committees initiative**

This initiative is one that existed up until the 2016-2017 school year, when it stopped functioning. In section 2.2 of the Operating Policy it states that, "*The Maroons shall facilitate a leadership committee for students to plan and execute events that promote school spirit and pride on the McMaster campus*". By reintroducing this initiative, the MSU Maroons can give students an opportunity to see the behind the scenes work this service does and be directly involved with it. This will hopefully encourage students to get involved with the service and attend the events it hosts/volunteers at. Hopefully, this initiative can help demonstrate to students what the Maroons do and how they can be part of the service.

#### **4) The MSU Maroons should host the MSU bike auction**

With MSU Macycle being recently rescinded, the Maroons have been tasked to take on the annual MSU bike auction in partnership with McMaster security services. Traditionally, the MSU Maroons have volunteered at this event so the ability to organize and facilitate it should be a simple transition.

### Changes to the Service Structure

#### **5) The MSU Maroons should remove the Promotions Coordinator executive positions**

Due to the similarity between the Promotions Coordinator and the PR executive team position, as well as the fact that the MSU already has an employee dedicated to videography and content creation, this position should be removed from the Maroons LT. The roles and responsibilities that differed for the Promotions Coordinator can be transferred over to the Public Relations Coordinator position. The PR Coordinator can be tasked to work with the MSU Communications Team to generate videos and other promotional content for the service.

#### **6) Introduce a community engagement mandate to the Maroons Public Relations Coordinator**

With the MSU Creating Leadership Amongst Youth (CLAY) conference being rescinded on March 8, 2020, the MSU has been tasked to keep the spirit of CLAY, that being community engagement, alive through various facets of the union. One way this can happen is through introducing a community engagement mandate to the Maroons Public Relations Coordinator job description and role. This will ensure that the PR executive works with the Maroons LT and MSU Communications Team to plan and discuss strategies for how the MSU Maroons can engage with the Hamilton community and strive to maintain the spirit of youth outreach and engagement that CLAY previously had.

#### **7) The MSU should remove section 2.3 of Operating Policy - Maroons**

As previously stated, with the freezing of Shinerama, and the introduction of an additional Events Coordinator for purposes related to charity and fundraising opportunities, there is no need for MSU Maroons to “*Work with the Shinerama Coordinator to provide support and volunteers for the Shinerama campaign*”. Thus, this Operating Parameter should be removed from the Operating Policy.

### Rebranding

#### **8) The MSU Maroons should undergo a service rebranding**

Survey responses indicated that perceptions of the MSU Maroons, from the perspective of undergraduate students, is not the most positive. Multiple survey responders indicated that the ambiguity of what the service does, as well as a clique-culture, has contributed to these perceptions. In an effort to have a cultural shift that moves away from the cliqueiness that the Maroons have generated over

multiple years it is my recommendation that the service undergoes a rebranding. In doing so, the Maroons can be given an opportunity to dissociate from negative student perceptions and strive to move away from creating a clique-like-culture amongst volunteers. The rebranding of MSU Maroons is something that will be worked on by the Marketing & Communications Director and the Executive Board.

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martino Salciccioli".

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