

## **Accessibility Policy Paper [Maroon Paper]**

### **Preamble**

The McMaster Students Union is committed to ensuring it is as accessible as possible to its students with visible or invisible disabilities as well as to students with chronic health concerns or undiagnosed illnesses. Though we encourage students with disabilities to get involved in the McMaster Students Union and advocate for themselves, we recognize the institutional and societal barriers in place that can make this harder for this demographic to do so. Many students with disabilities do not advocate for accessibility because they are not given the space to, feel as though they do not have the authority to, do not want to disclose their disability, or do not want to be defined solely through the results of their advocacy work. This paper attempts to take a proactive stance in addressing accessibility barriers within the McMaster Students Union, and in lobbying for the accessibility within the university as a whole, instead of relying solely on reactive responses catered toward these issues. The following concerns and recommendations outlined in this policy seek to erase ableism within the structure of the MSU and to ensure a more accessible campus as a whole.

### **Principles**

The MSU believes that:

- The McMaster Students Union (MSU) should foster a community where every student feels included, safe, and has an equitable opportunity to excel during their time at McMaster.
- All students should be able to succeed in their academic pursuits and environments, free from any barriers or obstacles.
- The MSU must work together with McMaster University to ensure that the university environment is accessible.
- All needs of students with disabilities should be taken into account in the development of courses at McMaster University.
- The MSU must create avenues to allow students with disabilities to communicate feedback regarding their university experience.

### **Concerns**

The MSU is concerned that:

- Inclement weather conditions pose significant transportation barriers for students with physical disabilities.
- There is a need for greater peer support and community solidarity.
- The course instruction delivered by course instructors and teaching assistants is not uniformly accessible to students.
- MSU working environments can pose barriers that obstruct current, and deter potential, student employees with disabilities.
- Students with disabilities often struggle to participate with student groups due to existing barriers of structure and engagement.
- Given that methods of online learning, including designs and deliveries, are often incompatible with diverse learning styles, students with disabilities struggle benefit.

- Existing methods of communication between the MSU, SAS, and students with disabilities, relating to the state of accessibility on the McMaster University campus, is insufficient.
- The definition of a MSU member in the MSU Bylaws prevents some students with disabilities from participating in MSU from voting in MSU elections or running for an elected position.
- Despite the fact that MSU members with disabilities pay for services with DARTS, a subsidiary of the Hamilton Street Rail (HSR) and Accessible Transportation Services, the MSU has established no professional relationship with the service.
- Faculty and course instructors are not required to upload a course syllabus online, which impedes student access to essential course information.
- Students with disabilities struggle with physical campus accessibility barriers that prevent this demographic from learning effectively.

### **Recommendations**

The MSU recommends that McMaster University:

- Where possible, strive to create proactive solutions to weather-related barriers on campus.
- Strive to implement universal designs that are accessible to student employees of all abilities.
- Should give adequate training and provide efficient support services to aid in creating accessible environments, services, and communities to students at McMaster University.
- Make methods and modules of online learning accessible for with students with disabilities.
- Grant an SAS Student Consulting Board member a seat on the Welcome Week Planning Committee.
- Have disability studies courses taught at McMaster University.
- Provide essential course information and conduct work with MIETL to assess how universal design is implemented as appropriate at McMaster.
- Host an Accessibility Forum annually, and should present a summary report the concerns and recommendations from the Accessibility Forum at the McMaster Accessibility Council on a yearly basis.
- Let students with disabilities register for their classes on MOSAIC before students without disabilities.
- Should offer additional funding or supports for students with disabilities who require the use of Personal Support Workers to succeed as students at McMaster University.
- Fully comply with all provincial accessibility laws and legislations at McMaster University.

### **Further Reading**

For more information about Accessibility, visit the [General Policies section](#) of the MSU website to read the full Policy Paper.

## **Ancillary Fees Policy Paper [Maroon Paper]**

### **Preamble**

Ancillary fees are defined as mandatory student fees that must be paid to the university in addition to tuition. Across the province, students are increasingly taking on the burden of paying for services, resources, buildings and other university costs through ancillary fees. Many of the services provided to students through ancillary fees are becoming more important to students than ever, and cannot in good faith be classified as ancillary when defining the necessary inputs for student success.

### **Principles**

The MSU believes that:

- Governance of ancillary fees must remain in the hands of students.
- All ancillary fees at McMaster University should contribute toward a model of fair cost sharing between students and the university.
- McMaster University's commitment to being a 'research-intensive, student-centered' university directly relies on supporting departments under Student Affairs.
- Faculty career and co-operative education centres (CCEs) are essential to the core mission of the university.

### **Concerns**

The MSU is concerned that:

- McMaster students pay among the highest tuition and ancillary fee rates in the country, and tuition continues to rise faster than inflation at Ontario universities.
- Student ancillary fee contributions to Student Affairs are not being fully matched by McMaster University.
- Faculty career, co-operative & experiential education centres (CCEs) have become core to McMaster's student-centred mission, yet are still largely funded through faculty-specific ancillary fees.
- Faculty societies do not currently operate under any faculty-specific Compulsory Ancillary Fees agreement, leaving faculty societies vulnerable to increasing faculty-specific ancillary fees in order to sustain or improve existing services
- Factoring in basic Athletics & Recreation ancillary fees, plus the cost of membership to The Pulse, McMaster undergraduate students pay the highest amount for full access to athletic facilities.
- In addition to the two base Athletics & Recreation fees of \$247.55, full-time undergraduates pay an additional 'part-time' Athletics & Recreation fee of \$4.98 per unit for all summer courses. This represents a duplication of fees for service.

### **Recommendations**

The MSU recommends that McMaster University:

- Address annual funding shortfalls to Student Affairs approaching \$1M/year, McMaster University should increase the operating allocation to Student Affairs

to match student contributions, as per the MSU-McMaster Compulsory Ancillary Fees agreement.

- Ensure fair cost sharing for future faculty-specific services through negotiating with faculties and faculty societies over individual Compulsory Fees agreements.
- Increase student access to experiential and co-operative education by increasing financial contributions to respective faculty CCE offices.
- Eliminate the \$4.98 per unit part-time Athletics & Recreation fee for full-time undergraduate students taking courses in the summer.

### **Further Reading**

For more information about Ancillary Fees, visit the [General Policies section](#) of the MSU website to read the full Policy Paper.

## **Course Registration Policy Paper [Maroon Paper]**

### **Preamble**

Course registration is an exciting time for most McMaster students: it provides the opportunities to get into classes that develop one's knowledge and skills, expand one's horizons, and get that much closer to completing that coveted degree. However, feedback on course registration reveals that many students are annually frustrated and dissatisfied with the process. This policy focuses on key concerns tabled by McMaster students, ranging from first year students just entering the system, to concerns levied by frustrated recent graduates.

### **Principles**

The MSU believes that:

- Students should have access to courses that guide them towards their personal, academic and/or career goals.
- Students should be granted unlimited access to all courses on their program lists or department.

### **Concerns**

The MSU is concerned that:

- Many students are currently unable to get into courses that are not required, but recommended, for advancement in their academic career.

### **Recommendations**

The MSU recommends that McMaster University:

- Require programs and/or departments to identify courses which they deem as "Recommended", to the Faculty and Registrar. These "Recommended" courses shall be those, which traditionally exhibit high student demand, and are prerequisites for a significant number of upper-year courses.
- Incorporate a waiting list for courses into Mosaic.
- Incorporate a tracking system into Mosaic for the number of students unable to register for a particular course. This data can be used in subsequent years for resource planning.
- Should implement a lottery system for student log-in times if Mosaic were to limit the maximum number of students using the system at any one time
- Should grant students the option to customize their academic path to the highest degree possible in advance of course registration, including the declaration of a double-major or minor.
- Provide information on the number of seats in each course on the Undergraduate Calendar/Course Timetable, in order to provide the most information to students as possible in the course planning process.
- Upon course cancellations, indicate the cancellation as a note underneath the cancelled course on the Undergraduate Calendar.

**Further Reading**

For more information about Course Registration, visit the [General Policies section](#) of the MSU website to read the full Policy Paper.

## **Deferred Maintenance & Sustainable Growth Policy Paper [Maroon Paper]**

### **Preamble**

McMaster University is a sprawling campus of over 300 acres, the University first moving to its current location in Hamilton in 1930. Several buildings still in use were constructed around that time, with most other academic buildings constructed during the 20th century. As a result, aging campus infrastructure requires constant care and the McMaster Students Union leadership has kept a keen eye on the issue of deferred maintenance.

### **Concerns**

The MSU is concerned that:

- The overall deferred maintenance sum for the University is estimated to be around \$150 Million.

### **Recommendations**

The MSU recommends that McMaster University:

- At the very least invest \$12.65 million per year to allow Facility Services to focus on critical DM requirements, while preventing the sudden failure of building components.
- Create a long term plan to increase annual maintenance funding to \$25 Million a year as proposed by the 2012 McMaster Asset Management Plan.
- Along with the Provincial Government, prioritize addressing the Deferred Maintenance backlog at McMaster University by increasing its proportional share of directly funding DM to an industrial standard of 1.5% of CRV. This figure amounts to approximately \$26 Million a year and will be a drastic increase from its current funding levels of approx 0.10% of CRV<sup>5</sup>.
- Target some elements of maintenance funding at the repurposing of spaces to increase their viability in new pedagogy.

### **Further Reading**

For more information about Deferred Maintenance and Sustainable Growth, visit the [General Policies section](#) of the MSU website to read the full Policy Paper.

## **Mental Health Policy Paper [Maroon Paper]**

### **Preamble**

The mental health of students at McMaster is a principle of great importance to the MSU. Post-secondary students fall within the age group that is most likely to suffer the effects of mental illness. It is estimated that one in four post-secondary students will experience some form of mental illness during their time at a post-secondary institution. The MSU's concerns and recommendations stem from conversations, experiences, and the research of individuals, experts, and professionals within both McMaster and the larger post-secondary sphere. The MSU presents a goal to establish a framework that will help guide future initiatives and direct lobbying efforts.

### **Principles**

The MSU believes that:

- Mental health and wellbeing for students is a critical concern that should be addressed by all levels of government, McMaster University, and the McMaster Students Union.
- Students dealing with mental health issues should have quick and easy access to physicians and counselors.

### **Concerns**

The MSU is concerned that:

- Increasing mental health concerns at post secondary institutions have lead to longer wait times and decreased access to resources.
- Students have limited on-campus access to continuing care beyond initial appointments.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Frontline Care**

- The provincial and federal governments should prioritize funding for frontline mental health care at post-secondary institutions.
- The University should prioritize funding for the Student Wellness Centre and frontline mental health care.
- Better coordination of services with the community so that students needing additional aid can easily and speedily seek support services.

#### **Academic Support**

- Student Accessibility Services reviews its current accommodation procedures to ensure the process is consistent with the changing accessibility landscape.
- Easily accessible mental health training should be required by all faculty members and teaching assistants.
- McMaster should create a "Bounce-Back" program to help identify and aid students struggling academically in their first year of transition into University.
- McMaster should develop a university-wide policy and process for accommodations for exams, midterms, tests and assignments for requests that may arise suddenly from extenuating circumstances

- McMaster University's policy on Undergraduate Course Management should be amended to mandate university instructors to include information on mental health resource and other accessibility accommodations.
- The government and stakeholders must work with institutions to develop a method that allows students to identify themselves as needing mental health support in the early application stage of their PSE.

### **Broader Campus Support**

- The campus community should establish and publicize pathways that students can follow to seek help for their Mental Health Concern in a centralized accessible location.
- The University should help to reduce mental health stigma by making sure that all official communication with students and works to build resilience.
- The University should expand training programs for more individuals in leadership positions.
- The government and stakeholders should work together to develop a comprehensive mental health provincial policy specific to Post Secondary Education.
- The federal government should undertake studies at the national level to better understand the effects of mental illness on students and to produce data that will be used to guide and focus future initiatives and policies.
- A cross-Canadian training program should be created, in consultation with provincial governments, stakeholders, and institutions targeting at youth and early adult mental illness detection, prevention and intervention.

### **Further Reading**

For more information about Mental Health, visit the [General Policies section](#) of the MSU website to read the full Policy Paper.

## **Supporting High Quality Classroom Instruction [Maroon Paper]**

### **Preamble**

With Ontario universities facing the challenges of inflationary costs and increased undergraduate enrolment, maintaining educational standards is highly important to students. In order to ensure that these challenges are adequately met, the need for resources in teaching and learning, including certified instructors and teaching assistants, pedagogical and professional development, and rewarding the professors who teach well are critical to the success of current and future McMaster students.

Students believe that a combination of inputs contribute towards student academic success, both within the classroom and within the greater university infrastructure. The current reality is that Ontario universities are facing hyperinflationary cost pressures and a limited provincial emphasis on investing into quality of education. Thus, universities are finding it more challenging to maintain a high-quality teaching and learning environment for students. This policy addresses student concerns over quality of education that students are currently facing, and advances recommendations to invest in quality-driven initiatives at McMaster University.

### **Principles**

The MSU believes that:

- Student learning is dependent on quality teaching in the classroom.
- Instructors must have the resources to develop their teaching skills.
- Teaching assistants should be encouraged to take advantage of the resources at MIETL.
- Teaching-stream faculty are critically important members of the University community, as students benefit from their expertise and passion for teaching.

### **Concerns**

The MSU is concerned that:

- Class sizes are increasing for McMaster students.
- The number of full-time faculty (teaching-stream or traditional tenure faculty) has not kept pace with increases in undergraduate enrolment over the past ten years.
- Teaching-stream faculty members are not held in high-enough regard as valuable members of the academic community.
- Teaching-stream positions are paid less than other full-time faculty, creating a disincentive for faculty members to initially enter this pathway.
- The process for removal of teaching-stream faculty members is much simpler than removal of tenure-track professors, and acts as a disincentive towards teaching.
- McMaster University policy places a cap on the number of teaching-stream faculty members for each faculty.
- McMaster instructors receive irregular formal training or new faculty orientations and are not expected to attain certification in teaching.
- McMaster teaching assistants (TAs) do not receive mandatory training in teaching or classroom leadership.

## **Recommendations**

The MSU recommends that McMaster University:

- Appoint a teaching and learning leader in each department to work with their colleagues in improving the department's teaching, learning, and assessment strategies to assist in reviewing and designing curriculum.
- Amend McMaster policy to reflect a growing appreciation for teaching, by readjusting remuneration, removal processes and governance abilities for teaching-stream faculty, and with raising the cap on the number of teaching-stream faculty members, in conjunction with increasing instructor hiring by approximately ten (10) percent to address the trends in increasing class-sizes and student-faculty ratios.
- Mandate that all new teaching assistants attend paid, institution-wide training from MIETL before entering the classroom.
- Ensure new faculty orientation programs are longer, and focus on developing connections between new faculty while also updating these individuals on current pedagogical research and innovative practices.

## **Further Reading**

For more information about High Quality Classroom Instruction, visit the [General Policies section](#) of the MSU website to read the full Policy Paper.

## **Undergraduate Course Management Policy Paper [Maroon Paper]**

### **Preamble**

Tests and assignments are the common means of evaluation for most courses offered at McMaster University. They are administered with the goals of not only evaluating the student's performance fairly, but also ensuring that the student has learned the course material. However, when examinations and papers conflict time wise with one another, or with other coursework, these goals are sometimes not met. A conflict occurs when examinations and papers are scheduled too closely to one another, or when other coursework is scheduled in the close proximity of such work. When this occurs students cannot be truly evaluated fairly or consistently, and it is also probable that a student will not learn effectively with such stress levels. This paper examines current policy and is meant to act as a general guideline for all faculties.

### **Principles**

The MSU believes that:

- Students should be given adequate time to complete their course work, prepare for, and write their examinations.
- Students should be made aware of the existence of policies that pertain to evaluation, including but not limited to: examinations, laboratory reports, take home examinations, papers.
- Students and instructors should uphold the policies outlined in the Undergraduate Course Management Policy.

### **Concerns**

The MSU is concerned that:

- Not all due-dates or testing dates are communicated to students at the beginning of the term, which may pose challenges to students trying to manage multiple due-dates.
- Students face unhealthy amounts of stress towards the end of the semester due to balancing final assignments, learning new course content, and preparing for examinations.
- Students have due-dates for assignments or take home testing that fall during the examination period, as scheduled by the Office of the Registrar.
- Students are not made publically aware of what days of the term are covered by the Assessment Ban.
- Students and Instructors currently do not have an avenue with which they can easily report violations of the Undergraduate Course Management Policy.

### **Recommendations**

The MSU recommends that McMaster University:

- Explicitly state due-dates for all marked material used in the calculation of the final course grade in course outlines
- Undergraduate Course Management policy amended the Undergraduate Course Management policy to prohibit all tests, take home exams, assignments, laboratories, papers, etc., regardless of weighting, during the Assessment Ban period.
- Set the due- date on the last day of examinations for final take home examinations or cumulative assignments that are due during the examination period.
- Launch a campaign to publicize the Assessment Ban prior to each examination period.
- Make the Assessment Ban dates a required component of all course syllabi as mandated by the Undergraduate Course Management policy.
- Amend the Undergraduate Course Management policy to include a section on a course of action for reporting infractions of the policy.
- Create an online form whereby students and instructors can submit violations to the Assessment Ban.

**Further Reading**

For more information about Undergraduate Course Management, visit the [General Policies section](#) of the MSU website to read the full Policy Paper.