COMMITTEE ON STUDENT SERVICES
Minutes of the meeting held on October 20, 2015, 11:03 a.m.
James Administration Building, Room 302

Present: Christopher Buddle (co-chair), Ollivier Dyens, Jennifer Janzen, Avik (Jim) Ghoshdastidar, Gillian Lane-Mercier, Brighita Lungu, Dusica Maysinger, Chloe Rourke (co-chair), Ian Simmie, Muhammad Walid, Linda Webb (secretary), Tamara Western, Robyn Wiltshire


The second meeting of the Committee on Student Services (CSS) for the 2015-16 academic year was called to order at 10:35 a.m.

1. Approval of Agenda
The Agenda was approved as circulated.

2. Approval of Minutes – 19 September 2015
The Minutes were approved as circulated.

3. New Business
   a) 2015-16 Student co-chair
      C. Buddle announced that C. Rourke had been selected by the students as co-chair.

   b) Meeting with the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) [30 min]
      O. Dyens joined the CSS meeting to address a few specific points:
      i. budget overview
      ii. vision for student services for 2015-2016 Academic year
      iii. innovation fund

      He stated that the figures that were presented to committee members in the spring had changed a bit so the information that was presented to CSS last May will be presented another time. Preliminary numbers should be available for November CSS meeting. O. Dyens then confirmed that while it was the intention to spend down unused funds in Student Services, the amount was changed due to the current staffing deficit. The recommendation is to use the unspent funds to move important issues forward and improve services for students in a sustainable way, while preserving a contingency fund. Student Services fees would only increase by small increments when necessary.

      Members embarked on a lengthy discussion regarding student well-being. Ideally, students would follow a path to wellness so they would leave university with an accumulation of skills to assist them in living a well-balanced life. The discussion that ensued included a wide range of suggestions from programming a grass-roots approach to encourage healthy living. Members considered upstream and downstream service provisions with the aim of leaving facilitating access to critical services. Members all seemed to appreciate the concept of prevention over intervention.

      It was recognized that wide scale institutional change would be needed to get on the path to wellness, and members questions how do we break down the silos to get the entire McGill community working collaboratively in the same direction? Suggestions included a visioning session involving participants
from across the community to discuss student well-being to collect thoughts on what is the best way to move forward.

The Innovation Fund is seen as being useful to trigger to research, pilot projects, or as matching funds to bring vision of holistic health forward. The innovation Fund provided seed funding, and with this one-time funding there is the need to be mindful that the funds are not permanent. One of the challenges of the innovation fund is being able to reach big goal with small projects. O. Dyens questioned if members were willing to accept applications from all areas of the University. C. Rourke suggested that in order to see cross departmental projects, CSS would need to seek them out and encourage them. It is also that the Student Service Review will bring forth its own set of changes.

Members went on to discuss that there seemed to be a three-tiered approach evolving – proposals requiring less than five-thousand dollars, larger, interdisciplinary projects, and smaller easily attainable projects (“low-hanging fruit”). I. Simmie encouraged members to consider the idea of carving out part of a units operating budget to finance innovative ideas so the innovation fund is not simply as a result of unspent funds. O. Dyens was receptive to creative solutions to budget cuts and encourage support of small projects to move forward.

Members stressed that it is important to have budget information prior to evaluating innovation fund applications. Also important to identify what problems student see that need fixing in the short, medium and long term. C. Rourke recommended that we communicate with the advisory board student-members to promote the innovation fund and encourage solutions. It was also suggested that the CSS co-Chairs join an upcoming Student Services Director meeting to stimulate brainstorming.

4. Business Arising

a) student services review [5 minutes]

In response to what will be available to the public re review documents, C. Buddle reported that while the self-study documents are not public, the recommendations that come from review committee and the response from Student Services will be available. R. Wiltshire took the opportunity to reiterate that there is ample opportunity for students to have input through the group interview process of the Student Service Review. It is important to encourage students to be part of process and if they can’t participate in the actual interviews, encourage students to report by means collective documents or by writing directly to the Chair of review committee.

Ian Simmie suggested that the Student Services Briefing Book as well as the Student Services Goals and Objectives are good sources of information that can be used by students.

b) medical notes [5 minutes]

C. Buddle reported that there was a discussion on Medical Notes at a recent meeting of ESAAC, and a very good discussion took place. Essentially, the Subcommittee on Student Affairs Policies and Procedures has now placed this on their agenda. This topic is moving forward – some of the ideas are safe disclosure center (the centre would communicate, on behalf of the student, to whomever needs to know about the medical absence). Another approach is to consider a standardized way of accepting medical notes, or even considering an allocation of student “sick days”. Discussion is ongoing and additional information may become available as the year goes on.
M. Walid commented that in the current practice in the Faculty of Medicine includes the ability to schedule days off and to reschedule important activities. In addition, Professors might want to schedule two different evaluation scheme with different weighting which would provide an opportunity where students would not be required to provide medical notes.

The discussion will be extended to Faculties once a formal proposal has been brought to ESAAC.

c) innovation fund [30 minutes]
   This topic was discussed in depth at the beginning of the meeting.

d) Guests at future meetings [5 minutes]
   C. Rourke suggested that Elizabeth Fiset be invited to a future meeting to share her work on Mental Health Strategies, possibly for November.

   C. Buddle suggested that Teri Phillips be included in a future meeting either next meeting or the January meeting.

   There was a suggestion to invite Student Services Directors to next CSS meeting, an alternate suggestion was to invite CSS co-chairs to a Student Services Directors Meeting to discuss the innovation fund.

5. Executive Director’s Report
   Due to time constraints, this was tabled to the next meeting

6. Other Business

   Meeting adjourned at 12:56