

Information on FY2014 Course Cuts in the McGill
Faculty of Arts (Affecting 2014-2015 Academic Year)

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1. Background

In December 2012 the Government of Québec announced large province-wide cuts to government funding of Québec universities. The government offered universities the choice of absorbing the cuts immediately or financing them over a five-year period. McGill chose the latter. Financed over a five-year period, McGill's share of the cuts amount to a \$19.1 million reduction in FY2013 and a \$19.2 million reduction in FY 2014¹ (these are the only two of the budgets which have set so far). Further, "As a result of rescinding scheduled tuition increases, McGill will receive \$18M less in tuition revenue (\$6M in FY2013 and \$12M in FY2014)."² There has been some movement from the government to return this funding; however "some one-time-only partial reimbursement for the lost tuition has been **indicated but not confirmed.**"³

According to a conversation with McGill Provost Anthony Masi, the Québec government is confirmed to give back "\$20.3 million of \$30 million."⁴ However this amount is already earmarked towards: hiring new tenure-track professors (\$10 million); programs targeting "unrepresented groups" at McGill; matching philanthropic gifts to the university (up to \$6 million); and up to \$3 million available from the province if McGill meets the Ministry of Finance's budgetary goals.⁵ So what these numbers boil down to is reduced funding for McGill that will trickle down to its operations and the services it provides.

2. How McGill-Wide Budget Cuts Affect Arts

After negotiating with those units affected by the cuts that have negotiating rights (such as MUNACA) and formulating the budget, the Provost announced that there would be a 10% reduction in each faculty's Teaching Support budget. His

¹ McGill University Budget Book FY2014, accessible at <http://www.mcgill.ca/provost/budget/mcgill-university-budget-book-fy2014>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Conversation with Provost Anthony Masi, February 11th 2014

⁵ Ibid.

reason for this was “to avoid layoffs.”⁶ In the same conversation, Provost Masi stated that from the point of view of the university, the Faculty of Arts was spending large amounts on course lecturers. According to the Provost, the Faculty of Arts thus decided to take this cut predominantly from the Arts Contract Academic Staff budget.⁷ Contract Academic Staff in this context refers to all non-tenure track professors, meaning faculty and course lecturers. However, it has been made clear that these cuts only target the budget for hiring course lecturers.

Therefore, “in April 2013 the Provost wrote to all Deans to inform them of the budget cut to their Faculties. Deans were directed to reduce Contract Academic Staff (CAS) expenditures by 10%. There is no choice in this matter, and the Arts amount to cut for 2014-15 is approximately \$366,000.”⁸ At the Faculty Meeting April 23rd the Dean mentioned the cut in his presentation; however it was not mentioned at the September 24th meeting, and the November 26th meeting was cancelled. In fact, students (through their student representatives) were not informed of the result of this budget reduction- less money to hire course lecturers and thus about 50 courses getting ‘cut’- until the Faculty Meeting of January 28th, 2014.

So the math for how a general budget reduction results in students having fewer courses to register from is as follows:

- The amount reduced from the Arts CAS budget is \$366, 298
- The minimum cost of hiring a course lecturer (that is, their salary for one 3 credit course) using the Contract Academic Staff budget is \$7,200
 - If (for whatever reason) the lecturer has a salary higher than \$7,200 then there will be fewer courses ‘cut’
- Thus $\$366,298 \div \$7,200 = 50.87$

⁶ Conversation with Provost Anthony Masi, February 11th 2014

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Correspondence with Dean of Arts Christopher Manfredi, January 29th 2014

- Thus, the reduction translates to 50 fewer courses that will have a course lectures and will therefore not be offered by the Faculty of Arts in the 2014-2015 academic year

3. How Are Course Getting Cut?

In the budget process the budgetary decisions are ‘handed down’ (that is, dictated) from each administrative level to the next. However the decisions are purely budgetary and do not concern operations. Thus, the decisions regarding specifically which courses will not be offered are to be made at the “local” (that is, departmental level) “by the Chair, probably in consultation with the undergraduate director”⁹ This will take the form of the following process. In a departmental meeting, the department forms two lists of courses they plan on teaching in the next academic year- one list of classes taught by tenure track professors (and therefore unaffected by the CAS budget reduction), and one list of courses, ranked by the priority the department assigns them, to be taught by CAS. It is this latter list of courses that will be affected by the cuts (that is, it is some of these courses which will no longer be offered next year) It is important to keep in mind that this list changes from year to year depending on a variety of factors, such as professors going on sabbatical. The second step of the process is that the department (likely the Chair) will meet with the Dean and present these lists, where the Dean judges them based on the following criteria: the likely enrolment in the courses, how critical that course is (for example, as a prerequisite for program-required courses), and previous commitments to department regarding CAS budget (for example, if a prof who usually teaches a course has become associate dean, then the Dean may have committed to hiring a CAS to teach that course). The third and final step is that the Dean will decide on how to allocate the Faculty’s (now reduced) CAS budget among the departments, based on the aforementioned criteria.¹⁰ Each department receives an amount from the CAS budget that allows them to teach a certain amount of the

⁹ Correspondence with Dean of Arts Christopher Manfredi, January 29th 2014

¹⁰ Correspondence with Dean of Arts Christopher Manfredi, January 30th 2014

highest ranked courses on the list of courses needing CAS. So basically, which courses are getting 'cut' depends on how the department ranks that list.

Departments are having these meetings throughout February and March¹¹, with final CAS allocation decisions by the Dean likely being made sometime in March. Therefore **it is critical that departmental representatives get in contact with their department administration (ie. the Chair or undergraduate director) as soon as possible** in order to voice student input on these decisions.

4. What Can Student Associations Do?

Unfortunately, the larger budgetary decisions leading to these cuts were made in April 2013, and the impression I have received from the administration is that they are not reversible.¹² The most worrying discovery I have had regarding these course cuts is just how little say students have in the budgetary decision making processes that affect them so strongly. In many cases the administration has shown they are willing to act only as mandated by the McGill University Statutes and not in a more constructive way that would not go against the University Statutes but could involve more student input in the decisions that will affect us most. The only form of student input (very different than simply communicating information to students) that is taking place in this entire process is at the lowest ("local")¹³ level, departmental meetings, where although "[s]tudents are represented"¹⁴ reduced budgets are already taken as a given. While it would be ideal to have student input more institutionalized in budgetary decisions, the very fact that simply because it is not institutionalized is automatically taken to mean that there can not be more student input demonstrates that the Administration's priorities do not include creating a consensus among all of McGill's stakeholders for the important decisions that affect them all.

¹¹ Correspondence with Dean of Arts Christopher Manfredi, January 29th 2014

¹² Conversation with Provost Anthony Masi, February 11th 2014

¹³ Correspondence with Dean of Arts Christopher Manfredi, January 29th 2014

¹⁴ Ibid.

Having pointed out the rigidity of the causative budgetary decisions, there are a number of strategies we can adopt to attempt to mitigate the effects these courses will have on students:

- i. As a departmental association, make sure you get in contact with your department as soon as possible in order to find out when these course prioritization meetings are happening, and make sure you have representatives there who are prepared to speak on students' behalf.
- ii. Given that only the budget for CAS is getting reduced, attempt to persuade professors who are teaching under the standard teaching load of 12 credits per semester to 'pick up' an extra course that would otherwise not be offered due to the reduction in the CAS budget. Though professors will likely be resistant to adding teaching another course to their already-busy schedules, you can try to incentivize the professors to pick up a course by (examples; not an exhaustive list):
 - a. Stressing the detrimental this will have on the quality of education students receive and student morale
 - b. Pointing out the possibility of co-teaching the extra course, so the professors is picking up only half an extra course
 - c. Stressing the potential variety the professor could have in teaching the extra course (for example, it could be a topics course on something they have always wanted to teach about but didn't have the chance)
- iii. Encourage departments to have tenure-track professors (as opposed to already tenured professors) pick up an extra course to positively contribute to their 'service to the community' component of tenure review
- iv. I will be continuing contact with the Dean of Arts to attempt to have any extra room in the Faculty of Arts budget (for example, money freed up if a professor takes an unpaid leave of absence) go to the CAS budget to mitigate the reductions.