



ARTS FROSH 2017 EQUITY REPORT

I would like to acknowledge that I am situated on the traditional territory of the Kanien'keha:ka people, a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst nations. I recognize and respect the Kanien'keha:ka as the traditional keepers of these lands and waters.

Introduction

Substantive efforts have been made in recent years to make Frosh more inclusive and equitable, and this was apparent during Arts Frosh 2017. Frosh organizers have worked to incorporate principles of harm reduction, respect, and consent, as well as to better accommodate students with dietary restrictions and those living with disabilities. Despite this, there are a number of areas for improvement. This report is intended to evaluate the inclusivity and accessibility of Arts Frosh 2017 events and propose tangible measures to increase the commitment to these principles in future years.

Overview: Biggest concerns

- Lack of water at events
- Inaccessibility to people with certain disabilities and medical conditions
- Exclusion of underage froshies
- Over-emphasis on drinking

Frosh Leader/O-Staff Training

Frosh Leader and O-Staff training was well delivered! New in 2017 was an Accessibility Training session, created in conjunction of the Office for Students with Disabilities. This training was meant to increase awareness about the different barriers students with physical and mental disabilities might face, and provide tools for leaders and staff to accommodate these students while respecting their autonomy. This training should definitely be continued and further developed!

Group Formation

This year's group formation went pretty smoothly. Due to the new location on Rutherford Field, which has a capacity of 400 people, group formation was staggered. Froshies were told to show up during one of two time slots based on the colour of their bracelets. The main issue with group formation was the field's capacity, which meant most groups had to leave immediately and could not use the space to bond or to use the bouncy castle and bubble sports set up there. A big part of making Froshies feel comfortable and included is helping them bond with their peers on the first day! These games (or the money used to rent them) could have been put to better use to improve Froshies' bonding experience.

"Ghost Crawl": Montreal/Pub Crawl

From what I witnessed attending the East Crawl of The Ghost Crawl, there are many tangible ways to make this event more inclusive. Positively, MSERT was present and



Coords were overseeing each venue and the walking routes. There was a large variation in the degree to which each venue posed equity and accessibility concerns.

A big issue with the crawl (and throughout Frosh) was the lack of water. While at certain venues, including Mikibbins Pub, Bar James and Chef on Call, O-Staff were offering pre-poured cups of water to froshies, at other venues such as Muzique, Gerts, and Café Campus, water was not being offered or in some cases not even visible. Perhaps the single easiest and most effective harm reduction measure for froshies who are drinking alcohol is to have water readily available. Water should be pre-poured at all stops and offered before or in addition to alcoholic beverages. This not only keeps froshies hydrated but also reduces pressure to drink alcohol at every stop.

A second concern (also a problem throughout Frosh) was that some of the venues were not wheelchair accessible, so organizers should seek out new venues that are. Furthermore, some venues had excessively loud music and flashing strobe lights. I spoke to a froshie with a concussion who mentioned that this made it difficult for her to be at those stops on the crawl. Especially since this is already the atmosphere at many of the night-time club events, it seems unnecessary for the Crawl to include these aspects, since it only creates another event that is inaccessible to those with epilepsy, brain injuries, and other disabilities.

The food provided at Chef on Call was great to help some froshies sober up and was also available for those with vegetarian, vegan and gluten free diets. However, the snack at Freshii, peanut butter balls, was extremely inaccessible and dangerous to those with allergies. There was nothing indicating what the snack was, and during the time I was at the stop, a froshie with a nut allergy ate the snack by accident. Luckily, her allergy was not serious, but for many people with severe nut allergies, that mistake could be deadly. All food given out at Frosh should be nut free, or at the very least, be clearly marked with common allergens.

A last major issue with the Crawl was the exclusion or segregation of underage froshies. They were not allowed into Gerts, and had to sit on the side in Bar James. Not only does this mean this event was at times completely inaccessible to them, but it also perpetuates the idea that Frosh is not fun unless you can or choose to drink, rather than Frosh consisting of activities that are fun with and without alcohol.

Boat Cruise

The pros of the boat cruise is that there are indoor and outdoor spaces, including places for froshies to sit and relax, and there are no strobe lights used. Although the boats are technically wheelchair accessible, they have multiple floors and stairs that make it difficult for froshies with reduced mobility to participate. MSERT was present, and Red Frogs were handing out water and granola bars before and after each 90-minute cruise, which was positive for harm reduction. On the boat, however, water was not visible and needed to be purchased at the bar. Bathrooms were gendered.

Plage



The “Bust the Sandman” Plage event was a really unique and fun non-drinking event that froshies seemed to enjoy a lot, however it was very poorly attended. It was a space for froshies to chill on the beach, play Frisbee, and do a silent disco. In speaking with some Frosh leaders, they felt the event was not well advertised. This event could be much better attended if it did not overlap with the boat cruise, and be a chance for froshies to meet students outside their Frosh group in more relaxed setting, reducing Frosh’s emphasis on drinking events. The event was accessible to those with reduced mobility.

Night Events

MSERT and Red Frogs were present and handing out water at all the night events, which was really good for harm reduction!

The first night event, “A Spectre is Haunting”, was held at Unity, a big venue with multiple dance floors, a chill zone, games room, and outdoor terrace. This was great as it accommodated froshies who wanted to dance as well as those who were interested in a more low-key night. However, it seemed that many froshies weren’t aware that all these spaces existed, as most were on the bottom dance floor, crammed in so tightly that it was almost impossible to move or get out if you were at the centre of the group. It may be helpful to have O-staff directing people to the upper floors as they entered. The venue also did not appear to be wheelchair accessible.

The second night event, “Power Grid” at Time Supper Club, was wheelchair accessible and the venue had a gender-neutral single stall bathroom on the main floor, which were positive. However, it was not accessible to underage froshies, many of whom got turned away at the door! Not only was this problematic because it excluded young froshies, but it separated many of them from their groups and left them to get home alone. Furthermore, this event was not well attended, likely because froshies were tired from Boat Cruise and it was the night before Beach Day. A club event on this evening could be eliminated entirely and replaced by a non-drinking event! Frosh could be made much more accessible to underagers and froshies with different interests by incorporating more fun, hyped-up events outside of nightclub and party environments.

On the final night of Frosh, two interfaculty concert events were held at Olympia and Metropolis. Coords were stationed outside and at major intersections between the two venues, and were also checking on froshies in the washrooms, which was great. Both venues lacked gender-neutral washrooms.

Beach Day

The bus loading this year took place at Beaver Lake and was extremely slow. The presence of bathrooms, MSERT and free pizza at the lake were helpful, however, due to a lack of garbage cans/bags, garbage was littered everywhere, which is obviously not environmentally friendly. While it was mostly cleaned up later, O-Staff should be stationed around the site with garbage/recycling bags throughout the loading.



At Beach Club, the biggest issue again was lack of water. While there were Red Frogs near the entrance filling up water bottles, it was very difficult to find water throughout the rest of the venue. The bars were understaffed and cannot be relied on to supply water. Pros were that froshies were given freezies and sandwiches, including vegetarian/vegan options. MSERT was there, and there were chill areas as well as places to sit in the shade. Portapotties provided gender-neutral bathroom options.

Movie

The movie "Ghostbusters" was shown on Forbes Field, which was a relaxed non-drinking event after Beach Day, supervised by Coords and O-Staff.

Arcade

Due to rain, the mountain breakfast, Tam Tams, and Piknic Electronic events were cancelled. The Coords reacted quickly and pulled together a fun arcade event to replace them. O-staff were at Place-des-Arts Metro giving tickets to froshies to travel to the arcade at the Atwater Forum de Montreal, where they were given arcade cards to play games and socialize. O-staff were stationed outside of the metro directing froshies to the event. While beer and food were served, it was a very relaxed mixer event that catered to a variety of interests. In future years, Coords should look into planning a similar event, perhaps earlier in Frosh, so that froshies could get to know each other and different groups in an environment where the focus is not drinking, which could help them feel more comfortable and supported throughout Frosh.

Other initiatives

The information booklets handed out to Froshies were marked with icons to describe possible limitations to accessibility at each event, including whether venues were wheelchair accessible, and whether there was loud music or flashing lights. While this is positive step towards inclusivity and provides froshies with important information regarding their health and safety, Arts Frosh should strive to eliminate these barriers to participation.

This year, Arts Frosh collaborated with the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) on the "Access Ally" initiative. Leaders with additional training, identified by "Access Ally" badges, were meant to be a go-to point for froshies seeking help with mental or physical disabilities. While this was a well-intended initiative, its effectiveness and impact were not evident during Frosh. It was difficult to identify the allies from the small badges they wore, especially since they were leaders busy with their groups and other responsibilities. Future Coords should expand upon this idea and collaborate with the OSD and other mental health and disability support groups to develop more substantive ways in which to accommodate froshies facing these issues. Ideas include having individuals (who are not also leaders) and who are trained to support those experiencing panic attacks or concussion symptoms, for example, stationed at every event. Froshies could be provided with a phone number (other than their leaders') to confidentially text questions or concerns about Frosh or to request aid.



Concluding remarks

Based on the issues identified throughout the report, these are my concrete proposals to improve Arts Frosh's commitment to equity and inclusivity:

- Have water readily accessible at ALL events and encourage froshies to drink it
- Research new venues that are wheelchair accessible and book them whenever possible
- Reduce the use of flashing strobe lights and eliminate them during the Crawl
- Do not provide food with nuts and indicate all common allergens
- Make Frosh more trans-positive by having at least one gender-neutral bathroom at each event. Coords can do this by simply indicating it with a paper sign on the bathroom door.
- Make sure underage froshies can enter every venue and participate in all games
- Reduce pressure to drink alcohol by better promoting non-drinking centred events, and creating new opportunities for froshies to mix and bond outside of party or club environments
- Continue to develop Accessibility Training for leaders and Access Ally idea

I am very happy to see the initiatives that Arts Frosh has been working on to make Frosh more inclusive and accessible to froshies! Frosh is longstanding tradition at McGill in which many of the events reoccur every year, and I believe that these staple events can be preserved while adapting them to meet a broader range of froshies' needs. While each activity will not appeal equally to every froshie, Frosh should be an opportunity for all froshies to enjoy themselves, meet new people, and feel welcomed into the McGill community regardless of who they are, their (dis)ability and medical conditions, and their desire to drink alcohol.

Respectfully Submitted,

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AUS Equity Commissioner 2017-2018

Written in September 2017. Any comments or questions can be submitted by email to aus.equity@gmail.com.