

EGSS Town Hall
Thursday, April 19, 2012
Room 200, Coach House
5:30-7:00 pm

PRESENT:

Moksha Serrano (EGSS VP, Academic), Jessica Godin, Alexis McKenzie (MLISSA President), Manisha Phadnis, Ryan Deuel, Fernanda Soler-Urzua, MJ Kim (EGSS Conference Coordinator), Michelle Harazny (EGSS Conference Chair), Cora-Lee Conway (PGSS DISE Rep.), Alex Bon-Miller, Sophia Kapchinsky, (EGSS VP, Finance), Rosalind Hampton

I. INTRODUCTION

Opening Remarks. Moksha S. welcomed folks and conveyed Heather's regrets. Introduced the Council present and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Cora-Lee C. read the EGSS Mandate and thanked people for coming. Cora-Lee provided some context behind the impetus of the meeting.

Moksha S. spoke to EGSS Council's role and talked about key activities, programmes and events. Moksha S. then opened up the floor for discussion.

II. SIS/EGSS

Many students present had questions about the nature of the SIS/EGSS relationship and the recent vote that SIS students participated in.

The former President of MLISSA (2011/2012) Alex was on hand to provide some insight as was the VP, Finance (EGSS) Sophia.

Alexis spoke to the fact that she and Heather have been working through resolving this issue since September. In future questions (re: MLISSA) can be directed to Alexis or current President-elect, Ariana Ross.

Alexis explained that SIS held an on-line vote- not a referendum- via the PGSS electronic voting system. Prior to that vote, meetings were held in the department about what students wanted and how to resolve issues regarding the newly instituted Student Life Fund (SLF) structure where there is no longer fees levied for the SIS association (MLISSA)- which up until that point had been operational since 1998. SIS students paid 2 separate fees (to EGSS and to MLISSA). Now with the Student Life fund there is only one fee being levied to graduate students so we had to figure out what to do going forward. We used an online vote to gauge student wishes for fees that are levied. (SEE APPENDIX A).

We presented students with 2 questions: **What should we do with the funds this year?** And gave them three options 3 options (as determined by Student Life Fund Ad Hoc Committee) and **What should we do with the money for the future?**

Sophia explained that the SLF collects \$10 per student. EGSS is a GSA. Before the SLF we would collect money from each department and MLISSA also collected their own funds on top of the \$10. MLISSA is its own GSA. So the question now is, does the money collected from SIS students (via the SLF) go to MLISSA or EGSS via the PGSS where all GSA funds are funnelled through. Funds are directly from PGSS to SIS and no longer going through the EGSS. Fund.

Alexis explained that the results are not binding but that MLISSA will try to respect the results of the vote- but legally and technically not bound to follow the results and made clear that SIS has no plans to separate from the EGSS. SIS should and will be staying under the EGSS umbrella. If we are not funding EGSS in the future (**60% students voted not to fund EGSS in the future**) opportunities for collaboration have and are being discussed. We've spoken about opt-ing into various activities, events and programmes so we can maintain access. We will have to work things out in the future but there are no plans to separate.

There were questions that followed:

Q: The vote is not binding- but MLISSA attempt to fulfil student wishes and follow the results?

A: 48% voted to give EGSS no funding for this year. And the 1st two options of giving remuneration was a *combined* 52%. The majority says to give nothing. If the results were legally binding we might be forced to follow the last option. But we are opting to look at various funding options.

Q: Will MLSSA have to vote at each year on how the budget the is dealt with?

A: The 2nd question about next year and foreseeable future? Results from that were not to fund EGSS in the future. MLISSA has talked about collaborating in the future but we haven't hammered out the details. This will be an on-going collaborative effort.

Q: Can SIS students run for EGSS positions?

A: EGSS VP, Finance suggested that these kind of decisions would not be made in a town hall setting and that many details still needed to be ironed out. The former MLISSA president spoke to issues around communication and culture sharing that many SIS students are not aware of opportunities made available to them via the EGSS. There are also 5 sub-associations within MLISSA so within the structure of the organization there are ample opportunities for participation.

III. EGSS ELECTIONS

As per the constitution elections should be held before March 1st. There was discussion about why they are taking place so much later this year and how difficult the process of collecting signatures for nomination, campaigning and building awareness around EGSS involvement is at this time of year during the summer. There was an exchange about the lack of competition for EGSS roles and some shared sentiments that perhaps a lack of visibility of timing of the elections resulted in the low participation turn-out. The lack of organization was articulated and although it was not posited as an excuse the strike was mentioned as making this year an exceptionally difficult one to navigate.

At the 1st GA a motion was passed to open up the constitution to being revisited. If there is no spring election- we can have vacancies and hold the election in fall at the by-election.

There was expressed disappointment in regards to the adherence to the constitution and noted that poor management and the lack of consistency and the discrepancies make it difficult to understand and interpret the actions of council.

A discussion about membership ensued and questions about how membership is defined were posed especially as it relates to the potential SIS 'opt-in' system to non-fiscal activities and programs ie. the strike vote, EGSS positions, student issues etc.

IV. SIS/EGSS Revisited.

Former MLISSA president responded that MLSSA and SIS are under the umbrella of EGSS and conceded that she understands some of the confusion. SIS is a unique entity, we are in a faculty but separate because we have our own GSA and it wasn't an issue until now. As per the SLF we can no longer levy our own fee to replace the previous one.

One attendee stated that upon requesting information from both EGSS and SIS in relation to the SLF vote, and the subsequent denials to the information, she contacted the PGSS council. It was communicated to her that the SIS budget would continue to be withheld until there is a referendum to decide on how to proceed.

The Sophia added that we are not at the point of referendum and there are still a number of details that need to be sorted and Alexis stated that the constitution would need to be revisited as well.

There was discussion about mis-management and lack of communication and while it was reiterated that the EGSS does amazing work there are still a lot of unresolved

issues that need to be addressed. For instance, travel awards and fellowships- there were questions about how that would be resolved.

Sophia explained that right now everyone has equal opportunity. The SIS vote came in quite late in the year. Now that the vote has come in we have to decide and we are in discussions about these very issues. Students are not aware of all of the work behind the scenes and it is not because we (the EGSS Council) aren't being transparent but we need to figure things out and then discuss it with everyone. Its counter productive (trying to communicate) when we still don't have the answers. So for the last year- if SIS decides not to fund for the last year- SIS can give a percentage, or reimburse for EGSS.

Alexis spoke to the fact that it's been a really difficult year. It took a while to figure out what the student life fund would mean and we've been trying to figure out what needs to be done. We wanted to be properly informed before informing the student body. In retrospect it may have been better to communicate this to the EGSS at large. We were weary of sharing information before deciding how to move forward but there has been great communication between council (EGSS & SIS).

There was discussion about membership again and what it means. There were questions about how will SIS position itself in relation to EGSS on non-fiscal related issues/activities. ie. the strike. How will SIS define its membership in relation to these issues.

It was stated that SIS participated in the strike because they are members of the EGSS. However culturally as SIS students are pursuing professional degrees it would be fair to say that most SIS students did not want to go on strike. The timing of the vote and strike vote were discussed as contentious and it was agreed that sometimes more voices involved in considering various decisions could help high light and mitigate issues before they become problems.

It was reiterated that SIS students will be members (of the EGSS) no matter what. They are just as important as any other. The trickier question is when we are doing things that involve money. EGSS needs to work on sense of membership in all departments. ie. KPE.

In regards to communications it was mentioned that a SIS student didn't know if they could sign someone's nomination form because of the vote. Many SIS students are under the impression that the vote was a referendum. As we move forward communications are so important.

V. EGSS Structure & Operations

There was a discussion about the hierarchical nature of Council. It is perceived as profoundly top down. A lot happens in contained spaces. In terms of doing things differently it was noted that Council needs to think about how it does things: broader communications- council needs to be more flat in terms of the way authority and information is shared this may help. It was suggested that Council meetings be open.

As per the constitution, council meetings are supposed to be open. But invitations have not been issued. Need information dissemination. There are no minutes shared and the website has not been updated. One attendee noted that the Graduate Student Mobilization Group created a website for the strike within two hours of the strike vote. [<https://egssonstrike.wordpress.com/>] There are other McGill GSA that don't have a mcgill.com domain but we can still share the information. The EGSS does great work but it's necessary to talk about improvement.

Engagement was discussed. Masters degree students- if its take a year for people to figure out how to get involved its already too late. If there was a series of town halls in the fall or to invite people to get involved in the EGSS a great opportunity to get people involved at an early point

The group discussed political engagement and instrumental information for students. There were comments about council being more politically active and exploring tensions between leadership and representation. Representation is important and a part of transparency. Meetings should be open. One attendee articulated leadership as an impetus to help people acclimate to more difficult issues It seems that EGSS (and it could be the perception) didn't want the status quo to be disrupted. And would love to see people in those positions embrace the office in terms of leadership.

It was noted that there shouldn't be confusion between neutrality vs. apathy. There has to be respect for many voices.

It was noted that EGSS council largely were not present or did not make themselves present during the strike and there was disappointment expressed at this fact and a perception that there was a lack of follow through and respect by the council as per the collective decision of students at the GA..

VP, Finance (EGSS) responded that council respected and supported the decision but as students there were also individual choices that had to be made about involvement in the strike. Sophia lauded the passion of the attendees and noted that the lack of transparency and lack of communications it not positive. These ideas are great. One of the biggest problems is apathy!

In terms of concrete suggestions it was suggested that council members take greater responsibility to towards knowing the membership. Leadership starts by knowing your members- we need to work into the role of the constitution- visibility. Council members can go to classes and present themselves on behalf of the EGSS- talk about your rights, and – stop the slippage. The EGSS is every student not council! It wont happen from meetings and emails- inclined to go beyond

EGSS Council Meetings

There was much discussion about the accessibility and transparency surrounding council meetings. Meeting minutes are not posted or emailed and meetings dates and times are not advertised and widely shared. One attendee spoke to an experience of speaking to council earlier in the year and feeling very unwelcome and was no permitted to attend or stay for the duration of the council meeting.

EGSS Councillor Reports

There was a recommendation that council members write and share an annual report of their activities and level of engagement, including an assesment of time commitments to future students and subsequent councillors have better idea of what is involved in the role, the time commitments etc. with lessons, learned and best practices.

It was a suggested that an ad hoc committee on the transition regarding the Student Life fund be formed.