Students' Society of McGill University
Tel: (514) 398-6800 | Fax: (514) 398-7490 | ssmu.ca
3600 McTavish St., Suite 1200, Montréal, QC, H3A 0G3
Located on Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, traditional territories

PETITION FOR AN EXTENDED WINTER HOLIDAY

We, the undersigned, call on the McGill administration to extend the 2020 winter break, currently lasting from December 24, 2020, to January 3, 2021. In its current state, the break would last a total of 12 days, which is 4 days less than last year. We find this to be completely unacceptable given our current circumstances and are formally requesting an extension of winter break.

This semester has been exhausting for students, professors, and administrators alike. We have all had to adjust to an online learning experience and increased social isolation, which has taken a physical and/or mental toll on many. A study in the *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* shows an increased incidence of anxiety in college-aged students because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is only one of many studies that have connected rising concerns with mental health and the COVID-19 pandemic.

A winter break of only 12 days is not sufficient for a multitude of reasons, especially as we are seeing a reduction in break time from last year. Many international and out-of-province students will be at a severe disadvantage if they go home, as the planned break falls 2 days short of suggested guidelines for a 14-day quarantine without even factoring in travel time. For many students, the opportunity to return home to their family and support systems would alleviate much of the stress that has arisen in these uncertain times. This is especially pertinent for first-year students, many of whom have not had a chance to return home at all this semester given the fact that there was no fall break. The isolation, limited experience in Residence, and difficulty in forging important social connections take a toll especially on those who have not experienced all that McGill University and the city of Montreal have to offer.

An extended winter break also allows more time for students and professors to prepare and plan for the upcoming semester. If a student has a laboratory or a class that will be offered in-person for Winter 2021 with mandatory attendance, it is not reasonable or safe to expect them to join in-person sessions without the proper time to quarantine and make sure that they are not spreading illness to their peers or members of their community. It is equally unreasonable to expect a student to forgo visiting their family for this reason.

Faculty and support staff need a break as well. As an anecdote, one of my professors apologized in one of his recorded lectures for being "low energy." He explained that it was because he was exhausted and overworked. We talk a lot about how difficult it has been for students, but it has been equally difficult for professors who are trying to teach multiple classes online. If we can extend the break, they would have more time to prepare their courses for Winter 2021, giving them an opportunity to resolve any concerns raised during the Fall term. Exams are set to end on

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December 22 and, according to McGill's undergraduate grading policy, grades may be submitted on Minerva up to two weeks after the exam was taken. This allows final grades to be entered on Minerva by as late as January 5, after the Winter semester has already begun. During the entire winter break, teaching staff will be responsible for both exam grading and preparing for the next semester, all while trying to enjoy the holidays with their loved ones. Professors deserve more time to finalize grades, relax, and do what they can to make online learning in Winter 2021 as successful as possible.

Finally, we can see that other universities have been able to accommodate last-minute changes to their schedules to extend winter break. We see no reason as to why McGill cannot do the same. Carleton and l'Université de Sherbrooke extended their break to January 11th, UQAM to the 14th, and Polytechnique to the 18th. As I am writing this petition on November 10th, Concordia has also announced an extension of its winter break, demonstrating that it is possible to make these changes in a short time frame.

We understand that this request is not without its drawbacks and logistical problems, but we ask that the University administration please consider the physical and mental health of the McGill community. We also understand that not all students have the ability or desire to visit their families, and some students may not have to travel far to get home. These different circumstances do not negate the potential benefit for student health and staff preparation for the next semester. We do not see how any meaningful changes could be made to the online learning platform with only a 12-day break, and we hope that with extended time, McGill staff and administration genuinely take student concerns to heart and reflect on how to improve online learning for Winter 2021. We ask that McGill show support for its students and faculty members, as we adjust to 'the new normal.' The pandemic situation is still one of fluidity and uncertainty and McGill should not act with such rigidity as we adapt to new information, health guidelines, and realities for our personal and professional lives. The world has changed dramatically, and we ask that McGill act as such.

Thank you kindly for your consideration.

Signed,

Students, Staff, and friends of McGill University

Current number of signatories: 9437
(Last updated on 12/3/2020 at 7:18PM)