



## Introduction

This is the first equity report for Arts Frosh and will serve to educate the AUS executives and Frosh coordinators as to its successes and failures. This report does not seek to destroy Frosh but rather to point out changes that could be made in order to ensure a more equitable orientation. I will first describe my experiences during Frosh weekend and then discuss my suggestions and hopes for Frosh 2014. The equity committee also stresses that these observations and suggestions are important for all McGill student events, beyond just AUS and SSMU. This report is in line with the AUS Equity Policy and more information regarding this policy can be found here: <http://ausmcgill.com/en/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Equity-Policy-Bylaws.pdf>

Although certain aspects of this report may be common knowledge to some, the idea behind this report is to provide concrete examples and suggestions for Frosh in a way that is public and holds future organizers accountable.

## Pre-Frosh

My friend, Christine Kopennaal had promised me a more equitable frosh for quite a while and I was very excited to see what they had come up with. I must applaud SSMU and the AUS for online registration featuring not only preferred name and gender pronoun but also accessibility needs. This was a great improvement from past years.

Esther Lee, the other equity commissioner, and I had been assured a place at Frosh this year, a decision approved by both Justin Fletcher, President of AUS, and Enbal Singer, AUS VP Internal of AUS. However, this process was full of miscommunication. Between AUS executives, SSMU executives and the first AUS Equity Commissioners in attendance, there was bound to be some confusion. Emails seemed to get lost on the way to frosh exec and when I finally did hear back, less than a week before Frosh, Paul Laughlin, AUS VP Events, explained that SSMU wanted both Esther and I to be trained for O-Staff, a four hour commitment. This was just a few days before the training session. Neither of us could make it and we were told that we would not be able to participate in Frosh. However, according to discussions with AUS executives after Frosh, this rule was SSMU's and would only keep us from obtaining a SSMU bracelet (which we never received). Unfortunately, I did not find this out before the first day of Frosh and by then, my co-commissioner had left for Toronto for the

weekend. It took two hours and the help of Josh Redel for me to receive an AUS bracelet that Friday. By the time I had received my bracelet, groups had already left for the pub-crawl.

## Thursday

The first event of Frosh was the Pub-Crawl, about which coordinators and AUS exec expressed the most concern. Their worries were absolutely valid. I followed Group 36 to Gerts where they played “Strip Waterfall” and “No Chug flip cup.” When I asked an O-Staff member working there about the games, I was told that this year they had to be equitable and he did not seem to be pleased about the change in program. This resentment of equitable changes was evident throughout Frosh. Strip waterfall included what you would imagine. One chugs a beer and then strips off one’s clothes. Of course, only if you wanted. However, the message of “only if you wanted” was one that seemed to be lost in the crowd. This is rape culture. Several women looked uncomfortable and seemed relieved when the game was over. One thing that I want to make clear here is that rape culture is embedded within McGill Frosh when games like these are played. The pressuring for nudity and the overt sexuality of frosh is both alienating for those who may not wish to strip for any number of reasons and disheartening as it reinforces a heteronormative sexuality revolving around drinking and power. As the O-Staff member whipped off his shirt and encouraged others to do the same (Only if they wanted!), the power dynamics were crystal clear.

As we walked through Montreal, it became apparent that real change would only be achieved if frosh leaders were enthusiastic and interested in creating an equitable atmosphere. One clear example of this was found merely in how many of the froshie’s shirts were seen to have been marked up with the gross nicknames that McGill reputation is based upon despite the fact that leaders were told they were not to write these on froshies’ shirts this year. However, in comparison to previous years, these names were quite reduced. Two in particular that I saw were “Anal-Me Alex” and “Get Your Phil.”

Several of the groups I encountered had leaders who lamented the fact they could not yell at Concordia students or run screaming through the streets this year. McGill’s reputation precedes it to the point that many froshies were disappointed by this year’s “tame” Frosh. Some of these leaders either did not care or missed the message as they continued to scream about Bumblebees while passing by Guy-Concordia. Perhaps, the funniest moment of Frosh came when a student started screaming at a pedestrian next to the Guy-Concordia metro station, “Fuck you! I don’t know if you’re from the U. Q. A. M. Or the Concord one or what but you’re not McGill! How does it feel to be second

best!” The idea that this student actually had no idea where he was but was still assured he was better than everyone else was a perfect reflection of broader McGill entitlement.

While walking around Montreal, I was also given the opportunity to hear some of the newer, less problematic, Frosh chants. Changes included “Drink, motherfucker, drink” to “Drink, if you want to, Drink.” While this sounds like a less obnoxious version of the classic peer pressure we have all grown to love/hate, the middle of the chant was said so quickly that it became “Drink, \*gibberish\*, Drink!” Evidently, this was not particularly helpful in changing the stress on excessive drinking.

One of the big supposed changes to Pub-Crawl this year was that they would add in stops at parks and other local attractions. In theory, this is an excellent idea but in practice most groups skipped these stops entirely and/or complained about their addition - attributing it resentfully to “safe space.” The distaste that I heard from frosh leaders for these stops and thus, as well to equity and safe space, would serve as an excellent introduction to the greater culture of McGill. It would only have been better, if they could have also attributed the horror of having to visit a park to The Daily.

The worst of pub-crawl all happened at one stop on St. Catherine's when a person of color (name withheld for privacy) introduced himself and was immediately mocked and subjected to jokes about marijuana consumption due to a similarity between his name and cannabis. As we entered, we were told that these O-Staff would be teaching us the “Chants we weren't allowed to be taught.” And they did just that, emphasizing that they couldn't be said in public or on campus.

Overall, the pub-crawl was not nearly as problematic as I had expected it to be. Rape culture and overconsumption were still a huge presence, but this year all seemed to be aware of their problematic nature. The real issue at play was a careless attitude towards these problems and a dismissal of their importance. Frosh leaders constantly repeated that they didn't care, they hated the new rules, and they wanted their old frosh back. I was really hoping that this attitude wouldn't extend throughout the event, but alas, life is disappointment.

## Friday

I attended two events on Friday - Field day and the Boat cruise. These two events were respectively the most and least equitable events of the weekend. Prior to these events was the scavenger hunt, which I did not attend, but after talking to another O-Staff, I learned they visited the Shag Shop and were taught a lot about condoms and other sexual items. When I got to field day, people seemed to be having a great time, bouncing in blow up castles and playing games. It seemed

like an absolute success, besides the litter. Unfortunately, several of the advertisers were handing out water bottles and they were all over the ground by the end of the day.

As I was given an O-Staff shirt, I was asked many times to help out with responsibilities that I knew nothing about resulting in angry froshies and leaders who knew nothing of my role at Frosh.

For the boat cruise, we were instructed to arrive 30 minutes early, and we were only let on the boat after an hour of waiting. The waiting in itself was not a problem but the time was filled with constant chanting started by the froshies and frosh leaders and later led by the Frosh coordinators. Even though all leaders were warned that chanting the more heinous chants would lead to their bracelet being cut, at this point, no leaders or coordinators seemed to care about the pre-frosh threats. Through talking with a frosh coordinator, I also found out that this was a feature of the other boat cruise as well. The cruise featured the expected drunk dancing and apparently a lot of drunk Americans unaware they were no longer at home as they chanted "U.S.A. U.S.A. U.S.A."

After the cruise, I found my way down to the club event held at Arena on Rue St. Catherine, at that time, there was barely anyone there and I left after less than ten minutes in the club. It looked to be a fine time and I was exhausted..

## **Saturday**

Saturday began with one of the most frustrating experiences of the weekend. As I was only given my bracelet last minute, they forgot to include a SSMU bracelet for beach day, and as a result, I was sent on a wild goose-hunt. I was driven from coordinator to coordinator to find "SSMU people," when I spoke to Josh Redel, he told me to speak to "Evia or Brian" about the situation. Once again, as they did not know who I was or what I was doing, I had to explain why I did not have a bracelet and why I needed one. Finally, once all was understood, it rested on Paul Laughlin to give me the OK to get on the bus. However, after two hours of waiting, I was told that I would only be allowed on the very last bus, if there was room. It took another hour for me to board the bus, but I did make it. As for the SSMU bracelet, I never received one and for this reason I am unable to comment on Sunday's event - the SSMU Concert. And while waiting in these lines and sitting on this grassy field before Beach day, it was then even more apparent that while the idea of equity was present during the design of Frosh, in its execution it was at best an after thought, that allowed for the promotion of rape culture. I want to applaud Christine Kopenaal and the many other coordinators, leaders and O-Staff who helped me during Frosh, they truly have reduced the inequity of the event and functioned as an extremely

cooperative resource. Of course, it is important to remember that culture can only shift so fast, but as long as oppression is perpetuated by stalling, it must be corrected to alleviate injustice.

Beach day started with the old “McGill Once...” chants and they were screamed several times while there. The day seemed to go well, and people seemed to be happy dancing and drinking in the summer sun. For the purpose of finding leaders, markers were given out so that one could write on their body, as many there were without shirts. However, these body markers were then taken to write some pretty horrible things. The worst was probably the white woman I saw walking around with the words, “N\*\*\*\*\* In Paris” scrawled across her stomach. It was pretty appalling. .

## Suggestions

Equity is not something that can be achieved in a single year. Oppression does not cease to exist because of some minor modifications. The entire system must be adjusted to include and promote those who could not access it previously. While this past year showed a step in the right direction, the move towards equity seemed more present in name than practice. While I understand that many people worked hard to create safer environments, the end goal felt more like avoiding a PR scandal than at restructuring frosh. It was made abundantly clear to me that equity was not welcome, as I was told by frosh leaders, coordinators, AUS executives, and froshies themselves. This should not be unexpected, as ever, when one fights against a system of power, that institution pushes back.

My first suggestion is the broadest and the greatest to the changing of Frosh. Frosh can only change if all of the people involved have an active interest in equity. Therefore, I suggest that the AUS Equity Committee be able to hire a Frosh Equity Coordinator to work alongside the regular frosh coordinators. This would allow for equity to take a more central role in the planning of events and allow issues of accessibility the attention they deserve. For next year’s frosh, the Equity Committee will have already existed for a year and be better instituted within the AUS such that the Equity Committee would be qualified to make decisions based on the needs of Frosh and the structure of AUS events. I would like to further suggest that this coordinator and the two AUS Equity Commissioners would all be in charge of watching over frosh events and making sure they run smoothly. As AUS Equity Committee will be present at most AUS events throughout the year already, it only makes sense that we are present at the first and (possibly) biggest event of the year. Ideally, the commissioners and equity coordinator would also have t-shirts that would distinguish them from coordinators, froshies, leaders, and O-Staff so they could be recognizable to all who may need them and avoid the confusion I felt. This year, the system in place required two coordinators to cut

someone's bracelet as a measure of accountability. In the future, I propose the policy be changed so that it requires two coordinators or one coordinator and one equity member to cut a bracelet and that bracelets can be cut at any time during frosh, even if the problem had occurred earlier in the weekend to account for the fact that coordinators are not available at all times. Coordinators are often managing the events and do not want to be taken away to cut a bracelet, getting two alone during the more hectic events would be an extreme hassle. For equity to be successfully integrated into the workings of Frosh, we must have organization and authority, otherwise, it is easy to rule our voices as unneeded and ignorable. There must be equal power between the coordinators and the equity team. Furthermore, I suggest that the coordinators and equity team be known to each other before the beginning of frosh to avoid confusion.

One of the other great benefits of this is the presence of an equity member when picking frosh leaders. This seems to be one of the more important roles the equity team can play in frosh, as it was these frosh leaders who were leading chants and creating havoc throughout the Milton-Parc area. This way, it would be ingrained in these leaders that equity is a major part of Frosh. This is the biggest opportunity for positive change. Frosh is a massive organization and things are often not decided until the day of, it is important that these frosh leaders are able to control and command an equitable space no matter the situation. The only way to change McGill's reputation of excess is to make sure that no member of the Frosh community manifests these behaviours. This change in attitude needs to take place most significantly in the Frosh leaders running the orientation.

After talking with Paul Laughlin at length, it became clear that most logistical problems could be solved with greater communication. It was apparently not before the week prior to Frosh that the AUS knew there would be a separate SSMU bracelet and this was why I was unable to get one. He also suggested that since many come into the interviews prepared and knowing the right answers, that this year, the equity committee come up with some new interview questions for the Frosh leaders. I think that this is a great idea and having discussed it with the AUS Equity Committee, I can say we would be happy to help.

The other suggestions I have are smaller in size but still great in effect.

- 1) Increase the usage of water coolers or reusable bottles and other drink coolers to reduce waste and make Frosh more sustainable. Hydration is incredibly important for Frosh to avoid health issues. Plastic water bottles should be available at all times for safety reasons but should be reduced where they are not absolutely necessary. Hopefully this would eliminate the use by businesses

- advertising their products during field day. The waste from Field Day alone was massive. This year, Frosh had composting for events for the first time which indicates that a more sustainable Frosh is definitely possible with enough planning before hand.
- 2) Do not have a pub-crawl if you cannot control your frosh leaders. Do not have chanting in the streets. Do not chant on campus. Frosh, every year is a hazard for every non-student who lives within a kilometer radius of McGill. We must teach our froshies that it is a privilege to live in this city and that they must treat the local communities with respect. Until leaders can respect the rules of Frosh and not teach their froshies offensive chants or learn how to tell their froshies to stop, McGill students should not set foot near Concordia. This is not only offensive but tarnishes the image of McGill and its students.
  - 3) Pub-Crawl should not feature stripping games or similar games which create a potential uncomfortable/unsafe sexual space. This only promotes rape culture and if froshies want to hook up, they can do it outside of the pub-crawl.
  - 4) Do not place park stops on your pub-crawl. Please don't disturb the people of the local parks. If this is really supposed to be an orientation, than create alternatives to pub-crawl in general and make tours of the city an actuality, instead of just an aside to the consumption of alcohol.
  - 5) Do not write on shirts. Actually take that seriously and if you see those who have writing besides their name/phone number, cut their Frosh leaders bracelets.
  - 6) Overtly sexual jokes are not appropriate at an orientation event. Frosh must be reshaped as an orientation event and not as an excess of drinking and power. These jokes are a result of the compulsory sexuality which further ostracizes marginalized peoples.
  - 7) Frosh leaders and coordinators must be educated on racist, classist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and other oppressive behaviours so that they can create atmospheres that do not contribute to any of these forms of abuse. It may be time to try to involve QPIRG or SEDE in creating workshops for those involved with Frosh.
  - 8) Frosh leaders and coordinators must be educated on how to properly call out their froshies for their problematic behavior. We must not let these forms of power be what we want represented as our school or for froshies to think that these things are welcome at McGill.
  - 9) Create real consequences for inequitable, unsafe, or offensive behavior. Make it clear what behavior is problematic, the consequences of this behavior, and enforce them. Leaders and O-Staff that do not respect the rules should not be allowed to participate in Frosh in the future nor other AUS events.

Overall, Frosh must be reshaped from drinking to orientation, from excess to sustainability, and from rape culture to anti-oppression. Hopefully some of these suggestions will create a more welcoming frosh. The Frosh coordinators should be commended for introducing equity and trying somewhat to defeat the oppression around them. However, as long as inequitable offenses hold no real consequences and people continue to understand equity as a joke, there will never be a great enough change.

Orientation should be a celebration of everything McGill is, not a demonstration of power. The fact street teams are necessary in the Milton-Parc area alone speaks to the idea that Frosh is not only disruptive to all around the “McGill Bubble,” but as well, merely an ego stroking sequence that mirrors a millennial Animal House. Yes, the structural inequalities are largely gone, but what remains are the greater problems inherent in Frosh - the excess, the inaccessibility, and the inefficiency.