



AUS Frosh Equity Report Fall 2014

Before Frosh

Vareesha and Isabel were hired as AUS Equity Commissioners at the end of Winter semester after final exams. Due to the late hiring of our positions, we were unable to meet in person until August. However, Isabel was able to meet Kyle, the new VP Social, and the new Arts Frosh coordinators in May to discuss some equity concepts and improvements that could be made with Frosh. Over the summer, Isabel and Vareesha were both away and could not attend any Frosh coordination meetings. Liaising with Kyle online was also difficult because Isabel had only met him once in person, and Vareesha and Kyle still had not made formal introductions. We think that this is not the fault of anyone involved, but that it was the lack of integration after we were hired. This lack of personal relationship made it difficult to share ideas openly, and Kyle hesitated to share the planning process of Frosh with us. There was also lots of confusion as to what the position of Equity Commissioner would entail in terms of the Frosh context as Vareesha and Isabel had not received training from Leila, the new VP Internal. This miscommunication and uncertainty about our role understandably created an impasse in sharing ideas and including us in the Frosh planning process.

When August came around, Vareesha and Isabel were finally back in Montreal and were able to meet with Leila, Josh (the previous Equity Commissioner), and Kyle on separate occasions to discuss the role and responsibilities of Equity Commissioner. Although our position became more widely understood by all parties involved (including us), it was too late as most of



Frosh had already been planned and there were no changes that could be made. It felt like the plans and ideas we had discussed over the summer were fruitless as we were not included in consulting or making structural changes. What came as a relief to us, but was also unfortunate, was the fact that Kyle and his team had actually implemented many new, equitable measures to Frosh that we supported and had thought of during the summer, but were not able to voice. What could have been a productive and efficient planning period over the summer was instead wasted on miscommunication and confusion.

Isabel and Vareesha attended a mandatory Frosh Leader training session held by Campus Life & Engagement (CL&E) to better understand what Frosh Leaders were being taught and how they were being trained to interact with their Froshies. The training was very informative and covered many important issues ranging from sexual assault, inclusivity, alcohol consumption, noise control, and how to handle emergency situations. We were able to receive our O-Staff t-shirts and bracelets without difficulty from Kyle.

Thursday

We arrived on Lower Field at noon as everyone was getting settled into their Frosh groups. The atmosphere was energetic and since the beer tent wasn't open yet, groups were doing sober icebreaker games and playing on the inflatables. The McGill Student Emergency Response Team (M-SERT) had a tent run by student volunteers trained in providing emergency first aid services, which was very accessible. One of the new changes that Kyle made that we were very happy with were the Chill Zones, which were tents providing free water and a place for people to relax if they were overwhelmed or dehydrated. The red M-SERT tent and the Chill Zone were right next to each other, allowing people to find them very easily and to receive help. There were some inappropriate nicknames scrawled onto Froshies' t-shirts, but this was a rare sighting and the Frosh coordinators went around later to check everyone's names and have conversations with the Froshies when a problematic name arose.



A few hours later, we returned for the Montreal Crawl. This year, Kyle and his team changed the focus from barhopping to exploring both restaurants and bars by adding three food stops. They also changed the name from the classic “Frosh Pub Crawl” to the Montreal Crawl, which created a positive change in attitude. When we joined a Frosh group, the dynamic was significantly different from other groups because some of the Froshies were older exchange students and two of the Frosh Leaders were our friends. However, we were able to see the general environment of the Montreal Crawl as we interacted with other groups over the next three hours. We noticed that the Frosh Leaders were friendly and inclusive towards their Froshies with the clear intention of looking out for them, but the O-Staff at each stop were less concerned. Due to the time sensitive nature of doing a crawl at multiple stops and sticking to the schedule, there was no time to check for underage bracelets or offer non-alcoholic beverages at most of the pub stops. We had one Froshie who was a celiac and could not drink beer. Most of the shots offered at the pub stops were mixed with beer and she had a hard time receiving an alternative drink. However, it must be noted that this was a problem with the bar staff, rather than with O-Staff or the way that Frosh was organized. Each pub stop we went to, the O-Staff were very encouraging about providing water to the Froshies and it was very clear that Kyle had made a real effort in creating this access throughout the whole weekend. The additional food stops were also a great idea to discourage Froshies from becoming drunk, but also to provide them with nourishment. Unfortunately however, each food stop we encountered had run out of food because we were one of the last Frosh groups. We could only receive food at the last stop, but it was already 6PM by then and many of the Froshies were complaining and hungry.

Another great initiative that Kyle took this year was to run Street Teams in the Milton-Parc area and to discourage pre-drinking parties before the night events. Perhaps due to bad timing, but Vareesha was unable to find the Street Teams before the night events. Olympia was the first clubbing event of the weekend and was open to Arts Frosh and Management Frosh. Since the venue



was very big, it allowed Froshies to either dance, walk around, hang out at the bar, or relax from the second floor balcony. It was a normal clubbing event and went pretty smoothly.

Friday

Isabel and Vareesha decided to attend the second boat cruise at 7:30PM, as we were not given specific instructions to which boat cruise to attend. Isabel arrived at King Edward Pier and immediately noticed that there were confused Froshies and Frosh leaders trying to figure out when the boat cruise was leaving and where the boarding area was. There were no coordinators in sight to clear this up and the few Frosh Leaders that had shown up early to the docking station encouraged their Froshies to chant to pass the time. Some of the O-Staff who showed up early were drinking alcohol out of water bottles and smoking cigarettes. It must be noted that while smoking cigarettes is not illegal, it sets a bad example and creates peer pressure for Froshies. There were also some Frosh Leaders that were clearly too drunk to take care of their Froshies.

As more people showed up to wait for the boat, they started doing the inappropriate “McGill Once, McGill Twice” chant and many people complained about the lack of coordinators. When the boat finally arrived, the mob of Frosh Leaders, Froshies, and O-Staff were restless and there were students who had gotten off the boat that needed medical help. It was a very anxious situation as people were pushing each other, trying to get a better place in line and to see what had happened. When the coordinators got off the boat they were able to organize the line and control the crowd. Kyle was able to prep us on what to expect on the boat and how to handle specific problems if we were to run into them. He told us that the bar staff were not being very cooperative in handing out free tap water to Froshies and asked us to tell people that the boat staff were legally obligated to follow through with this. Throughout the whole weekend, Kyle emphasized keeping people hydrated and clearly cared about the safety of Froshies.



We finally got on the boat and walked around to survey the area. Approximately 20 minutes into waiting for the boat to leave, people were already looking for water and there were O-Staff carrying around cups and pitchers of water to hand out to people. We told the Head of O-Staff that we were willing to help with anything they needed even if it were simple tasks like handing out water or standing by the bar and reminding the bar staff that they had to give out free tap water. However, when the boat was full, one of the coordinators came looking for us and told us to immediately get off the boat. At first, we thought that something off the boat had gone wrong and our help was needed. Instead, the boat was over capacity and we were being kicked off alongside AUS President Ava to make room for more O-Staff. The two coordinators who were dealing with the boat staff and telling us to leave stressed that “AUS exec is not a priority” and that “we weren’t even working”. They also blamed us for not attending the first boat cruise even though no one had given us specific instruction to attend either one.

Although we understood that putting Froshies on the boat cruise was a priority and it was a pressured situation because the boat staff were forcing the two coordinators to make a fast decision, it was made very clear that our presence was not welcome nor appreciated. This was also very problematic because there were O-staff who were too intoxicated to be of any help and the O-Staff who were eventually put on the boat instead of us voiced that they didn’t mind staying off the boat for us. The coordinators made it very clear that they prioritized O-Staff and SSMU staff over us and failed to understand that the only reason we were there was to work and to keep people safe.

Since we could not get on, we walked with Ava and another coordinator to Clock Tower Beach to find Kyle and inform him of what had happened. Kyle was surprised to hear that we had gotten kicked off the boat and apologized. Ava asked Kyle to send us a formal apology in writing on behalf of the two coordinators, which we never received. However, we were able to sit down with Kyle after Frosh to discuss what had happened and he expressed a genuine desire to change further interactions between Equity Commissioners and Frosh staff in



a positive manner. It must be noted that Kyle was not present at the time of the boat cruise when we got kicked off, and he had no say in the decision that was rashly made by the two coordinators. He also promised us that if anyone gave us trouble here on out, they would have to deal with him directly and that he gave us his full support.

We would have had no problem with getting off the boat due to space concerns, but the way we were kicked off was upsetting. It definitely affected our relationship with those two specific coordinators moving forward, as we both felt unwanted and disrespected. We didn't feel comfortable approaching them afterwards as they never apologized to us or acknowledged the incident.

At Clock Tower Beach, things were relaxed, as most people had left for pre-parties or were on the boat cruise. Vareesha went to the Milton-Parc community to look for the Street Teams, but couldn't find any even though she had been given the contact information for the organizer of the Street Teams. She spent some time on Milton and Aylmer taking care of issues as they arose. While there were not many prominent problems, it would have been more fruitful if she had been able to locate the Street Teams. Vareesha attended both night events and was pleased to see the amount of Frosh Leaders at the all ages event at Club Soda. Even when Froshies presented other forms of ID, bartenders refused to serve them alcohol if they had a white bracelet indicating that they were underage, and there was plenty of water available. At Club Ivy, the chill zone was empty and hidden in the back of the club, which was hard to find. If it was in a more prominent location, it might have been a better resource for Froshies. However, it was good that the drink tickets handed out could be used for both alcohol and non-alcoholic drinks.

Saturday

Beach Day began with a very high level of organization, especially in comparison to the past few years. We met at the Mont-Royal Park (or better known as the Tam Tams Park) at 9:30AM and were greeted by loud party music



playing from a Red Bull car, Froshies and Frosh Leaders lining up for bus tickets, casual yoga classes, and a free breakfast table that offered a variety of food. The atmosphere was very lively and people seemed excited to get to the Beach Club. The bus ticket system worked great in getting people to line up patiently, whereas in past years people pushed and shoved to be the first ones to get on the buses. This system allowed people the security of knowing that they were going to get on a bus eventually and also gave people the freedom to leave and come back later. Each ticket had a number and the coordinators were strict with only letting people on the bus who were within a certain range.

The night before at Clock Tower Beach, Kyle assured us that we would be the first ones on the bus and told us to call him directly if anyone gave us trouble, as he wanted to make sure we could attend Beach Day. However, when we approached the two coordinators from last night to ask if we could get on the early bus, they told us we'd have to wait in line like everyone else and dismissed us. It was very uncomfortable running into them again without any acknowledgement or apology. Despite this, we were able to receive two tickets without waiting in line after we informed the ticket table of our position.

Shortly after, we were able to board the bus and a staff member from the bus company came on to tell us not to drink on the bus or chant while we were in Montreal. She also told us to be respectful to the bus driver and to thank him after the ride. As soon as she left, the Arts Frosh Leaders sitting in front of us started passing around bags of wine and pressured everyone to drink. They joked about safe space and saying no to drinking, creating a very uncomfortable space for everyone who did not want to participate. As soon as we got on the highway, they started performing very loud and inappropriate chants that included obscene sexual and racist content. One of the Frosh Leaders even said, "This is what Beach Day is about" and all her friends laughed. Froshies on the bus were clearly uncomfortable and so were we. A Frosh Leader turned around to ask us what shifts we were working as she assumed that we were O-Staff, and we didn't feel safe telling her that we were actually there as Equity Commissioners. Not



only did Kyle ban chanting and make a real effort to cut down on pressures to drink, but he also made sure that it was widely emphasized through mandatory training. The unacceptable behavior of the Frosh Leaders that completely violated safe space was made worse by the fact that the bus ride was at least an hour long and no one could leave.

When the buses finally arrived, the Frosh Leaders encouraged everyone to chug their alcohol since it couldn't be taken into Beach Club, and the coordinators would be coming onto each bus to check. We even overheard some of the Frosh Leaders encouraging each other to put their drugs inside their shoes or their underwear. While waiting in line for the bus, people drank alcohol from water bottles and chanted a non-offensive "Beach Day Everyday" chant.

Although the bus ride was not a great start to Beach Day, once we got inside we found that there were many different activities that Froshies could participate in. To name a few, there was a dance floor, beach volleyball, beach soccer, and zip lining over the water. However, the heat was a problem as it led to high levels of dehydration, especially for those who were intoxicated. The bar staff refused to give out tap water and the line for the water fountain was very long. We asked some of the coordinators how we could help with this water shortage problem and so we picked up cases of water bottles from the M-SERT tent and ran around Beach Club giving out water. We also helped Froshies get on the buses going back to Montreal and they seemed very grateful for the extra guidance. At this point, we felt that our presence was recognized as being an extra set of helping hands, rather than diminishing the work of the coordinators. However, it's unfortunate that it took until the last days of Frosh for this to be realized.

Later that night, there was a movie screening of Jurassic Park on Lower Field. We felt that this was a great alternative all ages event that was accessible and low-key for those who wanted to rest after being at Beach Club all day. There was also an event at Saint-Sulpice, which went smoothly.



Conclusion

Overall, we were very impressed at the unprecedented level of organization that Kyle and his team of coordinators put into Frosh. There was a noticeably different attitude that accepted diversity and put effort into making people feel welcome and comfortable. This was the first year in which there were no major disturbances in the Milton-Parc community. Kyle explicitly stated that Frosh Leaders were not to lead their groups through the area and not to chant in public, which was taken seriously and created a huge improvement. He also banned all forms of chanting, except in private spaces - like in someone's home - but was very clear that they were not to be inappropriate in any way. In this sense, we also saw Frosh Leaders take this seriously and there was a huge decrease in the amount of inappropriate chanting that happened this year. When we did see obscene chanting, it was definitely an abnormal occurrence, rather than being the norm. Kyle also banned drinking games involving stripping, which we did not see happening. The accessibility of the Chill Zones and M-SERT tents was impressive and we were very happy to see that people were getting the help they needed right away.

Arts Frosh this year was a huge improvement that included a lot of new equitable implementations, and so we are going to work with Kyle towards creating AUS by-laws specifically regarding Frosh to help institutionalize these great new measures.



Suggestions

Although Kyle did an amazing job with Frosh this year, the incident with the boat cruise made us realize that it is not the fault of any specific individuals, but rather the lack of clarity surrounding our position as Equity Commissioners that created these issues. We think that this can be mitigated in the future by creating a smoother transition for next year's Equity Commissioners and VP Social by hiring the ECs earlier, providing clear exit reports, and having exposure to the new coordinators well before the summer. The earlier hiring time, even if it's only a few weeks or a month, will allow the new Equity Commissioners to become established in their roles, help hire the coordinators and Frosh Leaders, and work from the beginning in the Frosh planning process. It would also help build a relationship between the Equity Commissioners, VP Social, and coordinators, as the lack of this cemented relationship caused issues during Frosh. We would also like to see the role of O-Staff change and be taken more seriously in terms of the real effect they have on Froshies. It seemed like the general desire to be an O-Staff instead of a Frosh Leader was to re-live Frosh and not have responsibility over Froshies. Although the O-Staff have a different role than Frosh Leaders, it is important to emphasize that they must still follow the same rules as the Frosh Leaders in not becoming too intoxicated or pressuring Froshies to drink when they don't want to. Additionally, accounts of Frosh Leader-Froshie hook-ups were casually mentioned after Frosh. Although we didn't see this happening during the events, it is possible that they still occur in more private settings. It's important to promote consent in a holistic way that demonstrates why such relations become problematic when there is a clear power imbalance between both parties.

Attending Frosh as O-Staff helped us blend into the social atmosphere and didn't make people uncomfortable when we told them we were actually Equity Commissioners. Although we disagreed with Kyle over the summer as to how we would present ourselves during Frosh, we see now that it would have been a more difficult experience if we had showed up in Equity t-shirts or other visually



distinguishing garments. For future Equity Commissioners, we think that wearing O-Staff t-shirts are a good idea, but maybe with a small, discrete lanyard that states our position would be ideal, as it would help clear up confusion or show our legitimacy when contested.

Overall, Frosh is definitely changing from an unsafe drinking culture to a more authentic and safe orientation experience. We hope to see these changes continuously progress and see that our assessments are used to improve Arts Frosh 2015!!!

Respectfully submitted,

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AUS Equity Commissioners