

Arts Undergraduate Society Frosh Report 2020

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We would like to acknowledge that we are situated on the traditional territory of the Kanien'keha:ka people, keepers of the Eastern Door of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. This is a place with a long history of meeting and exchange amongst nations. We formally recognize and respect the Kanien'keha:ka as the traditional keepers of these lands and waters.

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Frosh Events 2020

Thursday, August 27, 2020

- A. Group Formation (12:30pm-2:00pm)
- B. Scavenger Hunt ('Scunt') released (2:00pm)
- C. Trivia Round 1 (7:00pm-8:30pm)
- D. Trivia Round 2 (8:30pm-10:00pm)

Friday, August 28, 2020

- A. Trivia Round 3 (9:00am-10:30am)
- B. Academic Seminars (12:00pm-6:00pm)
- C. Scunt due (7:00pm)
- D. Escape Room Part 1 (7:00pm-8:30pm)
- E. Escape Room Part 2 (8:30pm-10:00pm)

Saturday, August 29, 2020

Note: One Equity Commissioner was unable to attend the events on this day, so the Secretary General stepped in as a proxy

- A. Escape Room Part 3 (9:00am-10:30am)
- B. Escape Room Part 4 (10:30am-12:00pm)

- C. Spin Energie (1:00pm-1:30pm)
- D. Virtual Crawl (2:00pm-7:00pm)
- E. Concert (7:00pm-9:00pm)

Introduction

Orientation Week is an annual, end-of-summer series of events in which incoming students can meet other first-year students. A notable part of Orientation Week is Frosh, which spans three or four days. This student-run portion of Orientation Week utilizes interactive activities to facilitate connections between first-year students (“Froshies”) and various Frosh organizers. Before Frosh, incoming students are placed into different groups led by upper-year Frosh Leaders. These leaders are responsible for creating a safe space for Froshies, as well as supervising them during Frosh activities. Throughout the summer, Frosh Coordinators are responsible for planning and organizing safe and inclusive events for Froshies. All events are monitored by Orientation Staff (“O-Staff”).

Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, this year’s Frosh events were conducted via online platforms. The theme for this year’s Arts Frosh was “Olympic Frosh.” There were 53 groups and a total of 790 Froshies at this year’s Frosh. This report is the third official annual Frosh Report prepared by the AUS Equity Commissioners, who attended Frosh to assess the accessibility and inclusivity of the events. The AUS Frosh report serves as a reference and guide for past and future Arts Frosh organizers to ensure that Frosh is as equitable and inclusive as possible. Additionally, the intent of this report is to address the successes and shortcomings of Frosh so that future iterations of this popular introductory experience can be improved. This report will be presented to AUS Legislative Council and made available to the public.

Preface

After reaching out to Frosh organizers, AUS Equity Commissioners were sent documents for Frosh on Wednesday, August 26 at 6:00pm EST. This information arrived only 18.5 hours before the beginning of Frosh, which immediately raised concerns as to whether Frosh Leaders and Coords knew that Equity Commissioners are required to monitor Frosh activities, echoing a problem that has been noted in the previous two Frosh reports.

Frosh Events 2020

A detailed description and evaluation of the events.

August 27, 2020

A. Group Formation

Group Formation occurred on Microsoft Teams. All participants used their McGill emails to login and join their assigned group.

Approximately an hour and a half before Group Formation began, Equity Commissioners were added to one Frosh group on Microsoft Teams. Due to only being added to one group,

Equity Commissioners erroneously assumed that this group was only comprised of Frosh leaders, coords, and O-Staff. Additionally, according to the email sent to Equity Commissioners the day before Frosh, Equity Commissioners were intended to accompany one Frosh Coordinator to many different groups, which unfortunately did not happen. The conflicting information, in conjunction with its last-minute reception, led to Equity Commissioners feeling unprepared and confused.

One aspect that led to Equity Commissioners' confusion was the lack of identifying information about the members of the group they were added to. It was impossible to distinguish between Frosh Leaders and Froshies, which led Equity Commissioners to believe that they were initially in a group of O-Staff, coords, and leaders. It is unclear whether it would have been possible to alter display names so that leaders were properly identifiable, which would have alleviated some confusion. Additionally, it would have provided Frosh leaders and their Froshies with the knowledge that Equity Commissioners were present.

Although Equity Commissioners were only given access to one Frosh group, it was evident that Microsoft Teams was an effective way of organizing groups since every participant has a McGill-affiliated Microsoft Outlook account. However, the Frosh Leaders of this group lacked the diversity that is characteristic of the Arts faculty, which led to Equity Commissioners questioning if the hiring of the Leaders for this year's Frosh was still lacking the diversity that was called for in the 2018 Frosh Report. In a similar vein, Equity Commissioners were not aware of any O-Staff in the one group they were added to. Once again, questions of diversity and whether Equity Commissioners would meet the entire staff were deliberated. With such limited access, it is difficult to conclude whether Group Formation as a whole was successful for all groups.

B. Scavenger Hunt

Equity Commissioners received the Scavenger Hunt ('Scunt') on the first day of Frosh, approximately an hour before Group Formation occurred. The document consisted of seven categories (Frosh, McGill, Arts, Interfaculty, Montreal, Philanthropy, Other) of tasks that Froshies could complete for points. Each Frosh group worked together to complete as many challenges as possible. Once completed, video submissions were submitted to a Google Drive, which were sent to the Frosh Coordinators via Google Drive.

Though there were a mix of challenges that could be completed indoors or outdoors, certain tasks on the McGill and Montreal categories were exclusive to students living in the city. It should be noted, though, that there were very few challenges that required presence in Montreal. In the event of another Virtual Frosh, more inclusive categories would be helpful to ensure all participants, regardless of their location during Frosh, are comfortable and enjoy themselves.

The main concern with this event was the video submission aspect. Equity Commissioners were not privy to the submissions, so if there were any problematic or otherwise disturbing submissions, Equity Commissioners had no knowledge of their existence. Besides this

concern, though, every other aspect of this activity was well thought out and encouraged engagement during Virtual Frosh.

C/D. Trivia

Equity Commissioners received the Trivia questions on the first day of Frosh, approximately an hour before Group Formation occurred. The document contained 206 questions divided into four sections (McGill, Montreal/Canada, Olympics, General Knowledge). Individual Frosh groups determined which of the three Trivia sessions to attend based on group members' availabilities.

The questions were inclusive, encompassing a range of informative and entertaining topics. It is clear there were more than enough questions for the three iterations of the event.

Despite the comprehensiveness of the questions, there was a lot of confusion surrounding the platform for the Trivia events. Equity Commissioners were told that the trivia sessions would be held on Microsoft Teams. This information was corroborated on the Arts Frosh Instagram page. On the Arts Frosh Facebook page, though, the trivia event was advertised as being held on Zoom. This conflicting information made it confusing for Equity Commissioners, but undoubtedly also Froshies who were trying to attend the event with their group.

Additionally, the first Chill Room session coincided with the first Trivia session, which led to many Froshies mistakenly entering the Chill Room looking for the Trivia session. In concordance with the conflicting information about the Trivia sessions on social media, it seems that Froshies were confused about how to access the Trivia sessions. An Equity Commissioner was able to answer these questions and inform Froshies that Trivia sessions were taking place on their group's Microsoft Team page. This caused Equity Commissioners to question whether Froshies were properly informed about the Chill Room, as the only Froshies who entered were looking for another event. Once again, this lack of clear communication caused problems for the event.

Equity Commissioners were strongly discouraged from attending this event due to a concern that they would "make Froshies uncomfortable." This sentiment echoes the discomfort that Frosh Coordinators felt towards the 2018 Equity Commissioners during the Boat Cruise, as described in detail in the 2018 Frosh Report. As noted in the above Group Formation section, there was no identifying information to distinguish Equity Commissioners from other Frosh organizers or Froshies themselves. The implication that Equity Commissioners' presence would be unwelcome and overbearing discouraged Equity Commissioners from doing their job of monitoring events. Additionally, as mentioned before, Equity Commissioners were restricted to having access to only one of the 53 Frosh groups, which was not representative of the AUS community. With such limited insight and concerns from Frosh organizers, it seemed futile to monitor this event.

August 28, 2020

A. Trivia

See August 27, section C/D.

B. Academic Seminars

Academic Seminars occurred on Microsoft Teams. Participating departmental associations were given their own Team and hosted their presentations during their assigned time. Each department presented information regarding program requirements, the structure of certain degrees (e.g. Major Concentrations, Minor Concentrations, or Honours), various events that are often hosted, and ways to contact the executives of the department. There were eight 45-minute time slots with three departmental associations presenting concurrently (see below).

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|---------|--------|------|------------------|
| 12:00 – 12:45 PM | JSSA | CSUS | MPSA | |
| 12:45 – 1:30 PM | AGELF | DESA | PSSA | |
| 1:30 – 2:15 PM | IDSSA | MESS | CSA | Peer Advising |
| 2:15 – 3:00 PM | AHCSSA | GSFSSA | MUGS | |
| 3:00 – 3:45 PM | ASSA | LAPSA | HSA | |
| 3:45 – 4:30 PM | ASA | ESA | RSUS | |
| 4:30 – 5:15 PM | CLASHSA | MIRA | SUMS | |
| 5:15 – 6:00 PM | CSAUS | SSA | PSA | |

Prior to this event, Equity Commissioners were concerned that three departmental associations would be presenting simultaneously. If a Froshie wanted to learn about two associations that were presenting at the same time, they would have to choose which presentation to attend. Additionally, there was a Peer Advising Session during the 1:30pm-4:30pm EST time slots, which might interfere with students who were attending the presentations occurring during this time span. However, these concerns were resolved by the mandated recording of each departmental association's presentation. To ensure even more inclusivity, though, it might be useful to have a transcript of the presentations provided, in the potential cases of technological issues or underlying hearing difficulties. It might also be useful to hold the Peer Advising Session on a separate day to minimize conflicts with the departmental association presentations. To accommodate for the immense amount of information in the departmental association presentations, it might be beneficial to spread the presentations over the span of two days so that Froshies do not feel overwhelmed.

Equity Commissioners were added to every departmental association's Team on Microsoft Teams both the night before and the day of the event. Each Equity Commissioner visited half of the departmental associations for approximately 15 minutes to check-in. There were generally two or three executives running the presentations with varying numbers of participants in the video call. This event was the easiest to monitor, especially since the format of

Microsoft Teams facilitated a smooth switching between calls. Presenters were informative and participants seemed engaged in learning about the different departments.

C. Scunt

See August 27, section B.

D/E. Escape Room

The Escape Room was held on Zoom by Breakout Saint John, a third-party company. Equity Commissioners were told that it was impossible to monitor this event due to a limit of 10 people per session mandated by the company. This limit was created to accommodate for 15-20 Froshies and 5 Frosh Leaders, without any consideration for Equity Commissioners' presence. Further, there was a discrepancy in the information delivered to the Equity Commissioners between the number of attendees and the participant limit. Once again, there is a concern that Frosh organizers were not aware that Equity Commissioners were a required presence at Frosh.

After consultation with the Frosh Co-Chair shortly after Frosh, Equity Commissioners learned that the event was a walk-through of the Arts Building on McGill's campus. During the escape room, the 'host' emailed out clues to Frosh Leaders. The Leaders then shared their screen with the program so that Froshies could help with the clues and navigate through the escape room.

August 29, 2020

A/B. Escape Room

See August 28, section D/E.

C. Spin Energie Class

A no-equipment, HIIT (high intensity interval training) workout hosted by Spin Energie (one of the Arts Frosh sponsors) was held on Microsoft Teams from 1pm to 1:30pm. All participants other than the instructor were asked to remain muted with their web cameras off. The workout was accompanied by a playlist of trending music, and the workout instructor welcomed participants' song suggestions. The instructor performed a number of basic cardio exercises. There was a cap of 250 participants. Prior to the event Equity Commissioners were concerned that this limit on attendance would prevent all willing froshies to participate. However, out of a total number of 790 Froshies, only about 93 participants were connected throughout the video call.

D. Virtual Crawl

The virtual crawl took place from 2pm to 7pm. The event was facilitated by frosh coordinators. Each coordinator had a game prepared and alternated visits between the different frosh groups. The games were fairly simple, including activities such as Simon says, Pictionary, Cups, etc.

E. Concert

The concert was a live stream performance of the group Ziyann on the McGill Engineering Frosh channel hosted on the streaming platform Twitch on

Supplements to Frosh Events

Additional platforms that were utilized during Virtual Frosh.

Chill Room

Chill rooms were made available everyday with the following schedule: 7-10 PM on Thursday, 9-10:30 AM and 7-10PM Friday, 9-10:30 AM and 2-7 PM and 8-9 PM on Saturday. Chill rooms were held via Microsoft Teams, where a coordinator was present in the virtual room. Froshies were encouraged to join the Chill room at any time when open, if they needed a break from the main events, felt overwhelmed, or wanted to chat with a member of the Frosh team.

Discord

Different Discord channels were set in place prior to the start of the main events. The channels included different categories such as “Model UN” and “Book Club”.

The discord channel remained mostly inactive, with very little activity. However, this observation is largely due to the fact that Equity Commissioners were granted access to only three of the channels.

Facebook Groups

Similar to previous years, Frosh leaders created Facebook Groups in order to communicate with their Froshies.

Recommendations

A summary of the key issues during this year’s Frosh and an examination of how well this year’s Frosh incorporated previous years’ recommendations.

Key Issues

The main issue during this year’s Frosh was the fact that Equity Commissioners were repeatedly restricted or denied access to many events, which meant that there were limited observations for this year’s Frosh. If there were any equity concerns during Frosh, Equity Commissioners had no way of knowing about them.

There were concerns over the accessibility of the Spin Energie event as no alternative event was made available for Froshies who might have not been able to participate in such physical activity.

Other Recommendations

The use of the virtual platforms could have been maximized further, namely by creating affinity groups which Froshies could join, facilitating interactions between Froshies from different Frosh groups based on common interest or characteristics.

Due to the confusion on which platform would be used for different events, it should be considered to centralize Frosh to a smaller number of virtual outlets or communicate more effectively as to which platforms correspond to which events.

Fulfillment of 2018/2019 Recommendations

Both the 2018 and 2019 Frosh Reports suggest that there was a concerning lack of diversity in the Frosh Leaders. As this year's Equity Commissioners were not privy to the hiring process, nor had any insight as to how diverse this year's leaders were, no concrete conclusion about this concern can be drawn. As noted before, the singular group that Equity Commissioners were placed into looked very homogenous and was certainly not reflective of the diverse student body within AUS and at McGill as a whole. In future iterations of Frosh, it would be ideal if Equity Commissioners had some involvement in the Frosh hirings in an effort to advocate for diverse leaders.

Last year's report called for a larger implementation of truly calm chill zones. In the current virtual context, this was successfully implemented, and hopefully, this change will be transferred to future hybrid or in-person orientation events.

The previous two Frosh Reports also cite difficulties with physical accessibility during events. Due to the online context that Frosh operated under this year, the concern was a non-issue. However, it should be noted that there needs to be genuine efforts made to minimize the strain on physical accessibility during in-person or even hybrid Frosh. This consideration will be even more important when any semblance of in-person events can occur, as physical accessibility needs may be different in the post-pandemic world.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, this year's Frosh was unlike any other due to the extenuating global health crisis. Equity Commissioners commend the organizers, leaders, and coordinators for adapting to the novel challenges so readily and efficiently. It is clear that adapting something as big as Frosh to the virtual context was extremely difficult.

The primary concern with this year's Frosh, as has been noted before in both the 2018 and 2019 reports, is the lack of integration of the AUS Equity portfolio into the events, both in terms of access and planning. According to Article 3.8 of the AUS Frosh Bylaws, the "Arts Undergraduate Society Equity Commissioners aid the Frosh Planning Committee and the Vice-President Social in creating accessible and equitable spaces during Frosh, and in its planning." As suggested by this clause, the Equity Commissioners are supposed to have a significant role in helping plan Frosh to ensure that it is as equitable as possible. Although things were understandably delayed due to the novel challenges posed by the pandemic, it would have

been preferable if the Equity portfolio had been more involved in the lead-up to Frosh. Additionally, Equity Commissioners would, ideally, receive information about Frosh much earlier than the day before the events began. There was an expectation that Frosh organizers would reach out first to Equity Commissioners to inform them of how things would be run. When this did not happen, it required the Equity Commissioners to chase after the information. This fraught liaison between the Equity portfolio and Frosh organizers is, unfortunately, not new or unique to the transition to the online context. As such, there needs to be genuine improvements in how the Equity portfolio is incorporated during Frosh. Equity Commissioners are required to be at Frosh not to police the activities, but rather to ensure that the events are as inclusive for all participants as possible. Without this insurance of equitable event planning, the potential for unsafe Frosh environments drastically increases, which is worrying for students entering AUS and McGill.

Despite the access concerns for Equity Commissioners, the incorporation of virtual platforms was very successful. As mentioned earlier, Microsoft Teams was an effective tool for creating the groups, considering every McGill student has a Microsoft account. Additionally, Microsoft Teams was useful for Academic Seminars and Spine Energie sessions, mainly due to the ease of entering each department's Team and accessing information from the presentations.

In short, Virtual Frosh was a success in terms of the implementation of various virtual platforms, as necessitated by the current global circumstances. It is clear, however, that there needs to be further improvements in hiring processes that properly reflect the diverse Arts Undergraduate student population, and that the Equity portfolio needs to be better integrated to ensure these changes take place.