

REQUEST FOR FIELD FEE RAISE - PANAMA FIELD STUDIES SEMESTER

22.03.21

Fee Advisory Committee
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Every winter the Panama Field Studies Semester offers an exceptional interdisciplinary and applied learning experience for McGill students. For over twenty years the PFSS has run within its budget.

This year we are asked for a substantial rise in our fees, moving from \$5670.50/year to \$7800. This is driven by a rise in costs and drops in revenues linked to changes in the program personnel and structure, as well as exogenous decisions by Québec's Minister of Education (MELS). Fundamentally, however, the rise in fee is driven by the need to assure student safety and well-being.

Even at \$7800 per semester, the PFSS will remain the most affordable field semester offered by McGill. Compare with Africa, over \$15k, or Barbados, currently at \$8k but projected to rise as the program is restructured.

Rise in overall costs

Overall the PFSS' costs will rise by ca. \$21 000 from just over \$150 000 to ca. \$171 000. Costs are rising for the following reasons:

-The current 4x4 pick-up truck is close to 20 years old and needs to be retired. Aside from occasional maintenance costs, there were no costs associated with this truck that had been donated to the PFSS. The PFSS will now have to rent its replacement. A 4x4 is imperative for student safety – in case of incident or accident it has been regularly used to evacuate a sick or hurt student from the remote areas where the PFSS operates while allowing the rest of the group to continue its activities.

-The current Director, Catherine Potvin, being married to a Panamanian never charged accommodation and per diems for the estimated 45 days that she spent in Panama tending to the PFSS. These costs will have to be covered for the new Director who is based in Montreal with his family.

-The number of field classes will rise from three to four because one part of the existing Internship course will now be based in the field, allowing students to draw together and apply what they have learned over the course of the semester.

Drop in revenues

Overall the PFSS will lose \$36 000 in revenues.

-The year the MELS terminated its transfer of \$16 000 to the PFSS as part of its *Insertion professionnelle* program.

-To assure a healthy environment for students' mental health the PFSS has dedicated one of its rooms in its Panama City house as a space for retreat and consultation with mental health professionals. Over the past 5 years the number of students requiring medication and/or consultations with mental health practitioners has gone from none to 25% to 30% of the class. The new wellness room has been greatly appreciated by students. It puts them in a better position to meet the challenges of intensive field learning and we believe that it must, from here on, be a standard feature of the PFSS' program infrastructure. However, this has forced a drop in the overall number of students who can be admitted to the program from 26 to 22. Accordingly, the revenue drops by $4 * \$5670.50$ or $> \$20k$.

Between rises in costs and drops in revenues the PFSS faces a shortfall of \$57k.

McGill Faculties cover all teaching costs of professors' salaries and teaching assistants. Student fees are exclusively used to cover costs incurred as part of learning in the field. These are detailed in the accompanying budget.

The requested changes to the fees will allow the PFSS to keep within its budget under the new operating conditions it must now compose with.

Sincerely yours,



Catherine Potvin, Outgoing Director PFSS



Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, In-coming Director PFSS