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| MSU logo.jpg. | MEMO*From the office of the…*Student Representative Assembly |
| TO: | Board of Directors, SRA Members, Committee Chairs, and all MSU Members |
| FROM: | The Members of the Student Representative Assembly |
| SUBJECT: | Full-Time Staff and MSU Transparency |
| DATE: | March 7th, 2021 – SRA 20P |

**Dear Members of the MSU,**

This year especially, we have seen the effects of a lack of trust that students have in the MSU. We, an organization intended to support and represent the full-time undergraduate students at McMaster University, are not trusted by the students we set out to serve.

Despite the MSU’s efforts to communicate with the student body, students don’t understand what we do and who works to do it. Although we provide information about the workings of our Board of Directors, SRA, EB and part time staff online this information isn’t always communicated in language that is easy to understand or even available at all. Our permanent full-time staff are a mystery to the students who pay their wages. The rest of MSU employees, either part-time, or full-time one-year contracts for recent graduates are held to a different standard. The positions are transparent. Their job descriptions, wages, and employment policies are all listed online. The same can’t be said for the permanent full-time staff. To the students who pay for the entirety of the union, we owe them openness, accountability, and transparency.

The SRA is intended to be the highest body in the organization – a direct voice of the students – but we feel that we aren’t being treated as such. We recognize that we know so little about the operations of the Students Union. Most of us don’t know how many permanent full-time staff are employed, how much of the MSU budget goes towards paying their salaries, or even what their departments are. This is unacceptable. As the leaders of this organization, we refuse to be kept in the dark about the processes that we are supposed to be running. The SRA are made up of a group of students, the Board of Directors are recent graduates, and a collection of MSU members during General Assembly make up the most powerful body in the union because our organization is intended to be run by students. But in reality, this isn’t the case.

As all of our student positions are hired (or volunteer based) on a single-year contract, we face a steep learning curve when entering their roles. Few positions are given adequate transition periods, if they receive any transition period at all. This results in students who feel helpless and unprepared in their roles. To complete their duties, these students rely on permanent full-time staff to give them direction, historical context, and advisement pertaining to their decisions. Overtime, this has shifted the balance of the student union: one from student-lead, to full-time-staff-lead. Those who are, on paper, the supervisors of full-time staff, are then susceptible to being influenced by those they are intended to lead. In speaking with past MSU part-time staff, we’ve found that full-time staff act behind the scenes, often as a roadblock to change rather than an aide to the students’ efforts. This subtle MSU culture is well hidden. By the time a student working in the MSU realizes the extent of the troubling imbalance of power, they are already out of their role. In order to shift the organization back to one that is student led, a critical step is increasing transparency about the job description and wages of full-time staff.

We’ve heard the defense that it is not the standard for organizations like ours to be more transparent with job positions and wages, but we disagree. The Sunshine List, enacted in 1996, is an Ontario initiative to promote transparency and accountability within the residents of Ontario. This is a system to disclose the salaries of employees within the Public Sector who make over $100,000 CAD. Because McMaster is within the public sector, employees paid over $100,000 have their names, positions, salaries, and sectors available online for the public to see. The MSU does not apply within the definition of the public sector, because it is a distinct organization separate from McMaster University. Instead, it is a general not-for-profit organization. Because of this technicality, MSU employees who make over $100,000 have no obligation to be transparent with the wages they receive, even to the students who pay directly for it. In reference to not-for-profit salaries, the Canadian Charter of Professional Accountants (CPA) says: “Good governance is generally accepted to entail transparency over how compensation is set and what compensation is paid, whether or not required by law.” [[1]](#footnote-2) We agree and therefore we ask that the same standards set as a precedent for public-sector organizations and part-time staff positions in the MSU be held for the full-time staff. “Where no legislative require­ments apply, it is up to the Board [of Directors] to determine the organization’s compensation disclosure practices in line with its guiding principles and values and any requirements mandated by funders or the organization’s bylaws”.[[2]](#footnote-3) We, as the highest body of the McMaster Students Union and the supervisors of the Board of Directors call to re-align the organization’s disclosure practices with our guiding principles and values: to serve the students. We are asking that Employment Policy – Full-Time Staff, Job Descriptions, Wage classes and wage scale are added to the MSU website.

We recognize that there may be privacy concerns from the full-time staff. We understand that they do not want to receive harassment by students if their positions become public knowledge. We agree that all forms of threats and harassment are unacceptable. Considering this though, on the balancing scale between privacy and transparency within the MSU, we are on the far side away from being transparent. We feel that movements towards increasing transparency within the MSU will act as the first steps to bridge the gap in trust for the students towards the MSU. We also hear concerns that students might be upset without the full understanding of the situation. We agree that uninformed anger is unideal, but we feel that the solution to this problem should not be to engage in secrecy, but instead, if the students don’t have the full extent of the background information, to provide the background information. We have a group of staff dedicated to communication within all members of the MSU and we believe that, if used effectively, our social media and other forms of communication can be used to effectively engage students in the conversations that we are having on their behalf.

We are calling on the current administration to act in good faith to increase transparency in the MSU by passing our motions as follows:

**Motioned by Singh, Seconded by Au Yeung, that the assembly call upon the MSU administration to post Employment Policy - Full-Time Staff with the rest of the MSU Employment Policies on the MSU website by April 30th, 2021 at 11:59 pm.**

**Motioned by Sariaslani, Seconded by Aminaei, that the assembly call upon the MSU administration to post all MSU Job Descriptions, both full-time and part-time, to a publicly accessible place on the MSU website by April 30th, 2021 at 11:59 pm.**

**Motioned by Egbeyemi, Seconded by Del Castillo, that the assembly call upon the MSU administration to include wage classes associated with each MSU staff position with the posted Job Descriptions to a publicly accessible place on the MSU website by April 30th, 2021 at 11:59 pm.**

**Motioned by Egbeyemi, Seconded by Sariaslani, that the assembly call upon the MSU administration to include the wage chart defining wage ranges for each MSU staff position to a publicly accessible place on the MSU website by April 30th, 2021 at 11:59 pm.**

Sincerely,

Members of the Student Representative Assembly

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| SRA Arts and Science 2020-2021 | Adeola Egbeyemi | AE |
| SRA Health Science 2020-2021 | Bethel Samson  Zoe Tsai | BS  ZT |
| SRA Science 2020-2021 | Christy Au-Yeung  Armin Sariaslani  Danial Aminaei  Simran Dhindsa  Simranjeet Singh  Gail Del Castillo | CA  AS  DA  SD  SS  GDC |
| SRA Social Sciences 2020-2021 | Amylia Mesic  Shelby Seymour  Adrian Stathoukos | AM  SS  AS |
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1. Laura Cassiani and Paula Pettit, *20 Questions Directors of Not-for-Profit Organizations Should Ask about Human Resources*, 20 Questions CPA (Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada, 2018), https://www.cpacanada.ca/en/business-and-accounting-resources/strategy-risk-and-governance/not-for-profit-governance/publications/hr-questions-for-nfp-directors. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Cassiani and Pettit. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)