



REPORT

From the office of the...

Associate Vice-President (Services)

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Justin Phung, Associate Vice President: Services
Mitchell German, Vice-President (Administration)
SUBJECT: Maroons Service Review
DATE: **Thursday, March 16, 2023**

INTRODUCTION

To the Esteemed Members of the Executive Board of the McMaster Students Union,

The following report is a review of the McMaster Students Union (MSU) service known as **the Maroons**.

The aim of this review is to give an overview of how successful the service is in fulfilling its purpose and mandate. Surveys were conducted of the general student body as well as volunteers and employees of the service to gain an understanding of how the service functions, how it is perceived, and what programming/services it delivers to the student body. This review contains an analysis of those results, as well as a summary of external research that has been done. The external research took a focus on other university student unions in Ontario to understand if they offer clubs or services with strategies which can be adopted by the Maroons. The result of this internal and external research is summarized to give a series of recommendations made in concert by the Services Committee, VP Administration, and AVP Services.

SERVICE OVERVIEW

Service Purpose

- 1.1 To promote spirit and McMaster pride amongst McMaster undergraduates;
- 1.2 To facilitate leadership opportunities for students;
- 1.3 To represent the McMaster Students Union at campus events

Service Operating Parameters

- 2.1 The Maroons shall be a completely student-run service of the MSU dedicated to increasing the level of leadership, school spirit, and pride;
- 2.2 The Maroons shall facilitate a leadership committee for students to plan and execute events that promote school spirit and pride on the McMaster campus and in the Hamilton Community;

2.3 Be responsible for selecting the Welcome Week Charity in collaboration with Welcome Week Planners, and facilitating Welcome Week charity events.

Service Structure

3.1 The Maroons Coordinator, who shall:

3.1.1 Be responsible for managing all activities of the Maroons and represent the MSU as an Orientation planner for Welcome Day and Welcome Week;

3.1.2 Perform duties outlined in the Maroons Coordinator job description;

3.2 The Events Coordinators, who shall:

3.2.1 Be responsible for planning and running social events for students and the Maroons with the help of the Events Committee;

3.2.2 Be responsible for selecting the Welcome Week Charity in collaboration with Welcome Week Planners, and facilitating Welcome Week charity events;

3.2.3 Perform duties outlined in the Maroons Events Coordinator job description;

3.3 The Athletic Coordinators, who shall:

3.3.1 Be responsible for promoting Athletic and Recreational activities for the McMaster community with the help of the Athletic Committee;

3.3.2 Perform duties outlined in the Maroons Athletic Coordinator job description;

3.4 The Public Relations Coordinator, who shall:

3.4.1 Be responsible for the promotion of MSU events and Maroons specific events;

3.4.2 Be responsible for liaising with community members to foster a sense of community, leadership, and McMaster pride within the Hamilton community;

3.4.3 Perform duties outlined in the Public Relations Coordinator job description;

3.5 The Representatives, who shall:

3.5.1 Be responsible for promoting spirit and McMaster pride and assisting with Maroons and other MSU events;

3.5.2 Perform duties outlined in the Maroons Representatives job description;

INTERNAL RESEARCH

Volunteer and Executive Survey

The executive and volunteer survey consisted of 34 questions to gauge how effectively Maroons' executives and volunteers view its functioning and delivery of services to the student body. This allows for reviewers to understand how the leadership and volunteers of Maroons perceives the service and will allow us to gain an understanding of where areas for improvement exist. There were 19 responses to the survey which represents approximately 30% of all executives and volunteers with the Maroons.

Science represents the faculty from which the greatest number of respondents originate, with 31.5% from that faculty. Health Sciences is second, with 26% of respondents from that faculty. 42% of students were in third year, 37% were in fourth year, and 21% were in their second year. Most respondents were full-time undergraduate students, with three quarters being domestic students from Ontario. 89.5% lived in off-campus student housing, with the remaining either living in McMaster campus residence or living at home and commuting.

37% of applicants identified as East and/or Southeast Asian, 26% identified as White/European, 21% as South Asian, 5% as black, 5% as mixed race, and 5% who preferred not to disclose. Cisgender men and women were evenly split, with 10% preferring not to disclose their gender. 80% of respondents were heterosexual, 5% identifying as bi/pan/polysexual, 5% as questioning, 5% as Queer, and 5% preferring not to say.

Responses were fairly evenly distributed for annual household income, with the average annual household income being in the \$100,000 and \$149,999 range. Most respondents originated from family units composed of four (63% of respondents). Half of respondents were aged 20, with the next frequently reported ages being 21, 19, and 22. 18% of respondents self-identified with an intellectual, cognitive, or mental health disability. Half of respondents were second generation students, with the remaining half split between first and third generations.

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Most respondents were familiar with the Maroons before taking the survey. All respondents felt the role of promoting spirit and pride in McMaster was suitable, but were conflicted as to whether the role should be expanded, with 10.5% disagreeing, 42.1% agreeing or strongly agreeing, and 47.4% remaining neutral. All respondents believed the Maroons helped many people on campus through their services and were proud to facilitate activities and events. One anonymous respondent indicated they believed the Maroons are doing a great job at holding a variety of interesting events and representing the McMaster community. Another believed the impact of the service on the McMaster community is greatly felt, attributing it to the tight-knit nature of the team.

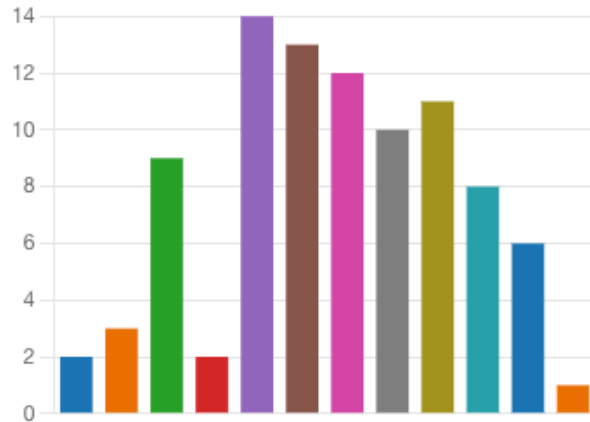
Over half of the respondents indicated they first learned of the Maroons through friends/acquaintances, with Instagram and Welcome Week being the next few sources. All respondents also indicated that Maroons social media and promotions were of excellent or good quality. Many respondents have also seen/heard of the Maroons in a variety of areas, with the most popular being friends/acquaintances, Welcome Week events, Maroons Instagram, on-campus Maroons promotional material, Clubsfest, student clubs or societies, MSU Instagram, and collaboration with other MSU services. Figure 1 below indicates that executives/volunteers want TikTok, physical promotions, and collaborations with other MSU services, collaboration with student groups and student societies, and collaboration with McMaster University services to be main ways to spread awareness of the Maroons.

Figure 1. A figure to show platforms/methods which executives/volunteers believe should be used to expand awareness of the service.

23. I think Maroons should use the following platforms/methods to increase awareness of its services:

[More Details](#)

● No particular platforms/methods	2
● Facebook	3
● Instagram	9
● Twitter	2
● TikTok	14
● Physical promotions (such as po...	13
● Collaboration with other MSU s...	12
● Collaboration with McMaster U...	10
● Collaboration with student grou...	11
● Collaboration with local, Hamilt...	8
● Online communities (e.g. Discord)	6
● Other	1



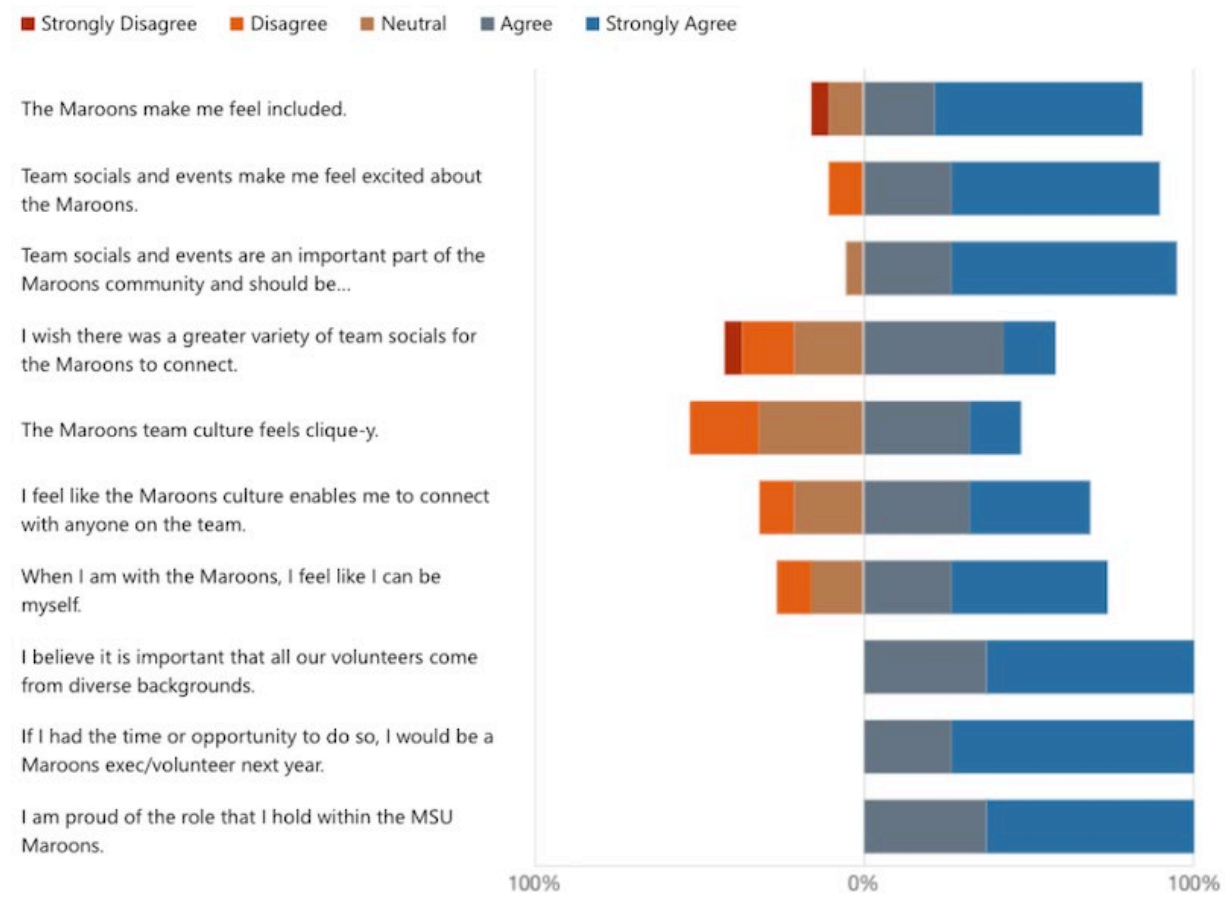
A majority of respondents were volunteers, with 10.5% of respondents being executives. 73.6% of respondents also indicated this was their first year working with the Maroons. All respondents indicated they believed their job description was accurate and did not compromise their ability to focus on academics. All respondents felt they had adequate support and executive/volunteer/MSU training, with the hiring process being thorough, fair, and appropriate.

Assessing operations provided some interesting results. 89.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Maroons strives to build a strong team dynamic, with 5.3% remaining neutral and 5.3% disagreeing. 94.7% of respondents also indicated they didn't feel burnt out, while 5.3% did. A large majority (84.2%) also felt the Maroons valued their input and made them feel appreciated, while 5.3% disagreed and 10.5% remained neutral. 94.7% of respondents also believed there were ample opportunities to provide feedback, and 89.5% of respondents also felt there was sufficient communication between volunteers/ reps and administration. However, 47.3% believed the Maroons were inadequately funded, while 26.3% believed the service was well-funded. The remaining respondents remained neutral. 36.9% of respondents also believed that Maroons did not provide ample compensation for uniform costs, while 26.3% of respondents did; the majority of respondents (36.8%) remained neutral. All respondents felt the frequency of collaboration, communication, and team meetings was right, with 10.5% of respondents indicating weekly executive meetings were too much.

Analyzing Figure 2 below provided some insight on team dynamic for the Maroons. 84.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Maroons made them feel included, with 5.3% strongly disagreeing. 89.5% of respondents also felt team socials and events made them feel excited, while 10.5% disagreed. Despite the fact that a large majority of respondents agreed that team socials and events were important, results were mixed on whether there

should be a greater variety of them. 57.9% of them agreed or strongly agreed that there should be a great variety, while 21.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed. 21.1% didn't believe there was a clique culture in the Maroons, while 31.6% believed there was and 15.8% strongly believed this. Of note, 10.5% of respondents indicated they did not believe Maroons culture enabled them to connect with others on the team, as well as feel like they could be themselves. Nevertheless, 68.4% believed they could connect with anyone and 73.7% felt they could be themselves. All respondents felt it was important that volunteers were diverse and were still proud of being a Maroon, expressing their interest in doing so next year and stating they have learned a lot from being involved with the Maroons.

Figure 2. Likert scale statements assessing inclusivity and team dynamic.



General Student Body Survey

The general student body survey consisted of 38 questions to gauge how effectively the Maroons delivers its services to the student body. This allows for reviewers to understand how the student body perceives the service and will allow us to gain an understanding of where there exist areas to make service delivery or communication with the student body more efficient. There were 121 responses to the survey, with most being first or second years.

The greatest number of responses came from Science students (40%) followed by Social Sciences students (17%). All respondents were full-time undergraduate students, with

most being domestic students from Ontario with almost half living in off-campus student housing and the remaining half living in residence or commuting.

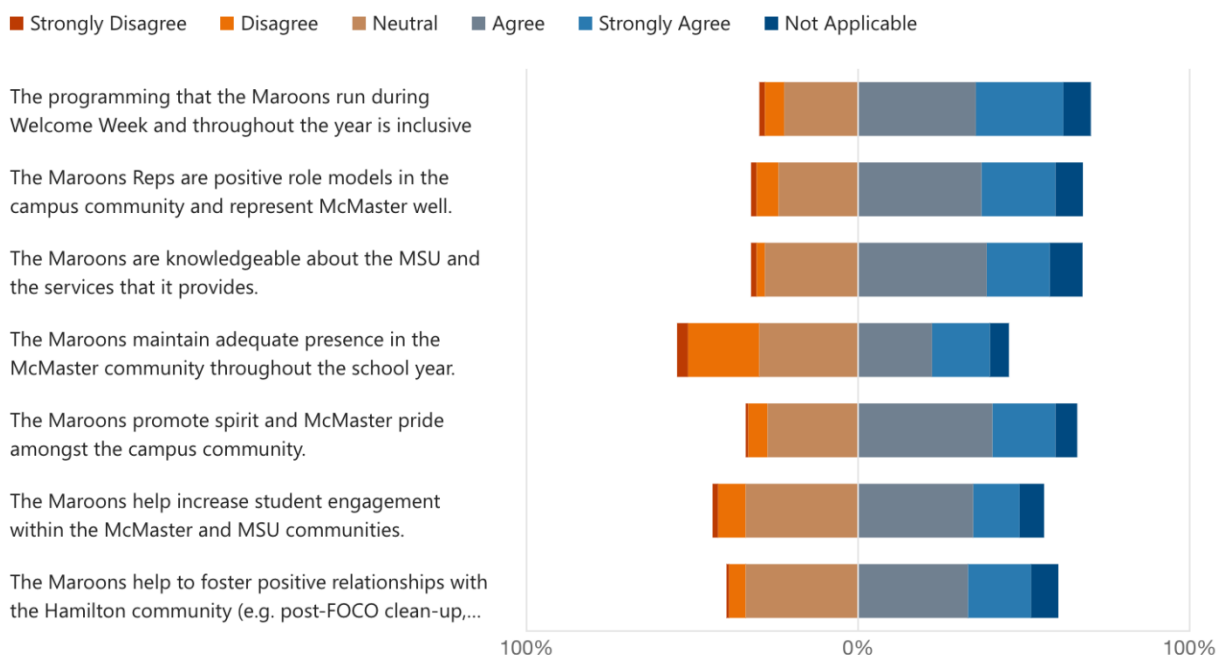
In order of greatest to least number of respondents, the three largest ethno-racial groups were White/European (31%), East or Southeast Asian (25%), and South Asian (25%). Cisgender women made up the supermajority of respondents (80%) with most of the remainder made up of cisgender men, and about 7% made up of individuals of various non-cisgender identities. About 75% of respondents were heterosexual, with the remaining 25% comprising various homosexual, asexual, Queer, and bi/poly/pansexual identities.

Average annual family income appeared to be within the range of \$50,000 to \$99,999 though likely at the lower end. Most respondents originated from family units composed of 4 or more individuals. Half of all respondents were either 18 or 19 years old, with the rest being 20+ years old. Half of the respondents were second-generation students, and 18% of students indicated they identify as a person with a disability.

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Generally, most respondents were not too familiar with the Maroons, with an average familiarity score of 4.3/10. Overall, a majority of respondents felt the Maroons' role was suitable (66.2%), but almost half of respondents (47.1%) indicated the role should be expanded. Most respondents felt the Maroons were positive role models and knowledgeable about the MSU, promoting spirit and McMaster pride. Respondents were more divided on whether the Maroons maintain adequate presence in the community throughout the school year, with 24.8% of respondents disagreeing and 39.7% agreeing. 10% of respondents also felt the Maroons should increase student engagement in a more effective way, although 48.7% believed otherwise. Figure 3 below presents a visual of the results.

Figure 3. Likert scale statements assessing the role the Maroons play in the school community and public perception of the Maroons



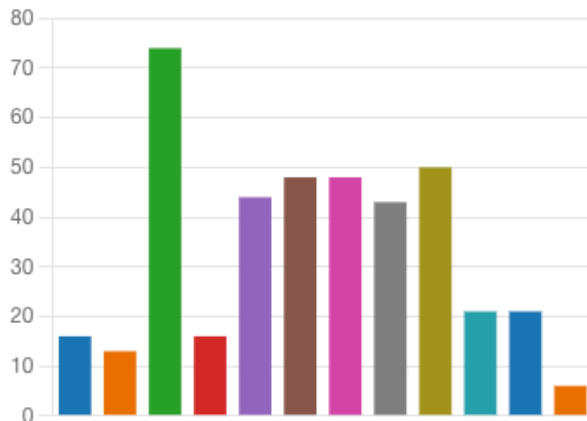
The majority of respondents first heard of the Maroons through Welcome Week (44%), with 11.5% hearing from friends/acquaintances, 8% from on-campus promotions, and 13% indicating they have not heard of the Maroons. 45% of respondents indicated they thought Maroons promotions are of excellent or good quality, with 30% indicating they were unsure or haven't seen Maroons promotions. Respondents who were familiar with the Maroons indicated they have seen promotions from Welcome Week events (53.7%), friends/acquaintances (37.1%), MSU Instagram (30%), Maroons Instagram (28%), on-campus promotions (27%), and informational emails (24%). Most students believed Instagram to be the best platform to expand awareness of the service, as seen below in Figure 4. Physical promotions, TikTok, and collaborations with student groups/clubs, MSU services, and McMaster University services were also leading methods suggested to expand awareness of the service.

Figure 4. A figure to show platforms/methods which students believe should be used to expand awareness of the service.

23. I think Maroons should use the following platforms/methods to increase awareness of its services:

[More Details](#)

● No particular platforms/methods	16
● Facebook	13
● Instagram	74
● Twitter	16
● TikTok	44
● Physical promotions (such as po...	48
● Collaboration with other MSU s...	48
● Collaboration with McMaster U...	43
● Collaboration with student grou...	50
● Collaboration with local, Hamilt...	21
● Online communities (e.g. Discord)	21
● Other	6

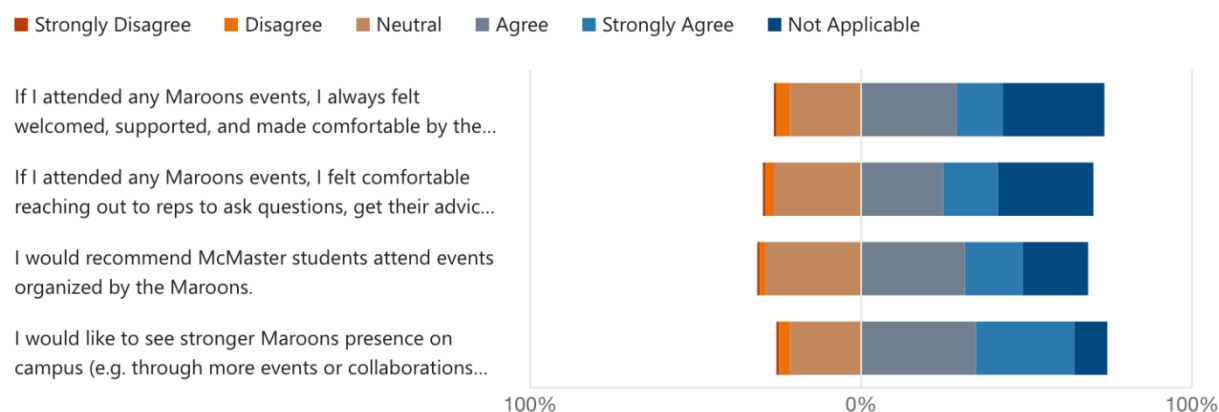


About 46% of respondents attended or helped with Welcome Week. Of those respondents, a majority of them felt the Maroons were welcoming and positive and able to create connections with students campus-wide. Of the respondents who interacted with Maroons at Campus Events programming like Monday Night Lights, Headphone Disco, Faculty Fusion, or the BBNO\$ Concert, 75% consistently indicated the Maroons were integral to the success of these events, providing guidance and making students feel welcome.

About 29% of respondents interacted with Maroons during FOCO-related initiatives surrounding the City of Hamilton's Nuisance Party bylaw, and 60% of those respondents believed that the Maroons were approachable and worked to uphold the positive image of

McMaster students. 22% of the respondents saw Maroons at varsity sports games, with almost all respondents indicating they bring spirit to the games and add to the atmosphere. Less than 7% of respondents participated in Maroons-led intramural teams or Movember, but of those respondents that did, they all indicated that the Maroons were effective at providing information and creating connections with students. However, the lack of responses for these initiatives may reflect the lack of engagement the Maroons have outside of Welcome Week and varsity sports games. Figure 5 below shows general impressions of Maroons initiatives and events. Generally, students left favourable or neutral reviews expressing comfort with the Maroons but looking to see stronger Maroons presence on campus.

Figure 5. A figure to show platforms/methods which students believe should be used to expand awareness of the service.



The overwhelming written feedback provided emphasized greater Maroons presence throughout the year, with more events centered towards first-year students. Many respondents were unsure of the scope of the services' role, believing them to only be present during Welcome Week. Responses also suggested the Maroons should attend more events besides sporting ones, as well as hosting other “student-first” events like game nights or engagement workshops to meet Maroons and encourage peer-to-peer interactions. Having more leadership opportunities for students to get involved with the service is also a priority, especially considering the service’s purpose and operating parameters. Respondents also suggested holding more collaborations to promote events.

Although the majority of students’ written responses were positive, there were a few written comments highlighting the perceived culture surrounding the Maroons. Most of these comments emphasized the Maroons being an “elitist” group and society, which could be intimidating for students and make the community feel less welcoming. Their behavior during Welcome Week was also described as rambunctious or irresponsible. One comment also suggested increasing inclusivity among underrepresented and marginalized groups to encourage students to join the Maroons and create spaces which were more diverse. Ultimately, these comments were only a couple of responses, with disclaimers that it may only be certain members that do not represent the Maroons or the MSU in the best light.

EXTERNAL RESEARCH

As a part of the external research strategy, the Services Committee aimed to review all undergraduate student unions of universities in Ontario. The following aims to compare the Maroons to its equivalent at other universities and assist in providing any recommendations.

First off, Algoma University, Brock University, Carleton University, Lakehead University, Nipissing University, OCAD, Ontario Tech Student's Union, Guelph Central Student Association, and the University of Toronto do not have an equivalent to the MSU Maroons.

The Alma Mater Society of Queen's University offers a Student Life Centre (SLC) which works closely with university departments and provides various resources on campus to its student body. SLC provides equipment, spaces for students and community members to organize meetings, performances and events. It also offers the Housing Resource Centre (HRC) that provides support to students who require assistance with off campus housing. Trained student volunteers provide students with resources about the housing rental, leases, tenant rights and more. Its Peer Support Centre (PSC) has over 100 staff and volunteers to help students with homesickness, personal grievances, mental health, instances of oppression and/or discrimination, sexual violence, and academic challenges. The University of Windsor Students' Alliance offers a similar Peer Support Centre (PSC). PSC is a drop-in centre where students can find a trained peer to talk to in a safe, inclusive, and confidential space. The University of Ottawa Student Union offers an international house service that provides international students with opportunities to connect with the university community and broader Canadian communities. It also provides them with social resources and events to ensure a smooth transition to a new learning and living environment. International House also offers appropriate mental health support to international students during their office hours from Monday to Friday.

The University of Waterloo also offers an Orientation Week that is organized by the Orientation Team (O-Team) and Orientation leader. They are involved in event execution and provide support for first-year students during the Fall orientation week. The University of Western Ontario offers a faculty Sophs program where upper-year, undergraduate students volunteer as mentors for incoming students. They primarily support incoming students in their academic transition to Western, as well as direct students to appropriate resources when needed. Wilfred Laurier University offers a First Year Project (FYP) program which is a Students' Union Committee run by First Years for First Years to improve their experience and transition into university. The FYP runs engaging events exclusive to first year students on Laurier's Waterloo campus. The York Federation of Students runs an Orientation leader program that aims to plan, develop, and organize for college or faculty annual Orientation week. They also offer Peer Mentorship which pairs a high-achieving upper year student with a first-year student for one term at York to assist with transitioning to university.

Overall, many student unions seem to provide more personal mentorship support via their programs, connecting first years with upper year students. Other resources related to confidential peer support or alternate resources were also highlighted. Although some of these ideas may fall outside of the purview of the Maroons, emphasizing more personal connections among Maroons and McMaster students as well as establishing appropriate leadership opportunities should be a top priority for the service.

CONCLUSION

From the information gathered through surveying of the student body, volunteers, and executives of the Maroons, it is evident that the Maroons play an important role for the McMaster community. Nevertheless, this review has unveiled a few areas in which the Maroons service delivery can be improved. Below are some recommendations for the service:

1. Reintroduce the Maroons Leadership Committee initiative

This initiative is one that existed up until the 2016-2017 school year, when it stopped functioning. In section 2.2 of the Operating Parameters it states that, "The Maroons shall facilitate a leadership committee for students to plan and execute events that promote school spirit and pride on the McMaster campus and in the Hamilton Community." This was recommended in 2019-2020 by Martino Salciccioli, AVP Services at the time, but it seems unclear if this came to fruition.

By clearly reintroducing this initiative, the MSU Maroons can give students — particularly those in first-year — an opportunity to see the behind the scenes work this service does and be directly involved with it. This will hopefully encourage students to get involved with the service and attend the events it hosts/volunteers at. This initiative can also help demonstrate to students what the Maroons do and how they can be part of the service. First-year students could apply for a position within the committee a couple weeks following Welcome Week. It can also act as a mentorship program of sorts to connect first-year students with upper-year Maroons, also allowing them to build their leadership skills and understand the role the Maroons played in the community.

2. Host more events to engage first-year students and the McMaster community

It is evident from the general student body survey that respondents remain unaware of the Maroons' initiatives apart from their presence during Welcome Week. Thus, hosting more "student-first" events like game nights or engagement workshops would encourage peer-to-peer interactions and allow students to connect with the Maroons in other capacities. In doing so, this could help dispel the negative perceptions of the Maroons. Open events such as dodgeball tournaments may also facilitate more community bonding and are highly recommended to engage with more students.

3. Hold more collaborations with other MSU, McMaster University services, or student groups

Given that most respondents wish the Maroons to be more present in the community, collaborative events are also an excellent way to engage with a more diverse range of students. Collaborations with MSU services, McMaster University services, and student groups were widely cited as ways in which to increase awareness of the Maroons. Especially with services like Spark which facilitates workshops and events for first-years, this would be an excellent opportunity

4. Increase funding for the Maroons to hold more events and initiatives

By increasing Maroons presence in the community, this may require further funds to host more initiatives and events for students. Ensuring they have the adequate budget to execute such events is important so that the service is able to establish a continuous presence throughout the

whole school year. The budgeting for events throughout the year should be managed appropriately with the Maroons Director and VP Finance.

5. Emphasize diversity in hiring process

Diversity among the Maroons seemed to be a point of emphasis from some respondents. By adding this to the operating policy, this could potentially increase inclusivity among underrepresented groups and help to clarify the hiring process.

6. Implement and enforce 60% new and 40% returner ratio where possible

This was a recommendation provided in the 2019-2020 Maroons Service Review to address clique culture within the Maroons and ensure the service is engaging new students and bringing in a new cohort of Representatives each year. By facilitating the Maroons Leadership Committee initiative, this should also help address this concern as members of the committee may apply as a Maroon in the following year. Implementing this ratio in the hiring process will also serve as a check to ensure if the Maroons are able to adequately engage the community and foster interest in applying for and joining the service.

7. Collaborate with faculty and residence representatives during Welcome Week

Numerous respondents expressed concerns regarding the Maroons being perceived as “elitist.” This could be attributed to the fact that their responsibilities and scope of work do not overlap with other representative groups during Welcome Week, contributing to the perception their work is separate and “glorified” compared to other Welcome Week representatives. Although the events they hold are separate and often under the supervision of the MSU or Campus Events, working more closely with faculty and residence representatives may lead to a more unified, collaborative environment among all representatives during Welcome Week. Whether it be during move-in days or by hosting events together, continuous efforts to collaborate with other groups may quell the negative “elitist” perception that students may have of the Maroons.

With these steps in place, I hope the Maroons will be able to successfully improve its service delivery and continue its role as a vital part of the McMaster Community. I would like to thank the Services Committee, the VP Administration, Administrative Services Coordinator, Director of Marketing and Communications, the Maroons Coordinator, the volunteers and executives on the Maroons team, and those in the student body who responded to the surveys for their help in the creation of this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reintroduce the Maroons Leadership Committee initiative
2. Host more events to engage first-year students and the McMaster community
3. Hold more collaborations with other MSU, McMaster University services, or student groups
4. Increase funding for the Maroons to hold more events and initiatives
5. Emphasize diversity in hiring process
6. Implement 60% new and 40% returner ratio
7. Collaborate with faculty and residence representatives during Welcome Week

Best regards,

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