



Recommended actions based on the investigation and report:
“McMaster Engineering Redsuits and Welcome Week Culture”

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Submitted to

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Introduction

In January 2014, the University was made aware of a songbook connected to engineering students. This discovery also brought to light unsanctioned student events. In response, the University retained an external investigator to investigate allegations relating to the culture and conduct within Engineering with regards to the existence and use of songs and a songbook which was considered inappropriate, sexist and degrading. Allegations at the time also included unsanctioned events that put students at risk and violated McMaster policies. The events related primarily, although not exclusively, to the McMaster Engineering Society organization and participation of engineering students and Redsuits during Welcome Week at McMaster. The report recognizes that only a small minority of students within the Faculty participated in the events.

The investigation's goal was to understand to the greatest extent possible what had been occurring with respect to the allegations and the involvement of student organizations. In order to solicit as much input as possible the investigation was conducted based on the following principles:

- Participants in the investigation would do so on a voluntary basis
- The report would not reference the names of students involved in the events
- Names of people providing evidence would not be included in the report

The report of the investigator was received April 23, 2014. The University has now had time to review the report and develop its response. This Recommended Actions Report outlines several steps to address the significant concerns and findings outlined by the investigation.

The McMaster Engineering Society (MES) is an organized group of students representing the engineering undergraduate student body at McMaster. The Redsuits are a volunteer student organization which promotes engineering pride and spirit across campus and the community. When a student is chosen to be a Welcome Week representative to help organize and run Welcome Week, he or she automatically becomes a member of the Redsuits. Once a student becomes a Redsuit he or she continues within the group even if he/she is no longer involved as a Welcome Week representative. Both the MES and Redsuits have a long history of making positive contributions to the University and to the community. For example, Redsuits help students and their parents on move-in day, and run fundraisers for charity.

In a document published some time ago and sent to university administration by the MES Executives in February 2014 entitled "MES Culture Shift Action Plan", the MES Executive identifies that they had been aware for some time that culture change was needed. It indicates that, "It was a unanimous decision by MES leadership to change our culture, image and overall perception within the university to better reflect our mission statement." The MES believes that a gradual approach "over several generations" is needed in order to mitigate "potential backlash". They point to signs of progress, such as additional Welcome Week programming for "introverts" and a supplemental week of academic sessions following Welcome Week.

But the findings from the investigation (“McMaster Engineering Redsuits and Welcome Week Culture”) demonstrate that conduct and decisions by the MES Executives and senior Welcome Week representatives have not been congruent with their stated intent of “culture change”. More specifically:

- The MES Executive and senior Faculty of Engineering Welcome Week representatives (Co-ordinators/Planners and Commissioners, henceforth called “senior representatives”) put student safety at risk through the organization of unsanctioned events involving excessive and underage drinking, and an initiation involving invitations to remove clothing.
- MES Executives and senior Welcome Week representatives committed a serious breach of trust through their actions and decisions including:
 - Insufficient financial management and record keeping
 - Intentionally violating the Student Event Risk management policy
 - Intentionally using inappropriate chants off campus
 - Once allegations were made public, hindering the investigation by removing and hiding information

“while some progress has been made...highly inappropriate and dangerous activities have cast a dark cloud over Welcome Week and must be immediately addressed.”

from the report: “McMaster Engineering Redsuits and Welcome Week Culture”

Without question, the University is obligated to act so that we can ensure our students’ safety, effectively develop our student leaders, and change a subculture that is out of step with the values of our institution.

McMaster is committed to:

- Building a culture of inclusivity, trust and respect
- Ensuring the safety of students
- Strong student governance including accountability of student groups to student members
- Education and development of students to become leaders both on campus and in society at large

The University has substantial concerns about the decisions and actions of the MES Executive and senior representatives. Many of these decisions and behaviours were not rooted in a lack of knowledge or awareness about procedures that needed to be followed, but in a lack of respect and an intentional disregard for our values and policies.

We have drawn several conclusions from the investigation, which form the basis for the recommended actions in this report. The recommendations were developed based on the findings of the investigation and in consultation with the Provost, Dean of Engineering and Student Affairs. They were designed to provide students with the opportunity to develop an understanding of the responsibilities that come with

leadership positions, to help prevent the continuance of activities that put student safety at risk, and to help students be accountable and transparent in the management of funding that comes from student fees.

We agree with the MES Executive that culture change is needed, but it is evident that a greater sense of urgency and improved effectiveness is needed for sustained change to happen.

Given the complexity of the task and the findings of the investigation, it is not realistic to expect the MES Executives to undertake the changes needed on their own. The University has an obligation to act.

Recommended Actions

A. University oversight of Engineering student leader recruitment, orientation, and development

Those in leadership positions have the greatest impact on an organization's culture. The selection and orientation of student leaders is a critical starting point for any culture change. Traditionally, the MES Executive has managed all recruitment and selection of Welcome Week representatives. Oversight by Student Affairs professionals and Faculty of Engineering administration in Welcome Week representative recruitment, orientation and development will provide the support, experienced mentorship and continuity to help student leaders perform their roles effectively.

Welcome Week planners already receive significant training from the Student Success Centre (SSC) that addresses topics such as the goals of Welcome Week activities, budgeting, event planning, leadership and volunteer engagement, risk management, sexual violence, alcohol, and mental health. This year, the planners will be going on a two-day training session to address these topics. In contrast, MES Executives receive no mandatory orientation.

Recommended actions

1. The Faculty of Engineering administration and University Student Affairs will oversee the hiring of Faculty of Engineering Welcome Week Planners/Co-ordinators and Representatives.
2. The student Faculty Planners will report directly to a member of the Faculty of Engineering administration.
3. The McMaster Engineering Society Executive will be required to attend annual leadership orientation. McMaster's Student Success Centre will develop and provide this orientation, starting this year with the current MES Student Executive. In addition to the topics listed above in Welcome Week training, orientation for MES Executives will help to develop a deeper understanding of the obligations and responsibilities that come with the privilege of their leadership role.

B. Financial Management

The McMaster Engineering Society operates with an annual budget of over \$400,000, funded by student fees. The University has worked with the MES Executive to determine how student fees have been spent over the past two years. There are insufficient financial management and record keeping practices in the MES financial management approach. In order to ensure better accountability to students who pay fees to their Faculty society, the University has, over the past year, developed a policy and hired staff to ensure improved financial accountability and transparency of our student groups. However, given the findings of the investigation, additional measures are needed:

Recommended actions

4. The MES Executive will be required to submit annual audited financial statements for the academic year 13/14 and for future years. Funds collected by the University for MES for the following year will be disbursed only after a satisfactory audited financial statement is delivered to the University.
5. The University may, at its discretion, request its Internal Audit department to review MES's financial records. MES Executive will ensure that reliable systems and professional staff are in place to help manage their finances in a way that ensures accountability and transparency.

C. Policies

A number of university policies intersect with Welcome Week. It is important to ensure that these policies work together, are clear in their intent and enable Welcome Week to achieve its goals of welcoming students in an inclusive, safe and respectful manner.

Recommended actions

6. Student Affairs will review its Welcome Week policy to ensure that it is aligned with the Student Events Risk Management policy, the policy on the Recognition of Student Groups, the Student Code of Conduct, and with the policy on Student Rights and Responsibilities.

D. Status of Current Sanctions, and Moving Forward

McMaster's student event risk management policy, practices and systems are in place to ensure that events run by student groups are safe and provide positive opportunities for growth and development. A risk management consultant's report from July 2013 has identified McMaster as the leader in the country in this area.

In line with our current policy and practice, sanctioned events are those that have been approved through our system. We will continue to have zero tolerance for unsanctioned events by recognized student groups and expect that all events requiring approval will be submitted.

In considering the way forward, it is important to strike a balance between opportunities for the MES Executive and senior representatives to earn back the trust of the University and their constituents

while not ignoring or minimizing past actions and decisions. More can be done to help equip student leaders to perform their roles effectively.

Since the allegations were received, the MES has been prohibited from serving alcohol at its events. In addition, all Redsuits/representatives from 2012 and 2013 have been ineligible to apply for positions within the Faculty of Engineering for Welcome Week in 2014.

The investigation report is clear that MES Executive and senior representatives knowingly breached University Policy, encouraged the use of inappropriate chants, and did not properly manage Society funds.

Although some rank-and-file representatives/Redsuits were participants in the activities under investigation, it cannot be determined the degree to which individuals were supportive of these activities.

The University's goal is to support strong student governance through helping students more fully develop their leadership potential.

Recommended actions

7. All representatives/Redsuits who were not on the MES Executive and/or who were not senior representatives in 2012 and/or 2013 will have their eligibility to participate as representatives in Welcome Week re-instated.
8. Restrictions involving alcohol will remain in place for MES academic events pending the satisfactory completion of MES Executives leader orientation as per recommendation #3. Alcohol for non-academic MES events will continue to be prohibited.
9. The Provost, Dean of Engineering, and Dean of Students will assess Engineering Welcome Week and the actions, events, behaviour and decisions of MES, MES Executives and Redsuits between now and December 2014. Based on this review, decisions will be made regarding:
 - a. Eligibility of MES Executives and senior Welcome Week leaders from 2012 and 2013 for Engineering Welcome Week leadership/representative positions in 2015.
 - b. Integration of MES executives into the Welcome Week leader and representative hiring process
 - c. Restrictions on alcohol for non-academic MES events

D. The Redsuit

The "Redsuit" is more than a uniform. It is an important symbol with a long history in the Faculty of Engineering at McMaster. The decisions and conduct brought to light by the investigation have damaged this important symbol. However, what's more important than the clothing worn by Engineering students is the culture they establish through their behaviours and decisions. With the University's support and

the implementation of these recommendations, we have faith in our students and in their ability to establish a culture based on trust, respect and inclusivity. Their challenge will be to repair the damage to the organization.

Recommended action

10. The University supports the continued work of the Redsuits in promoting engineering pride and spirit within the values of the University for building an inclusive and respectful community.

E. The songbook

The songbook posted online is obscene, and degrading. It has no place at McMaster or in civil society. Its very existence points to a disturbing subculture that exists beyond the Faculty and the University. The exact origins of the songbook are unclear and while the copy provided to the University includes McMaster student comments from as recently as 2010, the book is believed to have existed for a considerable period of time within engineering circles across the country. The subculture that supports the continued use of the songbook breeds where there is a lack of exposure and understanding. It was only through the courageous efforts of individuals within our university community that this songbook came to light.

Recommend actions

11. Any future promotion or demonstration of the songbook, its chants or similar material will continue to be dealt with swiftly and without hesitation through relevant policies and student codes.
12. Welcome Week training for representatives will be re-examined to ensure a strong emphasis on diversity/inclusivity training, and sexual violence/harassment.
13. The President's Advisory Council on Building an Inclusive Community (PACBIC) will provide further input to the Dean of Students on this issue following a review of the report and of these recommendations.

F. Implementation in other Faculty Societies

There was no evidence brought forward in the investigation indicating that similar problems exist in other Faculties. However, the proposed recommended actions are designed to help strengthen the leadership potential of McMaster students and therefore strong consideration should be given to the university-wide application of some of these recommended actions to ensure consistency and to help avoid similar occurrences in the future.

Recommended actions

14. The Dean of Students will discuss the findings from the investigation and the recommendations in this report with Faculty deans. Consideration should be given to the broader implementation of recommendations specifically related to Leader Recruitment, Orientation and Development and Financial Management.

15. Mandatory orientation for all Faculty Society Executives will be considered as part of the revisions to the Recognition of Student Groups policy.

Conclusion

Student groups and student governance have a strong tradition at McMaster and the University is committed to supporting students in these leadership roles. The investigation into student activities within engineering has been challenging but hasn't diminished the University's commitment to the student governance model. What is clear, however, is that when student activities run counter to McMaster's principles and values and particularly when those activities put student safety at risk, the University must act.

McMaster is fortunate to have some of the most talented, disciplined, selfless and creative students in the country. We expect a lot from them, and so we should. The investigation has provided a learning opportunity for the University and it is hoped that MES and other student leaders within engineering view the report and the recommendations through a similar lens. The University's mission is education. The MES has already recognized the importance of a cultural shift within its activities. The convergence of these goals provides an opportunity to help student leaders learn and then demonstrate their commitment to accountability, inclusivity, respect and the full responsibilities of leadership.

We will be a better institution and our students will be better prepared for success because of the direct approach we are recommending to tackle these important issues.