

# **Austerity at Concordia: A Primer**

**A working document of the Concordia Student Union,  
Covering the effects of subsequent budget cuts at Concordia University**



**Document v.1.2**

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## **Austerity in Quebec**

For many years now, politicians and economists have been raising their voices over the supposedly unsustainable levels of public debt held by governments all over the world. Here in Quebec, the public discourse has been dominated over the last half-decade with catastrophic discussions about deficit budgets and an allegedly dangerous growth in the government's debt.

Despite the fact that public debt in the province is still substantially lower than it was only 20 years ago—and despite ample international evidence and studies demonstrating the very serious economic and social dangers of cutting public expenditures in times of recession—political parties and subsequent governments have latched onto this rhetoric to woo voters with promises to right a sinking ship, without any concern over whether the ship was sinking or not.

Recent governments have cut billions from the provincial budget, starting with the minority PQ government elected in 2012 and increasing dramatically under the following Liberal government. **These cuts have come across the board, affecting everything from healthcare and education to environmental protection and employment programs. What they have not affected is the bottom line of Quebec's largest companies and banks.**

In effect, the public policies implemented over these years (especially those of the current Liberal government) are not rooted in any urgent need to redress Quebec's finances or reduce a dangerous level of debt. Rather, politicians have latched onto exaggerated rhetoric about the dangers of public debt and used it as an effective Trojan horse to try and radically transform the very foundations of Quebec's government and society.

The austerity policies put in place to date are about shrinking the role of the government in supporting vulnerable populations and in redistributing resources more equitably, and instead shifting those resources towards further enriching the top 1% of earners in Quebec. In short, it is another iteration of the now all-too-common tactic of "starving the beast" that is used by ideologically motivated politicians to forcefully reduce the role of government and to pave the way for an ever greater privatisation of government services. These short-sighted decisions inevitably cost citizens far more (monetarily, but even more in terms of their physical and psychological well-being) than any savings promised by the elites while increasing the profits that they themselves can draw from the situation.

**The most important thing to remember is that these austerity politics are a choice.** Not only are Quebec's finances far from any critical dangers, the current series of deficit budgets could be much more easily solved by a combination of adjusting the government's revenues rather than expenses and reducing the disproportionate level of corporate welfare.

It is deliberate political decisions that have robbed the provincial government of billions in annual revenues over the last 15 years under the false flag of "promoting growth." The product of those decisions has been recession, stagnation, and an ever greater cost being shifted to our most vulnerable populations, while banks, corporations, and top earners continue to post record profits and prosper at our expense. But, these decisions can be undone. A different public policy is possible.

## **Austerity in Quebec Education**

The austerity policies put in place by successive provincial governments are adding up, and their effects are increasingly damaging to almost all of Quebec's population (with the worst effects being lived by those in the most dire circumstances and with the notable exception of our wealthiest, who continue to prosper through "tough times"). As individuals living, working, and studying in Quebec, we are all affected by this systematic gutting of its public services and we must act to combat these policies on every front.

However, beyond our responsibility as part of the general population, we collectively represent a very specific target of these policies: students. For years now, we have been subjected to massive cuts in Quebec's education sector, cuts that chip away at the quality and accessibility of our studies. **These substantial and ongoing cuts to higher education are a very real and concerted threat to the fundamental role of universities in Quebec society.** They represent an intentional effort to transform education from a public good to little more than a training department for Quebec's largest corporations and private business.

In just the last four years, Quebec's universities have lost on the order of \$400 Million dollars in provincial grants to their operating budgets, representing a drop of nearly 15%. At the same time, the number of students in Quebec's universities has grown by 5%, leaving universities with less and less money to try and support more and more students.

Universities have seen new cuts announced every fiscal year since 2012-13, always in an ad-hoc and unpredictable manner: clear evidence that successive governments are simply making up fiscal policy as they go. Since more than two-thirds of a university's operating budget comes from these public grants, these cuts have an enormous impact. Across the province, universities are being forced to reduce or freeze hiring, cut classes and courses, close programs, and reduce funding for core services.

These deep and recurring cuts leave universities with almost no choice but to assess their programs through a lens of economic viability, cutting enrollment and course offerings in those programs that offer limited impacts on their ever-shrinking funding envelopes and investing further in programs that succeed in securing additional resources from the provincial government and private enterprises.

**The bottom line is that continuing cuts to university funding accelerate and provide ever greater force to an ideological transformation of universities** away from their once lofty goal of improving the human condition and flattening social inequalities, to instead focus on the economic return provided to private business and capital as extended training programs for a specialized workforce.

This re-orientation of the university's mission is a tension being lived by our university every day. An example of this can be found in Concordia's new Strategic Directions document, whose preface explicitly notes how modern universities need to adapt to "increasing expectations around practical outcomes and economic returns from research and learning." At the same time, the preface presents the university as "tethered to [its] core values and historic mission," mentioning specifically its commitment to "high-impact public engagement" and its role as an "engine of opportunity and social mobility."

This tension is present throughout the document. The themes of community and public engagement, societal impact, and accessible education recur constantly throughout the strategic directions retained,

while at the same time more subtle mentions of “scaling,” “redeploying” resources, working “lean,” and channeling resources to “promising” initiatives are scattered throughout it. Throughout the document, the traditional role and vision of a university as a public good is blended with a more neo-liberal vision of it as a part of the modern marketplace. A superposition which must eventually break down in putting principles into practice .

Today, the reality that students are workers has never been truer. As private interests and top corporations take over Quebec’s public policy, the university is transformed into simply another workplace, where on-the-job training takes place and the next wave of cogs is prepared for the machine.

It is in this way that a collective work-stoppage is so effective and disruptive when undertaken by students. Businesses need graduates—workers they refuse to pay to train themselves—and countering that economic pressure is one of the most powerful levers that students have to impact both public policy and the private interests that drive it.

## **How Quebec Universities are Funded**

To understand the challenges faced by universities due to these cuts, and some of the measures they may decide to undertake in the future in response to them, it’s important to understand at least the rudiments of how universities are funded in Quebec<sup>1</sup>.

Universities in Quebec are primarily funded through two major streams, along with several smaller ones. The most important sources of funding are: grants from the provincial government and fees charged by the university. Together, these constitute about 87% of funding through operating grants for Quebec universities as a whole; and over 95% of Concordia’s operating budget. Minor amounts of revenue also come from the federal government (primarily funding indirect costs of research) and the ever vague “other revenue”.

### **Provincial Grants**

The grants provided by the Quebec government are broken down into different envelopes (each ear-marked for a specific purpose), the most important of which is the operating grant—comprised primarily of funds ear-marked for teaching, support for teaching, and the upkeep of buildings and grounds. There are also much, much smaller envelopes dedicated to supporting research contracts, and a capital investment fund for purchasing equipment and buildings. Due to the way they are granted by the government, universities are not allowed to transfer funds between envelopes. Money can’t be diverted away from capital investment towards operations, for example.

The operating grant is calculated based on the number of credits being taken at a given university represented by Full-Time Equivalencies (FTEs), which are calculated by dividing the total number of credits being taken at the university in that year by 30. Each chunk of 30 credits (regardless of who is

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<sup>1</sup> This introduction to university funding is obviously simplified and glosses over the byzantine processes involved in specific envelopes and universities’ special missions. For detailed information, you can refer to a comprehensive report prepared by the Ministry of Higher Education for the working group on university financing in 2013 at: [http://www.mesrs.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/administration/librairies/documents/chantiers/Guide\\_consultation\\_print\\_emps\\_2013\\_chantier\\_financement.pdf](http://www.mesrs.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/administration/librairies/documents/chantiers/Guide_consultation_print_emps_2013_chantier_financement.pdf) (available in French only)

registered for them) is therefore taken as representing an abstracted “student” for the purposes of funding.

These FTEs are then weighted by multiplying the FTEs in different disciplines of study by a set factor meant to reflect their presumed funding needs “per student”, as set by government policy<sup>2</sup>. These Weighted FTEs (WFTEs) are then used to calculate the funds allotted for most of the operating grant. The provincial operating grant accounts for over 70% of Concordia’s operating budget.

### Student Fees and Tuition

After provincial grants, the biggest source of funding is tuition. This is composed of two parts, depending on students’ residence status. Firstly, *all* students at a Quebec university pay the same per-credit tuition fee (currently \$76.45/credit). In addition to this fee, Canadian out-of-province and international students pay a *forfaitaire* in addition to that amount. For Fall 2015, that *forfaitaire* is \$157.90/credit for out-of-province students and either \$447.12/credit or \$508.37/credit for international students (depending on the discipline of study)<sup>3</sup>. All of these amounts, base tuition and the *forfaitaires*, are set by government decree and can’t be changed by the university.

What’s important to know about these amounts is that, while universities keep the entire base tuition amount they collect, the amounts collected as *forfaitaires* are entirely transferred to the provincial government and then redistributed throughout the university network. This is intended to flatten disparities in funding that would arise for smaller universities (especially regional universities) that attract fewer international students as compared to large universities in metropolitan areas. Concordia refers to this redistribution as government “clawbacks.”

The reason this is so important is due to a pilot project that has, as of the 2014-15 academic year, completely de-regulated fees for undergraduate international students in six disciplines: business, engineering, law, computer science, mathematics, and pure sciences. What this means is that the amounts for the *forfaitaires* in those programs are no longer set by the provincial government, but rather by universities themselves. **There is therefore no upper limit on what can be charged to these students.** These programs are also no longer subject to “clawbacks” by the government. The university now keeps all of the fees charged to these international students, but in exchange their credits are no longer counted in its FTEs and they are therefore excluded when calculating the operating grant received by the university. The university has stated that this change has been revenue neutral for them.

So far, Concordia has only increased the cost of these programs by the same amount as mandated by the government for regulated programs. But, this is a totally new situation for Quebec universities and represents a very serious potential threat to international students already present at or planning to come to Concordia in the future. In essence, now that universities can set their own fees for these

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<sup>2</sup> The baseline discipline is an undergraduate “Arts” program, and it multiplies FTEs by a factor of 1.00. On the other extreme, an undergraduate FTE in veterinary medicine is multiplied by 9.73. As other examples for undergrads, political science or business represent a factor of 1.07, while an FTE in Fine Arts is multiplied by 2.93. Larger factors are applied for graduate students in each discipline.

<sup>3</sup> For detailed information, consult the university’s Fees Breakdown at: <http://www.concordia.ca/admissions/tuition-fees/how-fees-are-billed/undergraduate/fees.html>

programs and are able to keep all of the money so generated, they effectively represent a new class of privatized programs within Quebec universities.

The other fees charged to students are separated into one-time fees for services (such as getting your transcript, registration fees, etc.) and recurring fees known as Obligatory Institutional Fees (FIOs, the French acronym, is most commonly used for these). Most FIOs are charged by the university on a per-credit basis and none can be opted out of. These fees constitute an additional \$28.27/credit, more than a third of what is already charged for tuition. A whole slew of per-semester costs are also charged to many students depending on their program of study.

### **From Free Education to Privatization**

**Today, students shoulder fully a quarter of the university's operating budget**, between tuition, *forfaitaires*, and the various fees we're compelled to pay. This portion has been increasing steadily over the last four years, due to the cuts into the operating grant and the constant increase of tuition, *forfaitaires*, and fees due to inflation. In just the last 4 years, **the ratio of university funding from the province vs. students has shifted from 3.5 to 1 to 2.75 to 1**. In the same way, more and more costs that ought to be covered by public funds (paying for student support, technological and infrastructure improvements, and front-line services across the university) are being devolved to students, and we now face a serious risk of further fee increases to palliate lost revenue in specific envelopes.

This situation could hardly be more different than the one envisioned during the foundation of Quebec's modern university system. Back in the early 1960s, in the midst of the Quiet Revolution, the government of Quebec commissioned a report on the state of education in the province that then established the bases for the education system we've known since. The report of the Parent Commission is responsible for the creation of the CEGEP system, making primary and secondary school mandatory and public, and for the modern university system including the University of Quebec network, all measures meant to rectify the systemic, historic under-education of Francophones and the working class.

Underlying all of the recommendations of the Parent report was the belief that education should be accessible to all. As such, it was also responsible for the freezing of university tuition fees in Quebec from the early 60s until 1990, with the specific intention of someday rendering university free for all students. Today, we are further than ever from a vision of education that holds at its heart the collective value that an educated population brings to society, and from the political will to adequately fund the education of all as a result.

## **Austerity at Concordia**

### **Timeline**

Concordia university's first budget cuts came in the wake of the PQ's electoral victory in August of 2012. Halfway into the 2012-13 academic year, the new government unexpectedly announced serious cuts across Quebec's budget, including education. As a result, Concordia was forced to integrate a \$13.2 Million cut into the budget of their current fiscal year, already more than halfway done, although the government allowed up to 50% of that initial cut to be carried forward as a deficit.

That \$13.2 Million cut, originally presented as a one-time necessity by the province, was made permanent for the 2013-14 academic year, right after the PQ government had committed to a \$1.7 Billion investment following their Summit on Higher Education. Rendering the earlier cuts permanent effectively reduced the amount of that promised re-investment down closer to \$900 Million.

This forced the university to revise its budget once more, transforming what had been put in place as one-time compressions into permanent reductions in expenses going forward. Those permanent spending reductions were spread out over a four year period, meaning that they will be completely phased in by the 2016-17 academic year.

At the same time, the university was still counting on the governmental investment that had been promised to reverse these cuts in the medium-term. However, the snap elections that ended the PQ's minority government and brought in a new majority PLQ government, under Phillippe Couillard, rapidly made the decision to cancel the planned re-investment altogether, and none of those funds ever made their way into the university's budget.

Following the cancellation of the promised investments into higher education the new Couillard government doubled down with another massive round of cuts for the 2014-15 academic year, adding another \$13.2 Million in cuts for Concordia. These were further compounded by the government's demand that Quebec universities run deficit-free budgets for the year, forcing Concordia to absorb an additional \$2.5 Million in cost reductions from the previous year. Having completed a new budget with these cuts included in it, the government then added an additional \$1.5 Million in, totalling \$17.2 Million in cuts for 2014-15.

Now, in the most recent budget for the 2015-16 academic year, the government has again imposed cuts across the university sector, totaling \$6.2 Million in further reductions at Concordia. In response to these new cuts, and the ongoing effects of the past rounds, the university has made the decision to take a sort of symbolic stand by choosing to run an \$8.2 Million deficit for this year, directly challenging the government's zero-deficit edict. This is a symbolic way for the university to say, to the government, that they have done all they can to cut into the institution. That this is as far as they can go.

In total, **Concordia has now been forced to absorb \$36.6 Million in cuts to its revenues**, while expenses continue to grow at a fixed rate across the majority of their budget (the largest proportion of which is dedicated to salaries fixed by collective agreements). Concordia is now expecting to carry an \$8.2 Million deficit by the end of this year, to be paid back over several years on a schedule established with the Ministry of Higher Education, continuing to burden the budget for years to come.

### **Budgeting Process during the Cuts**

Beginning in the 2013-14 academic year, when the first round of cuts were made permanent, the university began a participatory budget process within its governance structure. Presentations were made by the university's Chief Financial Officer and Provost to Faculty Councils, Senate, and the Board of Governors, along with several public presentations open to any member of the university community. These presentations provided information on the budgeting process and realities at Concordia, and solicited input and suggestions from those present on possible methods of integrating the governments' cuts.



These “budget conversations” were then repeated during the 2014-15 financial year, following the next round of cuts, with the most recent ones being held over the summer of 2015, as part of the 2015-16 fiscal year.

Regardless of their presentation as inclusive spaces, the fact is that they have primarily served to engage staff and faculty, while students have been too often left as passive participants. Although the university administration organizes venues specifically targeting many other university constituencies, no student specific venues have been created specifically to engage students in strategic budgeting decisions. This is of particular importance given the structural barriers that preclude most students from being proactive in these types of discussions (particularly due to their transient nature at the university).

What’s more, cuts at the university have largely been delegated out to heads of sectors, including Academic Deans, and then implemented at these lower levels across the university. This minimally decentralised structure has resulted in even lower student participation, and largely non-existent efforts to bring students into those processes altogether. Decisions have therefore been made from a variety of power centers and then imposed on students, often without a clear understanding of the consequences they would have on us. Certainly without any effort to let students decide for themselves how to spread out the pain of cutting into the programs and services we require, or how to potentially absorb those costs in different ways.

Moving forward, we can expect to see a continued increase in the decentralization of decision-making power down into the university’s academic units. Under the new budget model being deployed by the university, which is closely linked to its ongoing Strategic Directions process, academic units will be given increased responsibilities for strategic decisions and use of funds within their departments (in keeping with the overall strategic directions and plan adopted by the university and faculties as a whole).

What this means, going forward, is that there is a huge opening for students to step up and become involved in establishing the conditions and future of their own education. But only if they can mobilize themselves and get involved in these local processes, to ensure that they are present around the table when the strategic direction plan is being put into operation, and when decisions are made within its framework. If not, then the process risks moving forward with extremely limited, or almost non-existent, student participation in most areas of the university.

## **Measures Undertaken by Concordia in Response to the Cuts**

### **Deficits**

First and foremost among the various measures so far used to absorb the cuts has been the accruing of a long-term deficit, now set at \$8.2 Million, which will be paid back over the course of several years. These deficits are a simple way of deferring cuts to future years, in the hope that eventual re-investments will come through and palliate the need to reduce the operating budget to cover them permanently.

### **Loss of Staff**

The next most common tactic undertaken has been to leave vacant positions unfilled within the university (i.e. delaying hiring someone to fill the vacancy) or to close those unfilled positions altogether. The university has stated that it has left positions unfilled or closed vacant positions every year since the

cuts first started in 2012-13, without providing any additional concrete information about the number, distribution, or nature of those positions across the university. What's more, it remains unclear whether the number of vacant positions left unfilled has grown every year, or whether it is simply the same positions being carried over from year to year. What we do know is that, following the lower-than-hoped-for level of participation in the Voluntary Departure Program, 40 vacant positions were left unfilled across the university. This represents the most concrete public information ever released on such vacancies.

The Voluntary Departure Program itself was an effort introduced during the 2014-15 fiscal year to try and permanently reduce the operating budget by up to \$12 Million annually, by having up to 180 members of the university staff voluntarily leave their positions (in exchange for a one-time payment equivalent to either 12 or 18-months of their regular salary, depending on whether they had been at Concordia for over 10 years or more than 15). The program was open only to support, administrative, and professional staff, not faculty members. In the end, only 90 staff members applied for the program. Of those 90 positions, 25 were considered critical to the functioning of their respective departments, and will therefore be rehired, **leading to a total of 65 abolished positions**. The program resulted in just under \$5.7 Million in annual savings going forward in exchange for \$9 Million in buyouts (which form a separate deficit that will be paid back over several years as well). Of the 65 positions abolished, 46 are directly related to the academic sector, while an additional 19 are from the university's Services sector.

### **Use of Reserve Funds**

Additional cuts on the order of at least \$5 Million have been absorbed through use of the university's Contingency Fund and reserve funds (an unspecified amount in 2012-13, \$5.4 Million in 2013-14, and some amount below \$4 Million in 2014-15). Much of these funds have come from the university's contingency fund (of around \$4 Million) which is retained annually in each budget. However, to help reduce the operating budget further, this fund is being reduced to \$1 Million a year going forward.

### **Cuts to Classes**

Probably most significant to students was the decision, made in 2013-14, to begin reducing the number of courses and sections offered in programs across the university. At this time, we have no concrete information as to how this measure has been implemented across faculties and programs or how many courses and sections have been lost due to cost-cutting measures. We are, however, working to get as detailed of information as possible from the university on this subject.

However, statements from the part-time faculty union (CUPFA) state that they have seen a 7% drop in courses across the university—although this average is composed of very different realities in different departments, with the sociology and anthropology department cutting the number of course postings for part-time profs by over 60% in a single year.

Other effects on courses at Concordia include a decision in 2012-13 to increase the minimum size of seminar classes across the University, from 10 undergraduate students to 12 and from 5 graduate students to 10. While these increases may seem small, they can be taken as indicative of moves that are likely affecting class sizes across course types. Indeed, a great deal of anecdotal information points to increasing course sizes and classes across the board.

### Other Measures

Other cost-cutting measures have included delays in upgrading computer equipment at the university (2014-15), the vaguely described “expense reductions and delayed investments,” and cryptic comments on investigating cohort pricing and price elasticity models for Concordia’s newly privatized undergraduate programs for international students. These last comments lead us to fear that the university may be looking at these privatized programs as a possible source of additional funding, continuing a long tradition in Quebec of treating international students as cash cows to fund the university system (rather than invaluable participants in a strong and vibrant university system) instead of working to ensure adequate and stable public financing by the government.

### Effects of the Cuts at Concordia

All of the measures outlined above have direct impacts on Concordia students. Clearest of these are reductions in course sections and selection, increasing class sizes, reduced faculty resources for students, and an ever greater pressure to increase revenues on the backs of students.

### Effects on Teaching, Learning, and Support

Across the university, students have reported seeing their course options shrink and class sizes grow. As a result, students have less choice in broadening their area of study while programs are rendered more generic and homogeneous. In turn, larger class sizes mean that students have fewer opportunities to engage meaningfully with their professors on the material, and less in-class time to learn collaboratively with peers and prof alike.

Students in larger intro classes also find that most of their interactions are now with TAs rather than their professor. These **TAs are all too often overworked, underpaid, and untrained, a natural result of the university treating TA positions as a form of financial aid to students**, rather than as a serious labour force in their employ that fills a critical pedagogical role. This leads to inconsistent experiences between class sections, and often means that students are left learning material at the same time as their TAs, rather than furthering their learning in collaboration with peers who have thought and worked through the same material many times over.

Cuts in budgets across the university have also meant an important loss of support and administrative staff. While the effects of these cuts are hard to qualify without direct experience in each department, it’s clear that losing 100+ staff positions across the university is bound to have an effect on students, both directly and indirectly. The full effects of these cuts are likely only going to be made visible over the coming year, and are likely to be experienced in a diffuse way by students across campus.

### Pressure to Increase Students’ Bills

Perhaps the most dangerous effect of these cuts is the serious financial pressure it creates within universities. Quebec’s universities have been claiming a substantive level of underfunding for well over a decade now, and it was precisely this line of argumentation that led the Liberal Charest government to try and raise tuition drastically in 2012.

Although students were able to block that increase, we have been left to accept the creeping threat of indexation in its place. In the meantime, **4 years of consecutive cuts into university funding can only serve to reinforce the rhetoric of underfunding**. This leads to a serious danger that universities and

government will ally themselves to try and find new money in students' pockets once more, instead of returning to an adequate and necessary level of public funding through progressive fiscal measures.

One hopeful sign (that that might not be the case this time around) comes from the University of Laval, where the undergraduate and graduate student associations released a joint statement with the president of the university that calls on the government to massively re-invest in a public higher education and which presents concrete fiscal solutions that would allow it to generate the revenues to do so. This type of collaboration between administration and students on the common goal of an adequate and stable financing of higher education through progressive fiscal policies could well presage a new configuration of power relations in this most recent struggle for the soul of universities.

### **Pressure to Increase Links to Private Business**

Beyond pressure to seek additional funds from its students, shrinking university budgets also increase pressure on the university to increase their linkages with private businesses. One part of this translates into re-organising programs based on employability and "industry needs" (that is, taking on the task of training employees. Tasks that used to be undertaken on the job within companies themselves, for appropriate remuneration for the employee being trained we might add).

Another dimension of this shift sees the university expend more and more energy seeking private donations to palliate their funding problems. These often come in the form of massive cash infusions, almost always in the Business and Engineering faculties, which is not surprising given their clearer links to big business and big salaries.

While there's nothing inherently wrong with alumni donations (and much to laud about them), corporate donations are another matter. In return for needed capital, the university is happy to exchange branding rights (leading to an increasing number of programs and on-campus spaces named for major donors and businesses) and to give up different levels of academic autonomy (large donations are often responsible for establishing whole new programs of study at the university: where there's wealth there's a way!).

Perhaps most troubling is the fact that many of these donations are being re-framed and described as "investments" into the school. Translated into the language of business, it's clear that many private enterprises see these "gifts" as a means to an end: future human resources and control over academic programs and the nature of the education being provided within the university. This deepening of linkages to business and to the employment needs of major corporations is a clear extension of the neoliberal image of universities, and it should trouble all of the members of the university when big money has more say over the evolution of program offerings than members of the university themselves.

### **Reinforcing the Neoliberal Vision of Universities**

In short, this budget crunch on universities inherently serves to reinforce an ideological view of universities as business exchanges for private enrichment rather than a collective social project for the common good.

On the one hand, pressure to increase tuition, rather than public funding, necessarily comes from a logic of viewing students as clients who are purchasing their education, rather than participants in enriching our society and collective knowledge. The same logic leads universities to seek increased funding from private business. One dimension of this is the multiplication of advertising spaces that we have seen across our campus, always to the detriment of student space. Another is its seeking of private partnerships to fund research, selling the university community's academic labour and putting the intellectual property and autonomy of students at risk. In both these cases, students are a product being sold rather than free collaborators in a common project.

The same pressure also tends towards an internal and external re-evaluation of programs based on economic dimensions. When the university begins to depend on increasing enrolment to balance budgets, then funds eventually get reallocated to "selling" the more profitable programs. Additional resources end up being funnelled into programs that are "winners," while less profitable or attractive programs are relegated to stagnate, if they're not cut outright. While we're not there yet, **re-organizing universities so that they better fit "market realities" and "needs" remains an inherent part of the logic behind cutting into the public funding of universities:** rendering universities more "efficient," based exclusively on a market logic and ignoring the humanist and social dimensions of higher education.

### **What We're Still Trying to Find Out**

- How many vacant positions have gone unfilled since the budget cuts started in 2012-13, and their distribution across the university sectors and employee groups.
- How cuts have affected class sizes at Concordia in concrete terms across faculties and programs.
- How the cuts in staffing in the university's academic and service units have affected students' experience of their departments, programs, and university services.
- The university's intentions and plans regarding international fees in its privatized programs.
- The tangible impacts on students across the university.

## **How You Can Get Involved**

### **Contribute to this Document**

Because so many of the actual decisions made in response to shrinking budgets have been made directly by departments and faculties, along with totally administrative bodies without any student representation, getting accurate and meaningful information about how these budget cuts have affected the university is a very real challenge.

Luckily for us, students are decentralized as well! And much better at sharing info and working in common. That's why we're calling on you to dig in your own departments and networks. **Let us know how these years of cuts have affected you, your department, your education, and your experience of Concordia** so that we can represent those realities as fully and forcefully as possible.

We know that this document will become 1000 times stronger if we are able to include contributions about the direct lived experience of Concordia's students during these austere times. **Help us to collectivize a real and meaningful resource that we can all use, to mobilize other students and to apply pressure where it's needed.**

If you're willing to contribute, please get in touch with the CSU's VP External Gab Velasco (external@csu.qc.ca), or its researcher, Gene Morrow (gmorrow@csu.qc.ca), and share your anecdotes, stories, impressions, information, data, or thoughts. We're more than happy to meet up for a coffee and chat anytime too!

### **Mobilize your Department!**

This decentralization of governance processes at Concordia creates an absolute necessity on students to be active and engaged in their own local academic units, in addition to their involvement in the larger university community. The current movement at the university is to give greater decision-making power to the academic units and departments. While this can be seen as a very positive development for the programs and departments (who are gaining greater autonomy and control over their development), it also presents a challenge for student involvement in those decisions.

Overall, and historically, student governance and participation has mostly been centralized at the campus and faculty levels. During the years of centralisation at the university, through the 2000s, this may have been an effective strategy, but it will quickly reach its limits in the face of changing university processes. If students are to continue their substantive engagement with the university, and be key actors in the changes and transformations sure to sweep through it in the coming decades, it will have to be as involved and active members of their own academic programs, departments, and faculties, while maintaining their strong presence at the highest levels of academic governance as well.

For now though, the focus needs to be on expanding the involvement of students at the base. Students in each department and program at Concordia need to be told, and need to understand, that they have the possibility of shaping the future of their discipline. However, that possibility can only be grasped if students take it upon themselves to get involved and speak out on where it ought to be going, and that this fundamentally passes through collective action alongside their immediate peers and colleagues.

So, if you care about the effects of these cuts at Concordia, and care about the future of your discipline and the university as a whole, then start working on informing your fellow students about what is happening and what is coming. Push your departmental association to start talking about it (or found a departmental association if you don't have one) and push for general assemblies to discuss your collective futures. Only together can any of us affect the university and its future course over the coming years. And each of us has to take responsibility for that collective effort by pushing ourselves and others for it.

Other members of the Concordia community have collective agreements. All we've got is solidarity.



**Concordia  
Student Union**