

Concordia Student Union - Council Of Representatives

CSU Special Council Meeting

Wednesday, September 13, 2023

Via Zoom, 18h30

- 1. Call To Order**
- 2. AI Software for Concordia Student Union**
- 3. Composition of Mental Health Committee**
- 4. Appointment of Councilor to Sustainability Committee**
- 5. Appointment of Councilor to Clubs and Spaces Committee**
- 6. Appointment of Councilor to Clubs and Spaces Committee**
- 7. Appointment of Councilor to the Student Space Accessible Education and Legal Contingency (SSAELC) Fund Committee**
- 8. Change of Dates for November 2023 CSU By-Election**
- 9. Change of Date for October 11 th Regular Council Meeting**
- 10. Approval of Appointments Committee Recommendations for Student-at-Large Positions**
- 11. Approval of Internal Affairs Coordinator's Budgetary Proposal**

Special Council Meeting called by CSU Executives Harley Martin and Kareem Rahaman as per bylaw 6.6.3



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Wednesday, September 13, 2023

Via Zoom, 18h30

1. Call To Order

Meeting was called to order at 18h34

We would like to begin by acknowledging that Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather today. TiohEá:ke/Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present, and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community.

2. AI Software for Concordia Student Union

Kareem Rahaman presents motion.

Kareem Rahaman: Essentially we went through some surveys that we had done and I found this idea a while back during my mandate around May, and I've been working on this project since and now it's at the point where we need to hire a developer to build it out for us.

Whereas surveys have indicated that students struggle to access services provided by the Concordia Student Union and Concordia University;

Whereas the inaccessibility of these services results in financial difficulties, delayed educational progress, and other implications which negatively affect student well-being and success;

Whereas that the CSU is the highest representative body of the undergraduate students of Concordia University and is tasked with addressing problems which effect students and implementing solutions;

Be it resolved that the CSU through use of an external vendor develop an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot "Navi" in order to solve these problems;

Be it further resolved that the CSU's Council of Representatives authorize up to \$170 000 CAD from the Student Spaces, Accessible Education, and Legal Contingency (SSAELC) Fund for the development of Navi, with an additional \$10,000 CAD per year until May 31st, 2028 to be set aside for maintenance of Navi;

Be it further resolved that the CSU hire Andrew Kyres to build and maintain this project;

The budgetary impact on the SSAELC fund is up to \$210 000 CAD over the course of five (5) years (until May 31st, 2028);

The budgetary impact is nil.

Seconded by Harley Martin

Motivation:

Kareem Rahaman: Our job is to carry out the wishes of the students, and surveys have indicated that this is something they struggle with.

Therefore, a big part of why I came up with this idea was because it would be ongoing, we would not need executives to maintain it. It is almost as if we are putting a whole new service without having to create a new fee levy for it. It would be the cheapest service that be my motivation.

Questions:

Adam Mills: We should build a more functional or rather, rescue the website that we already have. I do not see that this is something I think would be required if we just had a better navigable website along with a good FAQ on top of the manned services that we have currently, and I think the money would be better spent in improving digital services.

Kareem Rahaman: Considering that for the website Concordia spent millions, this software is going to be trained on Concordia's database. It is going to be answering more than simple questions like 'what is the CSU, what services does the CSU provide'. It could answer questions like, "how do I defer a class? How do I do this? How do I do that?". So I went to our Advocacy Committee and asked them those questions because I had similar reservations and they all said that a bulk of the cases they get are student requests. The ISO as well, in their survey as well, indicated that a bulk of their things are student requests that can be found on the website. But because the Concordia website is so difficult, to navigate, that is why people come to them. Because of the volume, they cannot respond to everyone. Beyond that, for international students, who are not in the country yet, would have to call ISO, and wait

hours or even weeks to get an appointment with advisers, because Concordia's website is very difficult to navigate. If the CSU were to invest in fixing something like Concordia's website, it would cost up to \$175,000 to maintain it's still at a point where we still have more cases now it's gotten worse actually. So I disagree, on that note. Also after talking to the services who deal with those students, they all said the same thing, which is that, having these student requests directed to this platform would make it so much easier for them to free up their time and spend the little resources they have on high priority cases. We would also have a running survey at all points of time. So, any question a student asks on the platform, we would know what it is and can remedy that instantly. When we send out surveys only a few students respond to them. Perfect example, on the insurance committee for Concordia, they're basing a \$10 million plus decision based off of a survey that 40 people responded to. This would eliminate that problem completely going forward and it will be there to stay. We never have to spend more than the initial cost, we never have to hire staff for it, and per use is actually going to be the cheapest service that's offered by the CSU. Yes, the number is high, however overtime, it is actually going to be the cheapest service

Maria Cholakova (The Link): In the presentation it says there are 80% of international students that have experienced difficulties, do you know how many people filled out the surveys.

Kareem Rahaman: I believe it was over 100 but less than 200. It is the International Student Committee survey so you should be able to find it somewhere on ISO. That was the survey used as well as some points from the annual survey as well as qualitative analysis by talking to students and service managers such as the ISO manager.

Adam Mills: Concordia as an institution already like a pretty, I don't know. It can feel like a extremely institutional environment with very little, you know, personal connections. Even when dealing with you know matters or especially when dealing with matters like this or you get told, just check the website, just check the website. And to me, I know it's a little bit more of a tool than just checks the website. But I think there's something to be said for just being able to have you know personal touch. And I know I've talked about the cost in the previously but like I don't think it's a I don't think it's a non-prudent way to spend money by having you know our representatives take care of this stuff as it is and on top of already like pursuing other solutions as well a big loss that's probably contributing to increase like student requests and that is the fact that we lost the Concordia Discord. You know that's something that is was free for everybody and there was no cause to run it except for volunteer's time if we could maybe look at even just the CSU working to get something like that. Like a

sanctioned say Discord server off the ground to replace that and help students that way and foster more personal connections.

Kareem Rahaman: Right. But I mean what you just said is essentially you sort of just highlighted the problem there too right. The Discord was a very good tool that was shut down. Why was it shut down? Chances are because people didn't maintain it properly. This is essentially going to be running for the next 50 years with like just the five years of maintenance. It's always going to be up there. Beyond personal touch, it's more than just, hey, here's a very simple answer to your question. It's going to direct you to services. For example, one of the test cases would be asking for what funding opportunities are available for international students. When I came to Concordia, I was told that there are zero financial aid available to me. Except what's in the CSU, but Concordia has them and you must really dig in the website to find it. A tool like this would tell you exactly how you should apply and pull all the data and save you actual hours of looking. And so I think that's invaluable because the things that international students have problems with, according to advocacy, when I spoke to the manager of advocacy, the things that they face when they go to these platforms and they get misinformation or they look at the wrong spots and they don't go to advocacy or they don't use it, is that they face things like having to repeat courses. For an international student, that's up to \$4000 per course. They face other problems, like literally losing their status as a student. They can even be sent off of university for a year. And all these problems stem from the Concordia website not being able to navigate it, services being overhauled. And yes, it's very simple to say like okay, why don't we just put more money in services? Absolutely, we can put more money in services. Where's that money going to come from? It's going to come from increasing the fee levy that's going to go back to the students. So we're going to be charging the students more money. This is a solution that uses money that's already been invested in a fund and the purpose of this fund is to invest in projects that will help students access these things. So it make no sense if now in the future of next year, now we have to increase three fee levies for services because we now have to solve more student request problems.

Adam Mills: I can see that. I think there's also more pressing issues that we should be pushing that funding towards like looking at increasing our allotments to student housing projects and stuff like that. I don't agree with the argument I guess. I'm not sold on the AI will solve all our problems.

Kareem Rahaman: I'm not saying AI will solve all the problems. I'm just saying that this is our best chance right now if we don't want to charge too much more money. But on your point of the numbers, I'll just like inform you on this and what you just said. We do have a grant writer on contract that's actively looking for grants for this and says that there's a high chance we can get a grant for something like this. And in terms of pouring more money into student housing stuff, he's currently applying to tons of grants for that as well. So if you were worried about us not putting money over there, money is definitely being spent.

Adam Mills: Yeah, I know, but this is more money that could be spent that way. Is it possible that we could even present a motion to defer this? Pending grant applications.

Kareem Rahaman: Grants can take months. We want to get it done before a mandate, and the actual building of the software would take a while. It's something I would definitely like to get done during my mandate, because it's gonna need someone to be QA'ing throughout the process of it being built. And seeing as I worked on it right now, I'd prefer to just be there to QA it during the course of my mandate because after that, like you said with the Discord, things like that. We do not know what execs are going to come in after what their priorities and goals are going to be like. With the grants, yes, we can definitely probably get grants. However, when we get it, I don't know like it could be months, it could be weeks. And also they work on a reimbursement basis. So you actually have to start the project and they get reimbursed, but you don't get a lump sum in your bank account.

Adam Mills: No, no, I'm not saying you get a lump sum or anything, just an actual approval.

Kareem Rahaman: It would be coming down to near the end of our mandate to then start this project. And then by then it'd just be almost like hard to do it because we'd be going through the switch and then we'd have to go through lamping up the other execs on this. And then they would probably come in hot in the new month with their own ideas. I feel strongly about it because I read the surveys, and I can clearly see that there's a demand that I need for it. If large-scale companies are migrating their data to AI track bots that, do it then I see no reason why the student union that's supposed to be helping student find data and stop well help remedy the problems they're having. I see no reason why we should not invest in something like this especially when the cost overtime is going to be less than cents per student.

Adam Mills: Do we have like a contract written up or is this just approval to this is just approval to go and proceed with signing a contract or does it have to come back to us again?

Kareem So this would be approval to go to the stage because it's SSAELC, it would go through us well, sorry, you guys saw us and then it would go to the SSAELC Fund, SSAELC Fund committee, yeah, SSAELC Fund committee and then it goes to the contract. So it's still far from being signed which also gives us time to you know get grants as well.

Adam Mills: Is there any way to measure or not measure but like you know say this chat bot comes out and proves to be a lemon, based on this specific company and it just doesn't perform, doesn't get used like how? I feel like it's a lot of blind faith too as well or like on this developer or is there one that's already been trained that we can see, see an example with like at a you know another institution or so.

Kareem Rahaman: It doesn't exist for any of the university and I highly doubt any company is going to let us see the chat bot they've built for their internal documents. However, during the blind faith, the reason we've chosen this developer is because he specifically works with

chat bots, 4 companies and he works in the senior software role as well as a product role. So he actually fills a spot of making sure people use it, QA'ing it and things like that.

Adam Mills: Is it this is just like a one person firm?

Kareem Rahaman: Well he heads it. I'm sure he has subcontractors. He has subcontractors under him to build the smaller things. Otherwise we'd just be paying crazy hourly fees. But to answer your other question on the usage, in the document that I sent they I said that they would have to consult with marketing experts and come to us with a marketing package that's already approved by a specialist. So the reason I've done that is because I spoke to a bunch of people who work with student unions and I asked them what were the things that were key to their products being used more than the services. One of them said that their product had 10 times the usage as compared to the university services. This is outside of Concordia now and they told us about their marketing package and stuff like that. So I told the software guys and what the company that they need to provide us something like this and consult with all these people as well as show us that they've done this work to consult with them to ensure that people are going to use this.

Maria Cholakova (The Link): If this is approved and implemented, how long is it going to take to get to the students, to get to the students.?

Kareem Rahaman: So if it's approved and close to the process, let's say from today we're looking at, it's going to be there for the students before May of next year ideally January. It all depends on SSAELC fund and like how the contract signing goes. I'm sure there's going to be back and forth there like any other contract we sign. But ideally my goal with it was actually to get it out for this orientation but the meeting we were going to have did not meet quorum, so that was unfortunate.

Chairperson: Are there any oppositions to this motion?

Adam Mills: I am in opposition.

Chairperson moves into a **Roll Call Vote**

3 YES

1 NO

Motion passes

Kareem Rahaman: I just want to say, Adam, regarding this, I'd love to have you in all the meetings following up so that you can sort of see what's going on because I don't feel strongly about it. So I if you want to be in on those meetings, I'd happily invite you to come to them.

3. Composition of Mental Health Committee

Harley Martin presents motion..

Seconded by **Kareem Rahaman**

Whereas the CSU council of the 2023-2024 mandate approved the creation of an ad-hoc committee on mental health at the June 17th regular council meeting;

Whereas the composition of this committee was not determined;

Whereas the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 ad-hoc committees on mental health were composed of one or more executives as non-voting chairs, four councilors (voting), and two students at large (voting);

Be it resolved that the 2023-2024 ad-hoc committee on mental health adopt the aforementioned composition;

The budgetary impact is nil.

Motivation:

Harley Martin: Yes, we just needed to make it determined so we could figure out who is supposed to be sitting on the committee.

Motion Passes Unanimously

4. Appointment of Councilor to Sustainability Committee

Councilor was not present

5. Appointment of Councilor to Clubs and Spaces Committee

Harley Martin presents motion

Seconded by **Kareem Rahaman**

Whereas the Clubs and Spaces Committee currently has one vacant seat for Councilors in addition to one vacant seat for a student at large;

Whereas Councilor Adam Mills has expressed a desire to join this committee;

Be it resolved that the Council of Representatives appoints Adam Mills to the Clubs and Spaces Committee;

The budgetary impact is nil.

Motivation:

Harley Martin: Adam was interested in we need people on this committee.

Chairperson: Adam do you accept

Adam Mills: Yes I accept.

Motion passes

6. Appointment of Councilor to Fee Levy Review Committee

Kareem Rahaman presents motion..

Seconded by **Harley Martin**

Whereas the Fee Levy Review Committee currently has two vacant seat for Councilors;

Whereas the Fee Levy Committee must be staffed by September 18th in order to review fee levy requests that may go to ballot in the November 2023 by-elections;

Be it resolved that up to two members of the Council of Representatives be appointed to the Fee Levy Review Committee;

The budgetary impact is nil.

Adam Mills nominates himself as Councilor to Fee Levy Review Committee

Seconded by **Kareem Rahaman**

Motivation:

Adam Mills: To make sure that it happens.

Motion Passes

7. Appointment of Councilor to the Student Space Accessible Education and Legal Contingency (SSAELC) Fund Committee

Harley Martin presents motion

Whereas the SSAELC Fund Committee exists to oversee, protect, and manage the fund collected by the SSAELC Fee Levy (\$0.40/credit);

Whereas the SSAELC Fund Committee is composed of one Councilor, the CSU General Manager, the CSU General Coordinator, two external members, one lawyer, and one Concordia University professor;

Whereas the Councilor seat is currently vacant;

Be it resolved that the Council of Representatives appoint a Adam Mills to the SSAELC Fund Committee;

The budgetary impact is nil.

Harley Martin: It's a large pool of money that can be used for a lot of things and as the motion that was passed earlier to do with the AI chatbot that has to go to SSAELC fund committee one to be passed but then kind of overseeing the use of those funds because a lot of things same as the one we passed for funding Reggies is up to a certain amount so like it's approved but then you might oversee some of the use of those funds and yes there's only one counselor seat on this committee it's only vacant seat and it's crucial to have counselor input on that given that the SSAELC fund committee doesn't meet all that often but when it

does meet it's for big projects. So we want to have that counselor representation at that committee.

Adam Mills nominates themselves

Seconded by **Kareem Rahaman**

Motivation:

Adam Mills: It is interesting.

Motion passes

8. Change of Dates for November 2023 CSU By-Election

Harley Martin presents motion

Whereas clause 1.3.1 of the Policy on Elections and Referenda states that the CSU by-elections shall be held in the month of November such that the nomination period begins one (1) University Day before Canadian Thanksgiving (October 9th);

Whereas Concordia University will now have a fall reading week from October 9th-15th;

Whereas the reading week would lead to the CSU byelection coinciding with the ASFA by-elections which would confuse voters;

Be it resolved that notwithstanding clause 1.3.1 of the Policy on Elections and Referenda the Council of Representatives approves changing the November 2023 by-election dates so that the nomination phase runs from October 2nd-October 27th, the Campaigning phase from October 30th-November 6th, and the Polling phase from November 7th-November 9th;

The budgetary impact is nil.

Seconded by **Adam Mills**

Motivation:

Harley Martin: The reading week really goes in the middle of our elections no matter how we move it, which isn't all that concerning because it falls during the nomination phase, which is just when people need to get signatures to become nominees. But as mentioned, if we moved it in a different direction it would have meant that our elections would have coincided with ASFA elections. And every single year we already have this problem where when we try and get people to vote or depending on how it falls, ASFA tries to get people to vote, people think they've already voted because given that half of the undergraduate students are ASFA members, they felt they've done their duty in one election or the other and don't realize that they're part of both associations. And just another note on this, this was a proposal that I worked with our Chief Electoral Officer on.

Adam Mills: Does it mean will be before or after the ASFA elections?

Harley Martin: It means it's before.

Motion passes unanimously

9. Change of Date for October 11th Regular Council Meeting

Kareem Rahaman presents motion

Whereas clause 6.6.1 of the CSU bylaws in part states that during the month of October there will be two Regular Council Meetings with the first on the second Wednesday of the month and the second on the fourth Wednesday;

Whereas the first October Regular Council Meetings falls on October 11th which as a result of the newly implemented fall reading week is no longer a day as defined by the CSU Policy on Executives, Council, and Committees;

Be it resolved that notwithstanding clause 6.6.1 of the CSU bylaws the Council of Representatives vote to move the first Regular Council Meeting of October 2023 from October 11th to October 4th;

The budgetary impact is nil.

Seconded by Maria

Motivation:

Kareem Rahaman: Well, we can't technically have the meeting because the reading week from the policy, we can't count it as a date. So that's why we need to shift it.

Motion passes unanimously

10. Approval of Appointments Committee Recommendations for Student-at-Large Positions

Harley Martin presents motion

Whereas the CSU Appointments Committee is tasked with appointing students-at-large to CSU and University Committees;

Whereas the Appointments Committee, following the Policy on Appointments and Equitable Hiring practices, has reviewed the applications submitted, interviewed the candidates, and made recommendations;

Be it resolved that the Council of Representatives approves the recommendations of the Appointments Committee;

The budgetary impact is nil.

Seconded by **Kareem Rahaman**

Motivation:

Harley Martin: Yes, we got a lot of applications and the appointments committee members worked very hard to get them all done. It's a lot of paperwork. And you know, we worked

through the process of figuring out who is best for each position and I think we've done well at that. So it'd be nice to get these approved. And after that, what happens is we send those those applicants to the university committee chairs on that side. And then on our side, the students at large are just the, if approved, then join those committees.

Motion passes unanimously

11. Approval of Internal Affairs Coordinator's Budgetary Proposal

Harley Martin presents motion

Whereas the Internal Affairs Coordinator, Christian Taboada, has attempted to convene the Clubs and Spaces Committee on multiple occasions since taking office in June 2023 but has failed to reach quorum;

Whereas CSU Clubs are eager to have their budgets approved by the Clubs and Spaces Committee so that they can begin planning and hosting activities;

Whereas Christian has allocated \$20 000 from the Clubs Fee Levy for Clubs Special Project Funding and an additional \$14 500 for the Clubs Reserve Fund;

Whereas Christian has reviewed the budgetary proposals of those Clubs that have submitted one and finalized his recommendations;

Be it resolved that the Council of Representatives approve the Internal Affairs Coordinator's budget proposal;

The budgetary impact is nil.

Seconded by **Kareem Rahaman**

Motivation:

Harley Martin: Over the summer we had a lot of struggle to convene the Clubs and Spaces Committee for a variety of reasons. One of them, notably one of the counselors, left the committee, so it was impossible for us to reach quorum. The clubs themselves have to start planning activities over the summer as well as clubs there and then just to plan their activities for the rest of the year. So having them approved was kind of like a must before the semester starts. We approved most of them based on what their special was last year with their expenses and what their membership was.

Christian Taboada: So based on the clubs that have submitted a budget proposals and how much they spent in the last year meaning their actuals from the 2022-2023 academic year, their budget is allocated based on that and how many members they're touching of the Concordia community.

Adam Mills: All right and then this is just a reallocation?

Christitan Taboada: So it's just shuffling things around exactly from the budget that is allocated for it from the club's fee levy. It's just reallocated to the club's budget.

Special Council Meeting called by CSU Executives Harley Martin and Kareem Rahaman as per bylaw 6.6.3