



Future Concordia Project
Final Report of the Student Experience Working Group
June 2022

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Executive Summary

The Student Experience Working Group was tasked with leading the reflection on how Concordia can stay responsive and agile to student needs over the next 3 to 5 years. Over eight months, the group engaged in a visioning process to suggest a new vision and mandate for the future student experience, conducted research into the topic, held consultations, and then developed a list of recommendations. The focus areas that guided the process centered around assessing and identifying student needs and responding to them through suggested services and programming that would support a diverse student body in navigating the university structure; create new opportunities for socializing, networking, learning and developing expertise and transferable skills; exploring personal and professional interests; and securing employment during studies and post-graduation.

I Overview

Introduction

The University is comprised of several interrelated pillars of excellence, including, but not limited to research, teaching, learning, community, and the student experience. With upwards of 50,000 students enrolled at Concordia (CU), our student body is an important group of stakeholders at the institution to both cherish and serve. Thus, if we could select a central pillar of excellence to bring the CU community together, it would be the student experience. From the student's perspective, the University is not broken up into dichotomies like academia and operations, curricular and extra-curricular activities, or research and teaching. It is all one experience.

Concordia may need strategies to manage budgets effectively and plan for sufficient staffing in specific areas, keeping the students' perspectives in mind. As post-secondary institutions collectively face growing challenges to the legitimacy, value, and investment of higher education, it is more critical than ever that we come together to bring students the next-gen experience that they want, need, and deserve.

Context

In the fall of 2021, Concordia spearheaded a process to envision the future of the University. Working groups were struck to develop and evaluate options on how best to define the future of Concordia within each of their respective focus areas: teaching and learning; research and impact; work, workplace, and workforce; University outreach; campus space; and the student experience. This report presents the recommendations of the latter working group.

The Student Experience Working Group met for six 2-hour workshops between October 2021 and March 2022 and received input after presentations to the steering committee and other working groups in January and late May 2022. The group also held two facilitated consultations with students in February 2022 and multiple unofficial consultations with various faculty and staff members and students throughout the year. Between consultations and workshops, working group members were tasked with research. The set of recommendations presented below is a result of this work.

Composition of the working group

The working group members were selected from across the University as follows:

- Salma Adem (Coordinator, New Student Outreach Initiatives / Student Success Centre)
- Lourdu Reddy Allam [VP Academic / Graduate Students' Association (GSA)]
- Katie Broad (Coordinator, LIVE Centre / Dean of Students Office)
- Racha Cheikh-Ibrahim (Coordinator, Graduate and Professional Skills / School of Graduate Studies)
- Selvadurai Dayanandan (Professor & Chair / Department of Biology)
- Tristan Khaner (Director, Office of the Dean and Faculty Operations / Office of the Dean of Fine Arts)
- Annick Maugile Flavien (Manager / Black Perspectives Office)
- Eduardo Malorni [General Coordinator / Concordia Student Union (CSU)]
- Irene Petsopoulos (Counsellor / Counselling and Psychological Services)
- Haleh Raissadat (Learning & Study Skills Specialist / Student Success Centre)

The co-chairs were the following:

- Alice Isac (Experiential Learning Manager / Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic)
- Rebecca Tittler (Part-time Faculty, Academic Advisor, & Coordinator / Loyola College for Diversity and Sustainability)

Except for Eduardo Malorni and Lourdu Reddy Alam, group members were not selected as representatives of their respective units, but rather as individuals with various expertises and experiences of relevance. The CSU and the GSA appointed their member representatives.

In addition, the working group was supported by the following team:

- Linda Campione (Project Director, Future Concordia and Return to Campus Initiative / Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic)
- Céline Fortin (Senior Lead, Planning and Summer Programming / Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic)
- Rima Said (Administrative Project Support, Future Concordia and Return to Campus Initiative / Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic)

Mandate

The Student Experience working group was tasked with leading the reflection on how Concordia can continue to be responsive and agile to student needs over the next 3-5 years.

2 Vision

Concordia fosters a student experience that prepares and supports a diverse student body in navigating the university structure; socializing and networking; learning and developing expertise and transferable skills; exploring personal and professional interests; and securing employment during studies and post-graduation.

3 Needs Analysis

Table I. The landscape of the student experience at Concordia

Individual: Students	Process: Student Performance	Organization: Concordia University	World
<p>Diverse student population: There is an increasing number of first-generation students and/or students from equity deserving groups entering post-secondary institutions.</p> <p>Accessing support services: Students may be unaware of their own needs and students with the greatest needs may not reach out for help or know where to find it.</p> <p>Wellness and mental health have been increasingly important to students.</p> <p>Students often take longer than 4 years to finish their degrees: In 2019 Concordia undergraduate students had a 69.9% graduation rate and a 26.3% drop-out rate over a 7-year period. Most students are working during their time at Concordia.</p> <p>Students of the future will likely increasingly be professionals looking to upskill and/or, change careers.</p>	<p>Students are expected to:</p> <p>Perform academically: This responsibility takes precedence in a list of competing priorities.</p> <p>Participate in extra-curricular activities: This is part of a well-rounded university experience, but busy students often cannot take advantage of unpaid extra work.</p> <p>Navigate a complex university structure: First-generation & often equity-deserving group students are pioneers. They often lack guidance from family and relatives.</p> <p>Network: Many students, including first-generation and equity-deserving group students, rely on the connections they will make at school for their future career success.</p> <p>Socialize: Social networks provide support, encouragement, well-being, and lead to persistence.</p> <p>Work: Many students need to work to support themselves and their families.</p>	<p>Communications are dispersed & untargeted. Many units are forced to bombard students from different angles, such as social media, email blasts, etc., competing for space in the attention economy.</p> <p>Faculty have most access and interaction with students but are mandated to focus on academics versus holistic student support.</p> <p>Post-secondary institutions are slow in decision-making and struggle to keep up with changes that require rapid responses.</p> <p>Post-secondary institutions are serving ever-increasing numbers of low-income students.</p> <p>Advising is siloed and inconsistent across programs</p> <p>Staff and faculty will require a change in behaviours, attitudes, and knowledge to better serve a diverse group of students in new ways.</p> <p>Structural barriers to changing roles and responsibilities may limit the ability to make changes and monitor progress.</p> <p>Technology infrastructure upgrades are necessary to serve students in an efficient and scalable way.</p>	<p>Labour market trends make employability of new graduates difficult (especially for those without the appropriate networks or previous experience).</p> <p>The value of post-secondary education is increasingly being questioned by students who seek employment opportunities after graduation.</p> <p>Top tier post-secondary institutions have resources to deliver high quality online instruction, increasing the competition substantially for less funded <i>brick and mortar</i> institutions.</p> <p>Although enrollment at Canadian universities does not seem to have suffered (Statistics Canada 2022), COVID has disrupted activities of many industries and caused increases in unemployment rates, especially among visible minorities (Statistics Canada).</p>

4 Recommendations

4.1 Supporting a diverse student body

Located in one of the most diverse cities in North America, Concordia has an increasingly diverse student body, with many international students, first-generation University students, mature students, student parents, part-time and working students, students with various accessibility needs, racialized minorities, etc. The University should strive to ensure a positive experience for all students.

4.1.1 Mental health and well-being

The mental health and wellbeing of University students has unmistakably declined over the past few years (e.g., Hanza et al., 2021). Declines have been particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic but were evident before the pandemic as well (e.g., Auerbach et al., 2016). Furthermore, academics and other University employees are also facing high levels of stress (e.g., Catano et al. 2007); one study found a doubling of stress and fatigue among University employees between 2019 and 2020, warning about high levels of burnout (Gewin, 2021), which may negatively affect the ability of employees to support students. Thus, students are themselves experiencing unprecedented levels of stress, and are also served by employees who may be similarly affected.

Currently, the University offers a slew of services to support the mental health and wellbeing of our students and employees. These include the services of Counselling and Psychological Services, the Zen Dens, a recent partnership with Bartimaeus, the Sexual Assault Resource Centre, and the Office of Rights and Responsibilities, as well as community support offered through the Black Perspectives Office, the Art Hives, the Multifaith and Spirituality Centre, the Concordia University Student Parent Centre, the Centre for Gender Advocacy, the International Student Office, the Otsenhákta Student Centre, and others.

However, many students are unaware of the existing services, programs, and community groups. As a result, it is often faculty members and academic advisors who are the first to be approached by students in crisis. That said, faculty members and advisors at Concordia generally have little to no training in addressing these issues and may feel lost and powerless. Many are not even aware of the existing services and programs available to students.

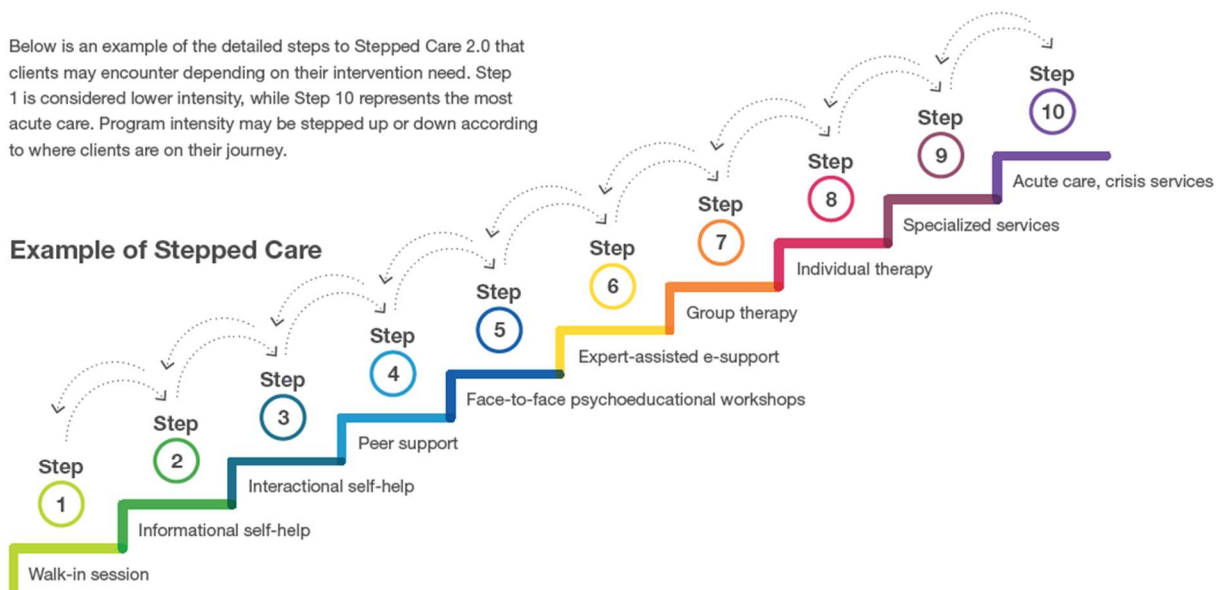
To address this crisis in mental health and wellbeing in our community, we recommend that Concordia develop required training for faculty, staff, and students. This training could range from short self-paced e-learning modules for the entire community, like the required sexual violence prevention training for all, to longer, more in-depth training for front-facing faculty and staff. All training should include, although not be limited to, a clear introduction to the services available to students, staff, and faculty, as well as an indication as to when to use or recommend the use of which services. Models to consider include the programs offered by the University of Guelph ([Staff & Faculty Resources | Student Affairs](#)) and the Mental Health Commission of Canada ([Mental Health First Aid](#)). This would require a moderate investment but would potentially greatly improve the lives of students, as well as those of front-facing employees.

Some Universities in Ontario are using the Stepped Care Model to prioritize distribution of limited mental health resources in a way that maximizes effectiveness and best suits the needs of all students. [Stepped Care](#) is a system of delivering and monitoring mental health treatment so the most effective, yet least resource-intensive treatment is delivered first. Less intensive treatments include self-help approaches or peer support, and more intensive treatments can include individual therapy or psychiatric consultation. The model is founded on the belief that people should not have to wait for psychological services, people require different levels of care, and finding the right level of care often depends on monitoring outcomes.

Stepped Care Steps

Below is an example of the detailed steps to Stepped Care 2.0 that clients may encounter depending on their intervention need. Step 1 is considered lower intensity, while Step 10 represents the most acute care. Program intensity may be stepped up or down according to where clients are on their journey.

Example of Stepped Care



Note: the steps described are simply an example of the model. Stepped Care can take on different forms depending on an organization's size, needs and service delivery capacity.

Stepped Care: A promising model to improve access to mental health care on campus

[9]

From the Stepped Care Guide

4.1.2 Accessibility of learning materials

As indicated on the [website of the Centre for Teaching and Learning](#), Concordia is committed to providing an inclusive learning environment. For example, there is ongoing work to provide physical accessibility to all campus spaces. In addition, the Access Centre for Students with Disabilities (ACSD) effectively provides support for students registered with them who have specific accessibility challenges. Professors are regularly asked to accommodate ACSD-registered students in particular ways, depending on their needs. As another example, in 2020, when all classes were switched to an online format within the span of two weeks in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all instructors were trained to provide captions for recorded lectures on Yuja.

However, Yuja is not the only and likely not even the most important platform used by instructors. There are many other basic best practices for accessibility that could easily be employed in the classroom and in all University communications and documents if instructors and staff were trained to use them. For example, an estimated 4.5% to 10% of people are colour blind or have some form of deficiency in colour vision, and yet most instructors are not well-versed in how to avoid dependence on problematic colour combinations in classroom material. Similarly, improper formatting in Word and pdf documents can lead to unnecessary challenges for people using screen readers.

In the summer of 2021, the Centre for Teaching and Learning ran a pilot project to train some instructors on accessibility practices for Moodle, Powerpoint, Word, Excel, and pdf documents. The program involved

4-5 hours of one-on-one training. Some were lucky enough to be able to participate, but many were not. This was a good start but a model that would need to be adapted to serve all Concordia staff and faculty.

Thus, we recommend that, instead of one-on-one training, a series of online workshops be run for faculty and staff, accompanied by straightforward guidelines posted on the website of the Centre for Teaching and Learning and on Carrefour, and that all faculty and front-facing staff be strongly encouraged to make use of these resources. The goal would be for all Concordia employees to be able to easily produce accessible documents. The investment here would again not be great but the shift in culture, potentially passed down to the students as well, could be quite powerful.

4.1.3 Financial support for students who are not performing well academically

There are a variety of bursaries and awards available to students, but most are aimed at those who are doing well academically, not at those who are struggling. This is understandable from a donor perspective, and it also corresponds to the cultural norms in academia and society in general that tend to dictate rewarding those who are already succeeding rather than supporting those who are struggling, implicitly equating academic struggles with laziness, for example. However, many students struggle because of financial need, and this can be compounded by additional responsibilities and/or challenges such as parenting, disabilities, etc. Full-time students in Canada are working more and more (Statistics Canada, 2008), with an average of 16.5 hours per week in 2004-2005, and a general negative correlation between hours worked and academic success (Motte and Schwartz, 2009). There are government loans and bursaries available, but many of these must be paid back, a daunting prospect for many students, and they do not necessarily cover all living expenses. Concordia should increase financial support to students who are struggling financially to facilitate higher completion rates in general, perhaps especially among equity-deserving groups.

The ability to provide financial support to struggling students would likely depend on donations, so the recommendation is that Advancement and Alumni relations should work towards partnering with donors on this issue, minimizing the cost to the University while increasing benefits to students during and after their time at Concordia.

4.1.4. Universal access to UNSS courses

The high diversity in the student body results in variation in the degree to which students are prepared for University in terms of study skills, time management, etc. Students do not begin their studies from a level playing field. In the current system, students in failed standing may be required to take one of both University Skills for Success courses (UNSS 200 and 201). These courses teach students about time and stress management, mindfulness and motivation, active learning, etc., and generally result in noticeable improvements in student performance. However, these courses are only available to those students who have been recommended by the Faculties, so generally those already in jeopardy. At this point, students may be so discouraged as to not follow through with the requirement and instead discontinue their studies. To avoid this, it would be useful if these courses were open to all students, such that those struggling could improve their skills before failing. A moderate investment in course sections and/or teaching assistants to support this would have a positive effect on student success.

4.2 Helping students navigate the University structure

Throughout the workshop and consultation process, it has become abundantly clear that a persistent problem for students is the difficulty they experience in finding the information they need about the University, its services, and the processes that must be followed. Sometimes, students don't even know what to look for or where to start. Most information they need is on the Concordia website somewhere,

but it is difficult for many to navigate. Other services like the advisors, welcome crew, Homeroom program, and Student Services Centre provide information, but again, are not always immediately available and students do not always find them when they need them. Therefore, we need to be able to communicate more effectively with students, triage their needs and collect data quickly and systematically to better serve their needs in the future.

4.2.1 Hybrid chat system

One possibility to help students navigate the University structure is a hybrid chat system. Students are increasingly digitally literate and used to (a) communicating via text, and (b) having chat options available to them as part of their online experiences and shopping, etc. For example, Canada Post has a chat option (see <https://www.canadapost-postescanada.ca/cpc/en/support.page>) to enhance customer experience.

The Concordia Library has been operating a very successful chat option for several years now. The system allows students to access information and get help right away, in real time. This system is available during Library open hours and sees at least 50 interactions a day, with an average of 15-20 minutes per interaction.

The system in place at the Library might not be easily scaled to the level of the entire University as such, since it relies entirely on employees to answer chats, but a hybrid system could still be based on this model. A hybrid chat system could open on the webpage to serve students by both a chatbot and live Concordia employees. Such a system could be easily accessible from the main Concordia.ca and other Concordia webpages.

Although the use of the chatbot would allow this system to be more easily scaled, many issues would be better addressed by actual people. The chatbot should thus be the initial layer of chat, but the client (student) should also have the option to chat with a real person at critical periods, and some issues (e.g., mental health issues, health crises) should be automatically transferred to a real person. The chatbot would have to be programmed to be able to automatically answer some questions and reroute students to a real person if certain crisis trigger words were used.

The chat option could be available 24-7 or just during specific hours. Note that the Library chat is available during Library hours only. During off hours, an email address could be shared, as for the Library. Chat employees could be employed answering emails when not running the chat.

Like many libraries, Concordia's library chat functions through LibChat. This system might or might not be appropriate for the other sectors of the University as it is designed for libraries. Further research would need to be done to find a suitable option to serve the entire University. Some investment would then be required, but the pay-off in terms of the student experience would be great.

4.2.2. Ticketing system

Another way for students to get help in a timely fashion when they are not sure where to go would be through a ticketing system like that run by IITS. This system currently allows employees to submit a request to IITS at any time via email. When a request is submitted, the employee receives an automatic email immediately, with a ticket number and a rapid follow-up. Such a system provides immediate reassurance that the IITS staff have received the request and it is being processed; it provides the user with a sense of relief right away, even before the problem is solved. Using a ticketing system to triage student requests would connect students with the right resources and ensure that the issue is resolved or else handed off to the next unit as needed. This would also reduce the volume of emails flooding the inboxes of staff members and significantly reduce the possibility that a request may be missed or forgotten.

The emails referred to in the discussion of the chat system above could be logged as part of this ticketing system.

4.2.3. Data collection

One of the needs of a highly successful undergraduate institutions is the ability to respond quickly to student needs (Kuh et al. 2011). The lack of data is an enormous barrier to being able to not only identify student needs but to adapt and develop new services for an increasingly diverse student body. To be able to understand ever-changing student needs, we need a way to collect data quickly. The working group had several suggestions to address this issue.

4.2.3.1. Ticketing system

One suggestion was the ticketing system described above. In addition to providing individual students with better service in a timely fashion, this system would allow the University to collect much-needed data on student needs by tracking student requests over time, providing insight into overall trends, and identifying critical opportunities to intervene during the student's journey. This would also provide the infrastructure to introduce quality assurance practices around service delivery including benchmarking and measuring outcomes with hard data. Reducing the time students spend navigating the University structure to find the information and services they need should be paramount to providing a next-gen student experience.

4.2.3.2. Shared student files

Post-secondary institutions are increasingly recognizing that [student data should be treated as an organizational asset](#). Any data gathered through a ticketing system should be tied to the student's profile so that those providing support can adapt their approach or even anticipate a student's needs. For example, an academic advisor may browse through the tickets before meeting with a student and find out that they have written to the registrar multiple times about their advisement report. The advisor may identify this as an opportunity to explain how the advisement report works so that the student can stay on track to graduate within their desired timeline.

Indeed, academic advisors need access to a great deal of information to perform their tasks well. Many student files are currently shared through the Student Information System (SIS). This system allows academic advisors, those working in the Office of the Registrar, Admissions, Financial Services, and others to upload documents pertaining to the student dossier. However, advising documents, for example, are often not uploaded, nor are admissions offers and likely other documents of relevance. For example, a Minor academic advisor at the unit level, not having access to the admissions offer, may not have important information about language or other requirements that would allow them to properly advise students. In addition, it is possible that not all those who would benefit from access to these documents currently have access. We suggest that best practices be examined to review what information should be shared when and with whom such that there are standards in place. Student data should be shared as appropriate.

4.2.3.3. Pulse surveys

Two other suggestions that came out of this process were the idea of collecting more personal data with student applications and expanding the current retention survey from first-year students to all students, but a more targeted approach might be to use pulse surveys. These are very short with only a few targeted questions pushed to the user in a mobile-friendly way. The technology solution provides real-time data so that the University can make decisions faster, thereby responding to student needs in a timely way. Here is a practical example of how this works: <https://www.studentpulse.io/engagement>

4.2.4. Empowering faculty and staff to refer students to appropriate services

Faculty members are the main points of contact between students and the University. As such, especially in smaller courses, they are uniquely positioned to identify students in crisis or at risk based on behaviours, performance, and attitudes. This applies to student health and well-being, as discussed above, but also to other struggles, such as difficulty writing, managing time, etc. At the same time, faculty members are not necessarily able to address these issues with the students, either for lack of training, mandate, or time, nor should they necessarily be expected to do so since there are many services already available for just this kind of support. Faculty members and other staff members who have contact with students (program assistants, for example) should be knowledgeable enough to refer students appropriately.

There are several ways this might be accomplished. Creating a unit that is devoted to triaging student needs could take referrals directly from faculty (and staff) members who may not have the expertise, confidence or time to identify the student's need and how/who can help. If we expect faculty to perform their own triage, an important step would be to make sure that they know this responsibility falls on them and to provide an updated list of all student support services before the beginning of each semester. Other ideas include an annual or biennial event or retreat faculty members and staff could attend to learn about the various student services offered and an expanded version of the Brown Bag Lunch series piloted this past year. None of these options would be particularly costly but all would help.

4.2.5. Required training for new program advisors

Academic advising varies from one faculty to another and even from one department to another. There is also often relatively rapid turnover of unit-level advisors; in the Faculty of Arts and Science, for example, advising is done at the department level by faculty members who may take on the position for a year or two. Although some training is available to these advisors, it is not always required, not is it always available as soon as the advisor comes into the position, and there is no standard training across the University. Such training is crucial so that advisors are properly equipped to guide students, not just through their required course-load, but also to the appropriate student services, financial assistance, experiential learning opportunities, career guidance, health and wellness resources, etc., as required. Along with faculty members, academic advisors are often the first to be approached by students, and they are not always necessarily equipped to be able to assist them properly in navigating the University structure and getting the most out of their University experience. Providing standard training to advisors is an investment with a potentially high payoff in terms of the students.

4.2.6. Targeted communications

Communications from the University to students are dispersed amongst many different units that post messages to multiple platforms (social media accounts, unit websites, events, mailing lists, etc.) and compete for space in the student's attention economy. Students are bombarded from different angles and cannot always screen all the messages coming their way to determine which ones are relevant to their interests and needs. A technology solution that allows for targeted and curated communications to students in specific groups would provide information only when it is necessary or relevant, thereby increasing the chances that students will act on the opportunity. For example, we could contact all undergraduate students in their final year of computer science to encourage them to apply to the new graduate program at Bell Canada. The frequency of notifications and the medium for delivering messages is of concern and may require a central person or unit to screen and triage requests to reach certain students.

4.2.7. Screens in waiting areas

To communicate important messages of relevance to all students, it would also be useful to have screens in areas where students are frequently waiting (next to highly frequented elevators like those in the John Molson building, for example) or are otherwise potentially captive audiences (the Shuttle Bus, the Hall Building escalators, etc.). This would require an initial investment into screens and a small investment in terms of time for someone to determine and program the information to be displayed, but, if done properly, could lead to a significant improvement in student knowledge about services available to them, deadlines of importance, and more.

4.3 Providing opportunities for socializing and networking

Socializing and networking are crucial components of the student experience. For example, a recent survey carried out by LinkedIn found that up to 85% of participants found their current jobs through networking (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/new-survey-reveals-85-all-jobs-filled-via-networking-lou-adler>). New friendships have been found to be crucial to the adjustment of new students to university (Buote et al. 2007), and even weak friendships have been found to be important to student satisfaction and wellbeing (Walsworth et al. 2021). In addition, a review by van der Zanden et al. (2018) found social relationships to be important predictors of first-year student success. Thus, a successful student experience includes opportunities for socializing and networking. Supporting and facilitating these opportunities has arguably never been more important than it is in this moment, when the need to build community in a post-lockdown world is more challenging than ever.

Concordia University fosters socializing and networking in multiple ways. For example, the Homeroom program provides opportunities for new students to build networks, as do student groups, identity-specific offices like the Otsenhákta Student Centre, and various mentorship programs. Career and Planning Services and Career Management Services provide career advice, workshops, etc., including advice on network-building. There is space for students to meet casually on both campuses. However, there are additional ways we can support our students in these areas.

4.3.1 Bookable spaces

To better support the activities of student groups, both official and unofficial, students should be able to easily book spaces on both campuses for meetings and events. At present, there are some spaces that can be relatively easily booked by students and student groups (the CSU spaces on the 7th floor of the Hall Building, study rooms in the libraries, etc.), but many available spaces on campus are not easily or freely bookable by students. Even classrooms are sometimes locked when not in use. Considering the importance of supporting socializing and networking opportunities, students should be able to book as wide a range of spaces as possible across the University free of charge and at short notice. Facilitating this might require an addition to the Student Hub or Concordia app.

4.3.2 Comfortable, aesthetically pleasing spaces for casual use

To support socializing and networking at the University, students need to spend time on campus. This is especially challenging for an urban institution like Concordia, where most students do not live on campus and have lives and jobs off campus. Even a decade ago, research found that campus beauty contributed to the likelihood that students would spend time on campus, especially the increasing number of non-traditional (older) students (Wyatt 2011). In an age when the average North American spends over 2 hours on social media every day (<https://www.broadbandsearch.net/blog/average-daily-time-on-social-media>) and documenting daily activities with photos posted to Instagram and Facebook is arguably the norm rather than the exception, especially among young people, the more aesthetically pleasing,

“Instagrammable” spaces there are that are freely available to students, the more likely students are to spend time on campus. In addition, aesthetically pleasing spaces, especially green spaces, have often been associated with health and well-being (e.g., Holt et al. 2019). Needless to say, campus accessibility is also crucial to providing opportunities for all.

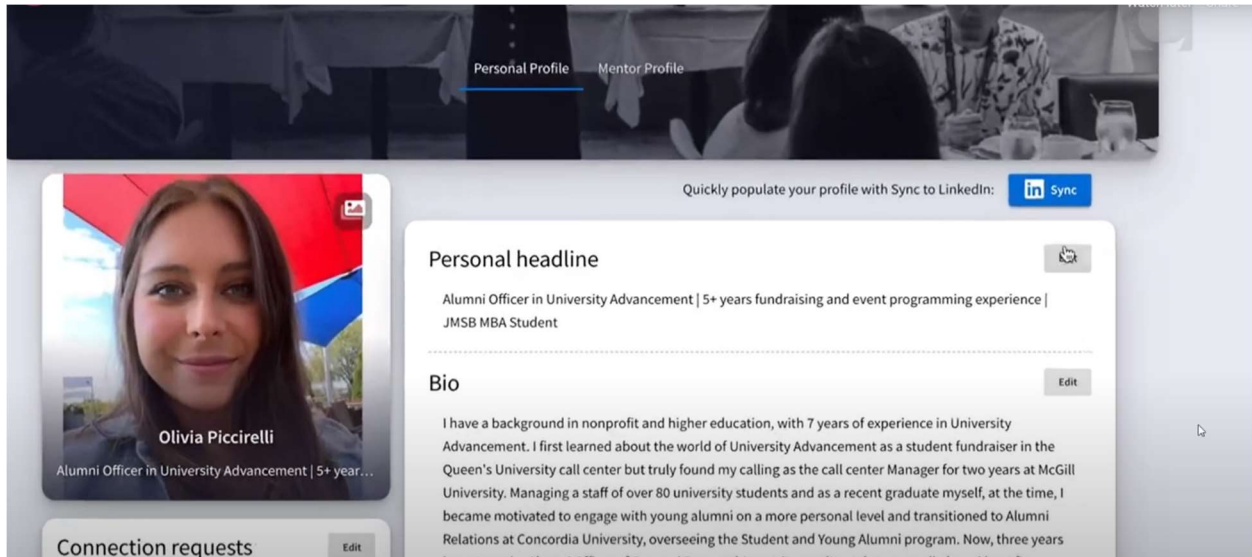
Thus, we recommend that accessibility, comfort, aesthetic appeal, and green cover be primary considerations in planning and managing University spaces. Diverse vegetation, public art, and comfortable seating, meeting, and study areas with available electrical outlets and strong Wi-Fi signals should be incorporated into as many campus spaces as possible, both inside and outside, on both campuses. Beautiful campus spots like the green wall and comfortable furniture in the newly-renovate downtown library should be the norm rather than the exception. A lot could be achieved here with relatively minimal investment.

4.3.3 Affordable, healthy, and easily accessible food options

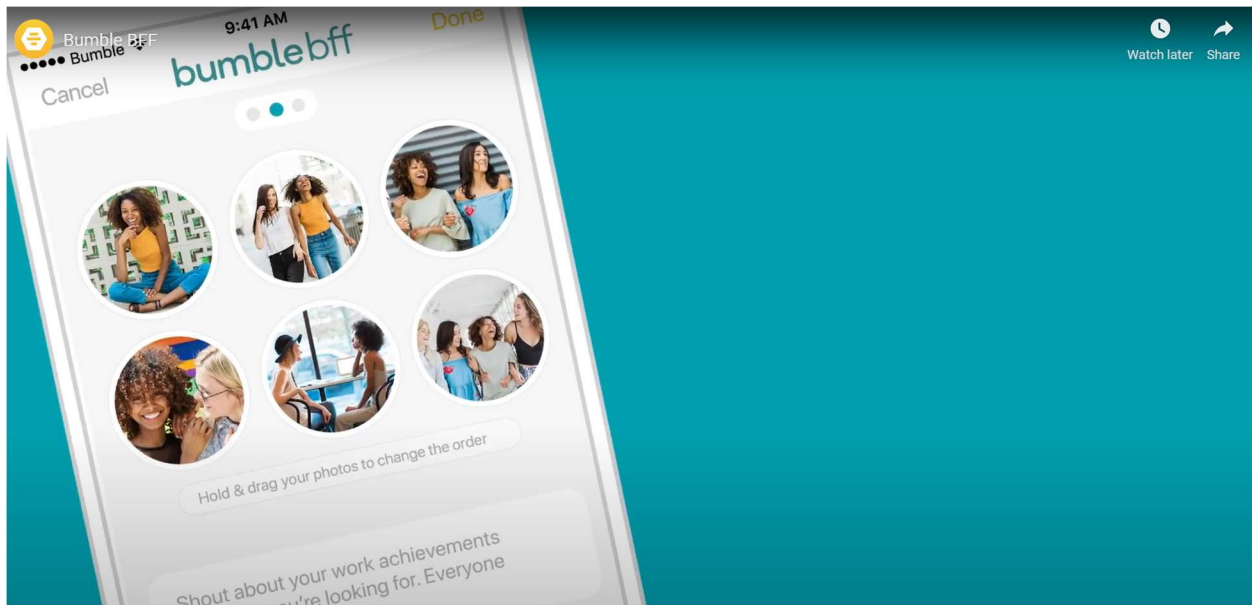
Another way to support networking and socializing, as well as health and well-being among our students is to provide affordable, healthy, and easily accessible food options and places to eat on both campuses. The Sir George Williams campus does not suffer overly from this aspect due to its downtown location, but the Loyola campus can easily be described as a food desert, with little more than a handful of junk-food-stocked vending machines available after 5 and on weekends and only a couple of very limited other options available during business hours. This can make it difficult for students to spend more than the necessary time on campus, let alone meet other students casually. The very least that can be done here is to provide healthy vending-machine options and more microwaves in student spaces, but ideally, healthy, fresh, affordable food would be available during reasonable hours every day in several locations where students can sit down together to eat around campus, including the G Lounge, the CJ, and the SP. Some of this food could likely be locally sourced from the Loyola gardens, at least during the summer.

4.3.4 Matchmaking app

Although there is demand for such a system, an in-person and virtual hybrid post-secondary student experience requires more planning to foster connection between students. We cannot take for granted the relationships formed through happenstance by virtue of occupying the same physical space. As a result, connection needs to be more intentionally facilitated by the University. Many of us use matchmaking platforms to seek connections that provide secondhand goods through the circular economy (e.g., through Kijiji and FaceBook Marketplace) or, in a pedagogical context, seek industry partners that can bring real-world projects to the classroom (e.g., through Riipen). A matchmaking platform for friendship might combat feelings of isolation by connecting students to each other; Concordia’s own [Alumni Connect](#) mentorship platform and [Bumble’s BFF](#) mobile app are great examples.



2 Concordia Alumni Connect profile example



3 Bumble BFF Mobile Application Example

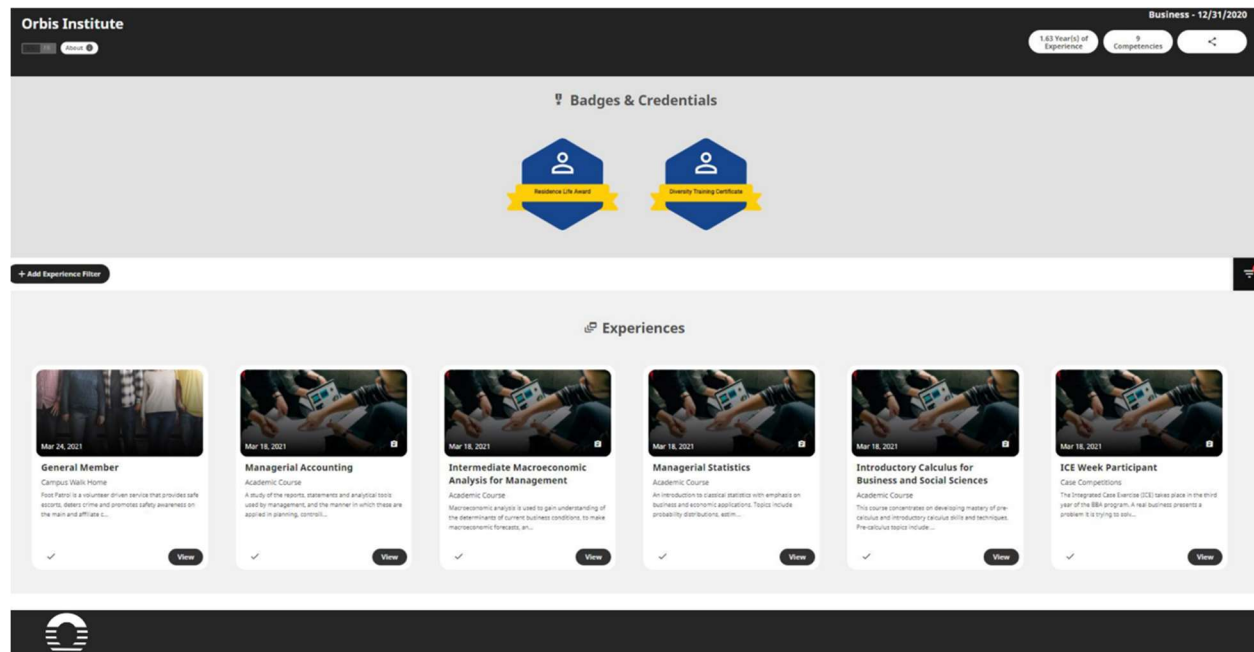
4.4 Employment

A key insight from our consultations was that students are concerned about employability and that they would like more opportunities for employment to be available during and after completing their studies. Due to financial need, many, if not most Concordia students are working part-time or even full-time off-campus, and the majority are likely studying with the goal of long-term employment. The University has a responsibility to prepare them and support them to the extent possible.

4.4.1 Employer-student matchmaking platform

There are opportunities for students to connect to employers through cooperative education, internship programs, information sessions organized by CAPS and CMS, and the Orbis job posting platforms these units manage. However, these Concordia-vetted employers could be connected more directly with our

students. Other Canadian post-secondary institutions have implemented an Experiential Transcript (ET) Module from Orbis that provides a personalized profile (or webpage) for each student that can be viewed by employers who have already been authorized to post jobs. As shown below, the ET highlights all sorts of experience related to the student's program of study and students can opt-in to allowing employers to access their profiles. This would likely result in students being hired more quickly and with less effort by employers while also helping students articulate the value of their program of study to employers - a critical piece that is often left off the CV.



4 Orbis Experiential Transcript profile example

4.4.2 More on-campus jobs

Concordia and its contractors often employ people with similar qualifications to those of our students. It would make a lot more sense here to support students by providing employment on campus whenever possible. At present, some students are employed on campus, some through work-study programs, for example, but this is not the norm. We therefore recommend that students be prioritized when searching for candidates, such that, if a student is not hired, it is the exception, rather than the norm. This would serve to provide more convenient and potentially more valuable employment opportunities for our students.

4.5 Providing opportunities for students to develop expertise and explore interests

Graduates are entering the workforce during an increasingly difficult period marked by labour market disruptions due to changes in technology and economic and social crises. Nearly a decade after the 2008 economic crisis, [The Royal Bank of Canada released a report](#) that noted the growing skills gap in our population based on the current and future needs of the labour market. Increasingly, post-secondary institutions are creating more opportunities for students to gain transferable skills by providing practical experiences [like internships](#) and industry challenges, identifying pathways to employment, and making it easier to learn skills that may not be covered in the curriculum. At Concordia, examples include FutureBound, GradPro Skills, and UdeMy, but more could be done.

4.5.1. Complementary credits system & competency model

Post-secondary institutions are moving from a curricular/extra-curricular model to a co-curricular model. This is a step towards blurring the dichotomy that prioritizes and rewards students for pursuing activities related to academic endeavors without pathways to experiences that may also provide value such as volunteering, industry challenges and internships, to name a few. A co-curricular model expands the sphere of student performance beyond grades and incentives and empowers students to gain experiences that will prepare them for life after graduation. This shift cannot be in name only; it requires that each department identify, promote and validate student participation in co-curricular opportunities for every program of study.

A complementary credits system would take this a step farther by providing a framework within which students could plan for these experiences as they would plan to meet the course requirements of their academic program. Students could be required to complete a certain number of complementary credits as part of their program requirements in addition to their course credits to be recognized and rewarded for participation and completion in a meaningful way (e.g., potential financial support when required). As such, we could actively promote all students into these experiences rather than indirectly reserving them for those who have the time and financial means to fit them into their busy schedules. This is especially true for students in equity-deserving groups, who often face barriers to volunteering or joining student societies, for example.

A University-wide competency model such as [Brock University's domains](#) is an example of how we might support all students in finding the experiences that they want, need and deserve while also helping them develop the language to articulate their learning through these experiences. This would entail creating a database of activities and tagging them with the relevant domains and competencies to make them searchable by filters and/or keyword searches.

4.5.2 Flexible experiential learning opportunities for all

The National Survey on the Student Experience (NSSE) measures student engagement in post-secondary institutions. The 2020 survey results showed that Concordia students participate less often in co-curricular and experiential learning (EL) activities than students in other institutions. This gap in participation could be due to the growing numbers of first-generation university students and individuals in equity-deserving groups pursuing higher education. While Canadian institutions collect and publish limited demographic data on their student populations, [Statistics Canada](#) reports the following:

- Approximately 30% of graduates who earned a Bachelor's degree from a Canadian institution from 2014 to 2017 were members of a group designated as a visible minority. Chinese, South Asian, and Black students made up almost two-thirds of visible minority graduates.
- More than half (54%) of visible minority Canadian graduates were first-generation immigrants (born abroad); 43% were second-generation (born in Canada and with at least one parent born abroad) and less than 3% were third-generation (born in Canada with parents also born in Canada). In comparison, 77.1% of non-visible minority graduates were third generation.
- Among non-visible minority graduates, 6 in 10 were women. This proportion was almost 50% for most Asian groups, but close to 64% among Blacks.
- Graduates from most Asian groups were, on average, under 25 years of age when they graduated, compared with 26.2 years for those who did not belong to a visible minority group and 29.1 years for Black graduates.

- Just over 30% of Black graduates reported having one or more dependent children two years after earning their bachelor’s degree, compared with 15.7% of non-visible minority graduates and less than 10% of graduates in most Asian groups.

This means that, for many of our students, juggling school, employment, family life, and other responsibilities prevent them from fully participating in co-curricular and EL activities. Within the current curricular/extra-curricular dichotomy, these students would benefit most from paid EL experiences that also contribute to their academic program requirements.

Flexible EL options would also include expanding the availability of micro work-integrated learning experiences such as [part-time internships](#), [incorporating industry projects into the classroom](#), and externships, which are mentorship experiences that include a job-shadowing component, to name a few.

4.5.3. Increased access to student leadership positions

One way for students to build networks, socialize, explore interests, and gain valuable leadership skills and expertise useful in the job market and in life in general is through student leadership positions. That said, these positions are demanding and time-consuming. Although some positions are paid (the Concordia Student Union Executive positions, for example), most are not and so are often only accessible to those who can afford to get involved. In addition, students from equity-deserving groups may feel less welcome in leadership positions. Student leadership should be representative of the student body, and these important opportunities should also be equally available and inviting to all.

There are several possible ways to address these issues. One way is to provide scholarships, subsidies, or salaries to students in leadership positions that are currently unpaid. Advancement and Alumni Relations could be asked to fundraise specifically to support student leadership positions. Another potential avenue to explore is that of academic credit: if student leadership positions could be supported by credit opportunities in various academic units across the University, they would be more accessible. Effort also must go into reaching out to equity-deserving groups and those less well-represented in student leadership positions to encourage them to participate.

5 Estimated relative cost and impact of the recommendations

Based on limited knowledge and expertise, estimates for the relative cost and impact of the various recommendations can be found below (Table 2). Note that specific research is highly recommended to properly assess cost and impact.

Table 2. Estimated relative cost and impact of the recommendations of the Future of the Student Experience working group

Recommendation	Estimated cost	Estimated impact	Students served
University-wide mental-health/ wellness training for faculty, staff, and students	Medium	High	All
Accessibility training for all faculty and staff	Medium	High	All: those with accessibility needs

Recommendation	Estimated cost	Estimated impact	Students served
			will benefit directly but those without may also benefit from the modelling of best practices
Bursaries and opportunities for students who are not performing well academically	Low-High (fundraising opportunity for Advancement and Alumni Relations)	High – related to student retention	Struggling students
Universal access to UNSS courses	Low	High	Struggling students
Hybrid chat system	High	High	All
Ticketing system	High	High	All
Shared student files	Low	High	All
Pulse surveys	Medium	High	All
Creating a unit that is devoted to triaging student	Medium	High	All
Annual / biennial event / retreat faculty members and staff could attend to learn about the various student services offered	Low	Medium	All
Targeted communications	High	High	All
Screens in waiting areas	Low	Medium	All
Bookable spaces	Low	Medium	All
Comfortable, aesthetically pleasing spaces	Medium-High	High	All

Recommendation	Estimated cost	Estimated impact	Students served
Affordable, healthy, and easily accessible food options	Medium	High	Those at Loyola
Matchmaking app	High	Medium	All
Employer-student platform	Low	Medium	Most
More on-campus jobs	Low	Medium	Those seeking employment
Complementary credits	Medium	High	All
Flexible experiential-learning opportunities for all	Medium	High	All
Increased access to student leadership positions	Medium-High	Medium	Especially equity-deserving students

6 Next steps

Supporting students is not the responsibility of a single unit called Student Services. It is a community effort. We all play an important role in the success of our students.

The task of the working group was to formulate recommendations; it is for others to decide which of these can and should be pushed forward when and how. Some of the working group members have shown an interest in continuing to be involved moving forward, should there be such an opportunity. As we close this phase of the project, we thank the project sponsors for trusting our team to explore possibilities for the future of the student experience at CU, and hope that these reflections and recommendations are a positive contribution to the future CU student experience.

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