

## CAMPUS CORNER

## STUDENTS

## McGill University

(Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology &amp; Department of Psychology)

SANDRA MANSOUR – Graduate student representative – McGill University (Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology)

**M**cGill University is recognized worldwide as an outstanding university with a reputation for strong academics, teaching and research. There are 21 faculties and professional schools that offer over 300 areas of study including psychology. Accordingly, McGill attracts a wealth of international faculty and students. Moreover, given that McGill is located in the second largest French-speaking city in the world, over 20% of McGill students are French-speaking.

McGill is also unique when it comes to psychology programs and departments, as there are two departments that offer various undergraduate and graduate programs in psychology. Within the Faculty of Education, you will find the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology (ECP). The ECP Department is committed to advancing knowledge in the area of cognition and development in typical and atypical populations across the lifespan. ECP is composed of several graduate programs, which include Master of Arts degrees in Educational Psychology (with streams in School/Applied Child Psychology, Learning Sciences, Health Professions and Human Development) and Counselling Psychology, Master of Education degrees in Educational Psychology (specializations in General Educational Psychology, Family Life Education, Inclusive Education and Learning Sciences), and PhD programs in School/Applied Child Psychology, Counselling Psychology and Educational Psychology. As well, ECP offers numerous diploma and certificate programs. A variety of undergraduate psychology classes for students training to become teachers are also offered, such as Educational Psychology and Exceptional students.

Within the Faculty of Science, you will find the Depart-



ment of Psychology. Undergraduate psychology programs in this department can lead to a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology. Graduate programs can lead to a Master of Arts or Master of Science in Experimental Psychology and to a PhD in Clinical Psychology (combined research and clinical training) or

Experimental Psychology. Six research areas are well represented in the Department of Psychology which includes: cognition-language-perception, behavioral neuroscience, developmental psychology, social-personality psychology, health psychology, and quantitative-modeling psychology. The PhD in Clinical Psychology in the Department of Psychology and the PhD in School/Applied Child Psychology and the PhD in Counselling in the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology have full CPA and APA accreditation.

Finally, McGill is affiliated with numerous teaching and research hospitals around Montreal, therefore providing excellent research and clinical training for its students. These include: the Douglas Mental Health University Institute, the Montreal Neurological Institute, the Montreal Children's Hospital, the Montreal General Hospital, the Royal Victoria Hospital, and the Sir Mortimer B. Davis - Jewish General Hospital.

Finally, McGill University is located in downtown Montreal, a cosmopolitan city with diverse linguistic and cultural groups. Students living in Montreal enjoy its exciting night life, numerous summer festivals (including the International Jazz and Just for Laughs festivals), gorgeous parks and scenic views from Mount Royal. Montreal is known for its European-like atmosphere making it one of the most popular cities in Canada. As well, Montreal is the second largest city in Canada next to Toronto, therefore all over the city of Montreal you will come across an incredible variety of restaurants, cafés, and boutiques suited for everyone's tastes. The town of Old Montreal is filled with 17th and 18th century architecture making it one of the most charming areas of Montreal. And of course, the best bagels you will ever taste are available by the dozen in the Plateau Mont Royal situated about 15 minutes from McGill.

## The Value of Grades in Graduate School

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**R**eceiving grades is the quintessential scholastic experience. We have been receiving grades since elementary school and they have been the external reward for our academic efforts. Grades are used to ensure we consistently strive and that this striving is a significant effort (the so called "110 %").

In addition, they also serve as a mark of comparison by which we can be measured against our fellow students. Although grades may serve their purpose in the undergraduate environment, in our opinion, the value of grades is greatly diminished upon entering graduate school. *Self-determination theory* (SDT), which emphasizes the importance of three main components related to intrinsic motivation: autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, Ryan, 1991), is a useful frame by which to examine the value of grades in graduate school.

Grades are often advocated as an impetus for striving. However, grades are external rewards and as such may hinder the intrinsic motivation of graduate students. Motivational research in the field of psychology has suggested that external re-

wards can be detrimental to fostering intrinsic motivation. A meta-analytic review examining the effects of external rewards on intrinsically interesting activities found that external rewards undermined students' involvement in these activities (Deci, Koestner, Ryan, 1999). Graduate school is purported to be the environment where we begin our professional training and the qualities of autonomy and competence tied to intrinsic motivation would greatly benefit us as professionals. Throughout our future work we may encounter many challenges, from a research roadblock to a difficult clinical case, where the external rewards may not be present and a cultivation of autonomy would fuel our ability to succeed.

Grades in graduate school are meant to reinforce us to reach for that extra bit of ef-

fort but the standard by which we compare ourselves is an external one. We continue to compare ourselves to this standard scale, as opposed to comparing ourselves to our own internal standards and values. We give value to a letter instead of giving value to our experiences in learning, and the sense of competence we have fostered within ourselves. Furthermore, the effort that comes from intrinsic motivation is lasting, and can change with your professional experiences. External motivations, on the other hand, only reinforce a behavior as long as they are present (Deci et al., 1999).

A key function of grades is that they provide an opportunity for ranking students and comparing their performances. This comparison is the standard by which students are accepted into graduate school. Yet, the range of grades in graduate school can be restricted and this limits the ability of grades to discriminate among students. While it is often argued that this discriminatory ability is critical in determining the adequacy of candidates for academic scholarships, the limited range of grades often leads to the evaluation of candidates by other accomplishments (i.e. publications, presentations). Given that presentations and publications are closely linked to our future profession they may serve as an

alternative tool by which to discriminate among students in terms of potential for professional contribution.

In our opinion, there are alternative evaluation methods to grades in graduate school, methods which will foster intrinsic motivation. In our experience with classes at the University of Ottawa, a pass/fail system of evaluation which includes qualitative feedback has been very useful. The pass/fail format of evaluation allows the student to set their own personal standards for success. In addition, the qualitative evaluation component offers viable academic feedback which can more easily be incorporated into our professional development. It is possible that this format of evaluation will further contribute to the autonomy and competence of future psychologists.

## References

- Deci, E., Koestner, R., Ryan, R. (1999). A meta-analytic review of experiments examining the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125, 627-668.  
Deci, E., Vallerand, R., Pelletier, L., Ryan, R. (1991). Motivation and education: The self-determination perspective. *Educational Psychologist*, 26 (3 & 4), 325 – 346.

## Errata:

In the Spring Issue of Psynopsis, the article "Advocating for Psychology as a Profession: A Clinical Psychology Student Initiative" was attributed to Pamela Seeds, Department of Psychology, Westminster Hall, The University of Western Ontario when it should have been attributed to "Advocacy Through Action: Students Bringing Psychology to Our Community" which is a student group from the University of Western Ontario. We apologize for the error.