

President's Update

FOR AFTERNOON OF
August 11, 2023

Another Win from MUNFA Amid Administrative Misinformation

MUNFA is pleased to announce an update in the Student Wellness and Counselling Centre (SWCC). This follows a [letter MUNFA sent to the Premier](#), an [Information Bulletin](#), [substantial media appearances](#), and a [click-to-email campaign](#) put together by Memorial's students addressing these dire concerns. Nearly 450 emails were sent to decision makers in both Memorial and the provincial government demanding they take action on this urgent issue. We would like to commend every ASM who participated in this campaign and the community partners who spread it to their networks. We would like to further highlight the role of the student unions - MUNSU, MISU, GSU, GCSU, and CFSNL, who put their pressure and support behind MUNFA in this fight for the proper resourcing of permanent Counselling Faculty members and their Psychology Residency Program. Solidarity always wins.

Following this pressure, in the afternoon of August 10 we received a copy of a memorandum from the Complement Advisory Committee (CAC) dated August 9. This memo informed the Dean of Students of the CAC's decision to fill two previously vacant tenure-track faculty positions in the SWCC, one of which the CAC had previously recommended cutting in its March 8, 2023 meeting. Moreover, the Administration had refused to fill any permanent Counselling positions as recently as Fall 2022. This position has only changed due to persistent pressure. This commitment to investing in stable permanent ASM positions will put the Doctoral Psychology Residency Program in better standing for its forthcoming accreditation visit. The memo further designated another vacant faculty position to fund the SWCC Director role, which oversees health services and wellness in addition to counselling, when the appointment for the next three-year term is finalized. MUNFA has serious concerns with this decision.

On August 9, [a statement was issued in the Gazette](#) responding to the crisis in the SWCC. MUNFA had received a commitment at the July 27 meeting with President Bose and Provost Lokash that we would receive an update on the crisis no later than August 10. Given the broader impact of psychologist training, we were transparent that government and members would be informed before that date. Despite this commitment, this statement was sent out to the larger Memorial community instead, avoiding further collegial discussion with MUNFA, and attempting to undermine the severity of the crisis facing the SWCC. The Administration's response was misleading and failed to address specific concerns we raised.

There are five central points of misinformation that appeared in the statement to address:

1. The Doctoral Psychology Residency program is in a standard process of re-accreditation
 - a. Previous re-accreditation reviews have already underscored staffing as a concern. Neglect of an accredited program to the point of jeopardizing its continuation by failing to provide a minimum faculty complement and abject denial of those circumstances is not standard.
2. The keep.meSAFE offers *free* 24/7 services to students
 - a. The keep.meSAFE app costs Memorial almost \$95,000 per semester for the St. John's campus alone. 77 students utilized it in the Fall semester of 2022 and 88 students in the Winter 2023 semester. SWCC residents, in contrast, regularly see those numbers of students in any given two-week window.

- b. In the face of a crisis of proper staffing of ASMs, it is shameless of the Administration to point to this service. The quality of care offered by doctoral psychology professionals cannot be replicated or outsourced to an app.
- 3. Memorial's SWCC faculty complement remains stable and no positions have been eliminated
 - a. On July 27, Dr. Lokash directly told MUNFA that the Provost's office had made the decision several years ago to no longer fill faculty positions in the SWCC as they became vacant. **Consequently, the unit dwindled to just three permanent counselling faculty.** The purpose of the calls for action and public campaign surrounding the SWCC's Doctoral Residency Program was to urge the Provost and the CAC to address the dire impacts of this decision.
- 4. The SWCC does not require accreditation to operate
 - a. While the Administration should be aware that all counselling services at the SWCC are accredited by another professional body, IACS, MUNFA and Counselling ASMs have explicitly referenced CPA accreditation of the doctoral residency in professional psychology as the urgent issue. This is because the site visit to evaluate is just days away.
 - b. Accreditation holds institutions accountable to a standard agreed by the professional field that cannot be arbitrarily changed internally. This is essential for the health and safety of students receiving care. Maintaining the standards of accreditation is a key responsibility of the SWCC Director due to its importance.
- 5. No waitlists for "initial appointments" in the SWCC
 - a. This is a slight-of-hand tactic frequently used by systems to misrepresent and downplay wait times. Students awaiting ongoing counselling and psychotherapy are being funnelled into single sessions. This practice is then represented as offering "no waitlist" and it should not be taken to mean the SWCC is operating effectively. Additionally, the SWCC will already see a reduction from three psychology residents to two in the upcoming year and a corresponding decrease in service.

It is unfortunate that instead of addressing the important issues facing Counselling ASMs and its Doctoral Psychology Residency Program, Memorial's Senior Administration chose to diminish these valid and urgent concerns, deny the instability they have created, and privately make changes without broader accountability. While the Administration would like members of the university community and the broader public to believe there was no crisis to address, this was indubitably false.

This is a Win. Pressure works. But our work is not done. Whether accreditors for the SWCC see these changes announced August 9 as sufficient to warrant reaccreditation remains to be seen. Furthermore, MUNFA has yet to officially receive a response from the Provost regarding these developments. There are many concerns that have been amplified throughout this process regarding the continued lack of collegiality expressed by Memorial's Administration and the devaluing of academic staff members.

I further encourage members to consider the specifics of the situation around the SWCC as a part of a broader pattern of units being systematically dismantled by upper administration through the attrition of tenured faculty positions. Through its work with Counselling Faculty, MUNFA became aware of over one hundred unfilled academic staff positions. These impacts are being felt all across Memorial, our university

We continue to push forward for more for our members and the greater Memorial community.

In love and solidarity,
MUNFA President Ash Hossain