

The Arts Foundation Program

Cultivating Curiosity, Confronting Complexity, Creating Community



The global context and an evolving student population

McGill students are amazing. They are curious, motivated, and creative. They do great things while they are at McGill and after they graduate, they continue to do great things. Arts graduates go on to be leaders in an array of contexts. We help them to get there by delivering a high-quality education.

The world is changing, and today's generation of students face tremendous pressures – impacting both their academic and social lives. We want the incredible success of McGill students to continue.

Many first-year students in the Faculty of Arts find their transition to university life overwhelming. The sheer number of students in many of their classes makes it harder for them to find connections with their peers. This leaves them feeling isolated and alienated, feelings which first originated for many during the COVID-19 pandemic with an overreliance on screens and social media. Mental health struggles are at an all-time high for young adults, which is challenging in a university environment and even more so when they begin their careers.

What's more, students' increasing reliance on technology has had a huge impact on their learning experience, making it more passive and less active. Generative AI tools now allow students to automate essay writing and even note taking. This threatens not only their ability to think critically, but fundamentally the development and ownership of their own ideas. The reliance on AI tools has exploded at McGill (as it has everywhere) since 2023, raising serious pedagogical and policy questions that universities are only beginning to wrestle with.

Students must also navigate a world in which they are confronted on a daily basis with political divisions and misinformation, global conflicts, and environmental degradation. These mammoth and complex challenges will need to be addressed by their generation. To do this they must be able to ask questions and develop and evaluate answers for themselves, have the confidence to work together with others to move forward, and demonstrate compassion for a common good.

Make *your* mark

The world is changing: McGill Arts must change with it

To prepare students to take a leadership role in addressing the biggest challenges of today and tomorrow, McGill has a duty to think outside the box and reshape our curricular and pedagogical approach. The status quo cannot continue.

A restructured first year learning experience must address the needs of an evolving student population, and to prepare them not only for their academic life at McGill but also to address a rapidly changing global context once they graduate.

McGill is currently a leader in Arts undergraduate education. Our academic programs build in connections to complementary disciplines and protect students' opportunities to explore.

Yet our current pedagogical framework does not **from the start** position students well to take advantage of what we offer.

- First year students are introduced to disciplines through large survey classes and consequently are less likely to be actively engaged with research faculty in posing and addressing research questions.
- First year students find themselves in large classes, where it is challenging for them to engage with one another.
- Multi-disciplinary courses are the exception rather than the rule in the first year.

Brilliant faculty members, as well as whole academic units, are striving to be innovative and collaborative, while maintaining academic rigour. Yet there is a limit to what they can do to keep up with the rapid pace of change caused by disruptive technologies and paradigm shifts such as ChatGPT, as well as the impact of other pressures, including an increasingly polarised society and mental health struggles among young adults. We propose a coordinated curricular solution to meet our students where they are and continue to deliver the high quality rigorous education McGill is known for.

McGill's solution: The Arts Foundation Program

The new Arts Foundation Program, designed for first-year Arts students, will meet this generation of students where they are, reimagining the way we teach students to ensure they think for themselves, can bring different domains of knowledge and perspectives together, and are able to develop and own their ideas while communicating them clearly.



Key objectives

Engaging directly with live research questions

Tenure track faculty and other top tier researchers at the cutting edge of their field will introduce students to some of the research questions they are currently working on, current debates, as well as methodologies for addressing these issues; students will deliberate with one another as they engage these matters. Courses will allow students to model a process of inquiry, and to develop original answers to live questions.

Building community through exchange of ideas

Courses will highlight for students how disagreement can spark understanding, collaboration, and chart new paths forward. Inquiry focused courses will thus help to combat political polarization and also create peer-groups of students who can support one another throughout their degrees.

Equipping students to tackle complex problems from a variety of perspectives and disciplines that may not have an obvious relation with one another

New Complex Problems courses will synthesize knowledge across domains. Bringing in expertise from across disciplines, these Complex Problems courses will expose students to diverse research methodologies and showcase how a variety of approaches are needed to understand and address important issues. This will encourage students to bring together what they are learning, ask new questions, and creatively address complex problems by recognizing there are multiple answers.

Enabling students to take ownership of their views and clearly express their ideas in a compelling, succinct way

We know that we cannot correct all misinformation or eliminate the use of ChatGPT, but we can teach students why their ideas matter and how to confidently express them through a focused writing-intensive course.



"We want to help Arts students harness their curiosity and develop answers to their questions. We also want to ensure that these inquisitive and creative individuals are well-equipped and confident to address increasingly complex situations and problems, while remaining attentive to how both the problems and proposed solutions affect diverse community members and other stakeholders."

Lisa Shapiro, Dean, Faculty of Arts

Bringing the Foundation Program to life

The Dean of the Faculty of Arts and her leadership team believe so strongly in the enhanced Arts Foundation Program that they invested \$150,000, as well significant time and energy, to move forward with a Pilot in the 2024-25 academic year. The response from students was phenomenal and all spots filled quickly. Surveys indicate a great appetite to continue the program and ultimately expand it, so it is mandatory for all first-year students and potentially open to others.

The limiting factor? Teaching capacity within the Faculty.

The heart of the Foundation Year is courses designed for and dedicated to first year students, including some smaller classes and other larger multi-disciplinary classes, all aimed at engaging students in meaningful, in-depth conversations.

However, it is difficult for professors to add these dedicated courses to their already significant academic workload, while maintaining high quality academic major programs for all students. To fully offer the Foundation Year Program to all 900 UO students, we could need to add 40 courses (4 complex problems lecture courses + 36 small seminar courses) to the Faculty's program - impossible without enhanced teaching capacity.

The Solution? Early Career Researchers (ECRs).

In addition to being talented researchers, Arts PhD students and Postdoctoral scholars are training to be the future generation of university professors. Complex, high-quality teaching experiences, involving innovative course design, are an essential and highly valuable part of their professional development.

By supporting ECRs to design and teach Foundation Year courses, as well as to provide additional support for academic programs, we are offering a dual benefit. On the one hand, first-year students will have access to all of the benefits of the Foundation Year program we've already described, in dedicated settings that will allow them to engage meaningfully with complex topics and live research questions. And at the same time, ECRs will have the unique opportunity to help design these courses, gaining valuable curricular and teaching experience that will serve them well as they pursue their own academic careers.

And the whole McGill community benefits by adding bright new ECRs into already lively discussions.



How you can help

Support the Foundation Year Discretionary Fund,

which will be used by the Dean and her senior leadership team to hire ECRs, support the Office of Arts Education in supporting ECRs and UO students, and support the Arts Showcase event for students to highlight their learnings to the wider community.

Cost: Any amount, special recognition for donors who give \$25K+

Support Postdoctoral scholars,

who will help to deliver the Arts Foundation Program to students, while initiating their own academic careers. They will teach four courses each year, impacting at least 100 students per year and approximately 300 students over their three-year appointment. These prestigious positions will provide recent PhDs with opportunities to interact with McGill faculty, to develop and publish their research, as well as to gain teaching experience in an innovative program, furthering their careers, while also exposing students to exciting new approaches on topical issues.

Cost: \$100K/year for a minimum of 3 years for each Postdoctoral scholar

Support PhD Teaching Awards,

which will further the professional development of McGill PhD students, increase teaching capacity for first year complex problems courses, and expose students to the most recent research and methodologies. One PhD student would co-teach a complex problems course, impacting approximately 250-300 students per year.

Cost: \$60K/year for a minimum of four years for four to five PhD Awards per year

Help us prepare the thinkers and leaders of the future

As a publicly funded post-secondary institution, McGill offers undergraduate students a very high-quality education at some of the lowest tuition fees for a top global university, but we simply do not have the resources to pivot our curriculum in the current changing world.

We rely upon philanthropy to go above and beyond our regular teaching and programming, so that we can meet this generation of students where they are and ensure that we provide not just a very good education but a truly great one.

No other university in Canada has proposed such a trailblazing approach for a comprehensive reboot of Arts education for ALL incoming Arts students. Some universities offer smaller seminars to some select first year students, while others have an elite program for the best and the brightest students in an incoming year.

Here at McGill, we believe that every student deserves access to the greatest education an Arts program can provide. We want the first year at McGill to provide students with the benefits of a liberal arts education, while they are attending a large public research university in a world class city.

Your support of the Arts Foundation Year Program has the potential to start a revolution in the way an Arts education is taught at our peer institutions around the globe.

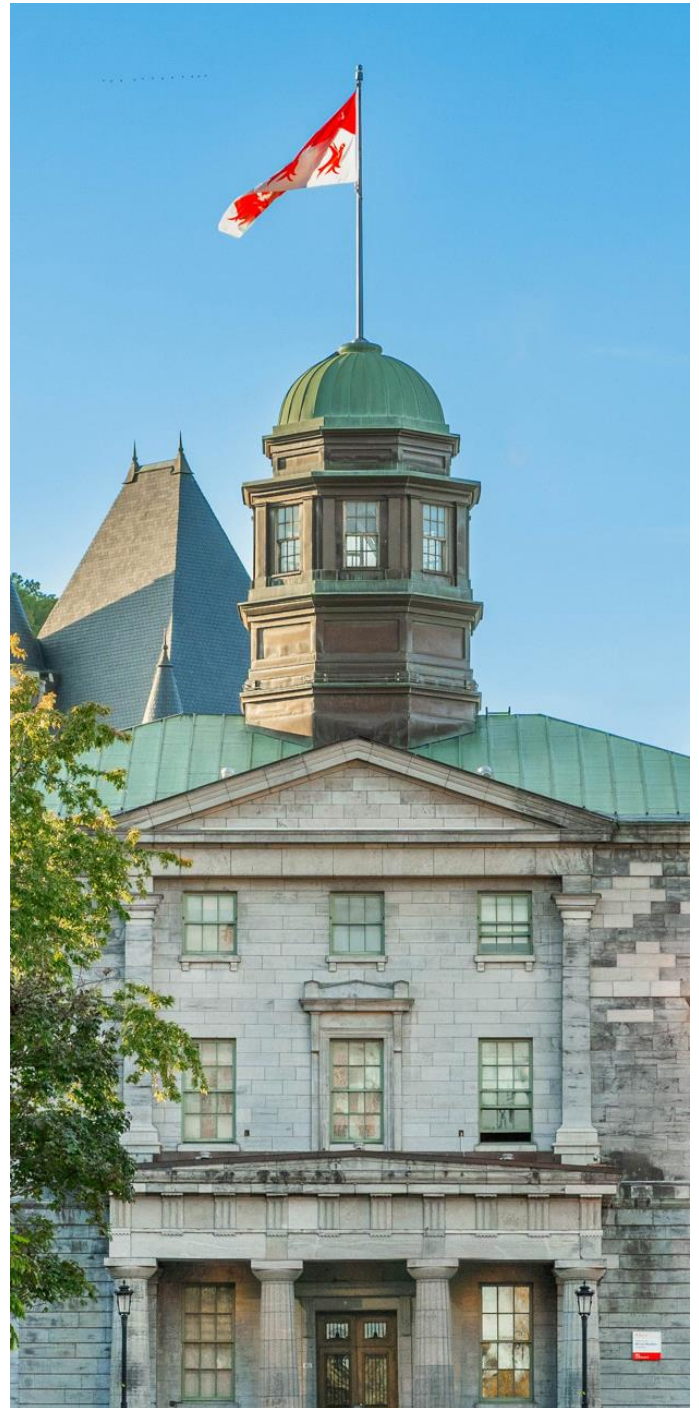
Celebrating your gift

The Faculty is dedicated to not only stewarding philanthropy with the utmost care, but also to creating a community of like-minded donors who can continue to champion the need for robust education in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Donors who give \$25K or more may receive updates on the impact of their gift to the Program, such as:

- Reporting on the Foundation Year's progress and activities
- Invitations to the Arts Showcase event, featuring students and professors
- Additional stewardship opportunities, including naming opportunities, commensurate with gift

Make *your* mark. Join us.



For more information, please contact:

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