



Friday January 12th, 2018

To all members of the Concordia Association for Students in English (CASE),

In 2014, Emma Healey penned an essay on The Hairpin website denouncing sexual misconduct within the Concordia English Department. Despite the gravity of the situation, and the many efforts made to bring about tangible sanctions, no punitive measures were enacted. On Monday, an online piece by Mike Spry posted on canlitaccountable.com brought these issues back into focus, once again denouncing the toxic culture prevalent in the Department. In the following days, many individuals corroborated these claims, expanded upon them, and shared their own experiences on Twitter.¹

First and foremost, to those personally affected: we believe you.

We are deeply upset and appalled that this University has allowed sexual misconduct to harm students for so long in what should have been a safe and professional environment. We are frustrated that these events allegedly come as a shock to many members of the English Department faculty, as instances of inappropriate behaviour have already been denounced multiple times. It is also extremely disappointing that survivors have had to put themselves at risk by relying on media exposure to generate the potential for concrete repercussions.

As of this moment, the courses taught by the professors named online are being reassigned pending investigation, the books written by those faculty members have been removed from the display window on the sixth floor of the Webster Library Building, and a third party is conducting the investigation.

Since these issues have resurfaced, multiple faculty members have offered to personally listen to students' concerns. Although we believe this gesture to be well-intentioned, we urge students to keep in mind that faculty members are not equipped to adequately assist survivors. Moreover, faculty members have access to institutionalized legal recourse that students do not possess. Given this imbalance, matters shared in confidence could theoretically be used to undermine students' ability to lodge a formal complaint. It may be useful to consider confiding in other resources on and off campus. As such, we have included, at the end of this statement, a list of resources other survivors have deemed helpful.

¹ By no means are we asserting that this paragraph is a comprehensive summary of events. We simply want to provide succinct context for anyone unaware of what has been happening. We recognize that multiple individuals have come forward, and many more have been affected. Please understand that these few lines only graze the surface of this complex problem, and we strongly encourage you to seek out the full details of this situation.

To be clear, CASE is a student-run association whose mandate is to represent the interests of Concordia English Literature undergraduate students. This includes any student enrolled in a minimum of one ENGL course (Creative Writing, English Literature, Professional Writing). We are funded by the Arts and Science Federation of Associations (ASFA), which, in turn, is exclusively funded by students' fee-levies. We receive no funding from the English Department or the University. Our responsibility is to the students, not to the Department. As such, we are committed to addressing student concerns, and insisting that appropriate action be taken when necessary.

On January 12th at 3pm in LB-646, Professor Kate Sterns, the Co-ordinator of the Creative Writing Program, joined by Deputy Provost Lisa Ostiguy and Dean of Students Andrew Woodall, will be holding a meeting to inform Creative Writing students of remedial actions the University has decided to take, as well as respond to any questions. However, we urge not only Creative Writing students, but also those in English Literature and Professional Writing to attend this meeting and discuss the future of our department. Given faculty members' potential conflict of interest, we recommend students do not treat this meeting as a forum to share their experiences. Instead, please consider joining us in using this time to demand change and immediate action from the University.

We have compiled a provisional list of actions we expect from the Department moving forward. Student feedback and input on these expectations and the process as a whole are crucial in order to continue to pressure the University and the public to act. Now that the silence has been broken again, we cannot allow it to return.

The English Department should, in our view:

- Acknowledge the fact that students brought up these concerns in 2014/2015 when Emma Healey's essay was published, and apologize for the subsequent dismissal of those concerns.
- Be transparent about the third party conducting the investigation - including the disclosure of potential biases - and reveal the criteria this third party will use to make final recommendations and decisions.
- Facilitate a clear line of communication between students and the investigative third party.
- Be clear about what constitutes legitimate and defensible evidence in the eyes of investigative authorities.
- Hire student-approved, third-party organizations to provide survivor-oriented support to affected Concordia students and alumni.
- Revise the current policy regarding personal relationships between faculty members and students to account for possible risks of impropriety, especially regarding abuse of power and potential negative repercussions for students.
- Prior to faculty members offering personal support to students, require students be made aware that faculty members have access to institutionalized legal recourse that students do not possess.
- As problematic faculty have taught courses in both the Professional Writing and Literature streams, keep all ENGL students informed and involved.
- Remove *Matrix Magazine* from the Concordia campus.

In addition to these provisional expectations, CASE is exploring other resources and forms of support pertinent to these issues. To this end, we have initiated plans to facilitate workshops informing students about their legal options in the face of libel or defamation threats. Moreover, we are attempting to assess student interest in a CASE-organized general assembly dedicated to discussing the present situation.

We want to reiterate that CASE's mandate is to accurately represent its student body. Therefore, we strongly encourage and value your input. If you have any concerns, ideas, questions, etc. please contact us at CASE.president@asfa.ca. If you would prefer to speak in person, on or off campus, please let us know and we will arrange to meet with you.

In solidarity,
The CASE Executive

Suggested Resources:

Centre for Gender Advocacy

<http://genderadvocacy.org/>

- Provides respectful, confidential peer-to-peer support, advocacy, and resources for those who seek it, with a focus on harm reduction, empowerment and self-determination.

Concordia Student Union Advocacy Centre

<https://csu.qc.ca/advocacy>

- Aims to help students who find themselves in difficult situations by accurately identifying their needs, as well as determining and executing necessary courses of action.

Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC)

<https://www.concordia.ca/students/sexual-assault.html>

- Provides confidential and non-judgmental support and services to Concordia University students of all genders and orientations who have been affected by sexual violence and/or harassment.

Sexual Assault Center of the McGill Student Society (SACOMSS)

<http://www.sacomss.org/wp/>

- Volunteer-run organization committed to supporting survivors of sexual assault and their allies through direct support, advocacy and outreach. Their services include Drop-in, DIAL hotline phone number, support groups, advocacy and outreach.

CSU Legal Information Clinic

<https://csu.qc.ca/lic>

- Volunteer law students provide Concordia Undergraduate students with legal information and referrals to lawyers if required.

Quebec Coalition of Sexual Assault Centres (RQCALACS)

<http://www.rqcalacs.qc.ca/index-en.php>

- Provides support services for victims and their relatives and close friends throughout the judicial process. According to individuals' needs, they may also provide support through health services, group support meetings and referrals to other organizations.