



Wednesday April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018

### **SSMU-CSU Walk-out Statement**

In 2014, an essay on The Hairpin website denounced sexual misconduct within the Concordia English Department, but no concrete change was enacted. A year later, a handful of students sent a letter to the English Department Chair requesting a response which would, at the very least, provide students with information on sexual assault resources. They were told that nothing could be done. It is now 3 years later, and we are being told that there was never an open secret. In January, a confessed harasser wrote an essay forcing these issues back into focus. A few days later, CASE put out a statement outlining our 9 demands for the administration. To this day, none of those demands have been met. We still haven't received an apology, nor has the department acknowledged the pervasive problem, even though 3 professors in the English Department have been suspended, and 1 tenured professor is coincidentally on medical leave.

Students have been pushing back against professors engaging in sexual misconduct for years. For a long time, students have had to rely on each other to create their own support system. This year, we have been fortunate in that, this time, the accusations have been heard in a variety of spaces, which in turn has allowed for more voices to be heard.

However, invitations to be part of the administrative response have been limited and problematic, at best. The investigative process has been kept vague, conflicting information has been given to students, and communications from the administration have been evasive and labyrinthian. Student representatives make up only one third of the Concordia Task Force on Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Violence. It is also ridiculous that the CSU had to fight for its right to select these student representatives, and that the university demands that these students be in good academic standing. This only goes to show the university's ignorance of the extensive and damaging effects of sexual harassment and violence.

Make no mistake: the university has been doing the bare minimum to placate students in the hopes that the situation will blow over. Through their actions, members of the administration have demonstrated time and again that they prioritize the university's reputation over students' safety.

To the Concordia administration: we cannot trust you until you take responsibility and acknowledge that sexual violence and abuse perpetrated by professors is a pressing problem that needs to be addressed. The issue is being framed around how students are

supposedly unaware of the university resources available to them in response to abuse, instead of focusing on the actual problem: students being harassed by professors. This is completely unacceptable.

What our students so desperately need at the moment is to be heard, acknowledged, and informed on the administration's actions.

CASE fully believes that the English Department wants change, and we are hopeful this change will happen. But this change can only begin with listening to students. Therefore, we reiterate our demands (1) for a clear and transparent investigative process, (2) for the university to be clear about what constitutes legitimate and defensible evidence in the eyes of investigative authorities, and (3) for faculty members to receive mandatory consent training that addresses the risks and power imbalances inherent to student-professor relationships.

We stand in solidarity with the SSMU, the CSU, and all Concordia and McGill students, past and present, who have been personally affected, and we urge those here today to please continue being involved with your student associations, with your organisations, with your peers about demanding that our institutions be kept accountable. Now that the silence has been broken once more, we cannot allow it to return.