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## Concordia University denounces Bill 60

The last English university in Quebec opposes controversial proposed charter

By Timothy Weynerowski / January 7, 2014 / Featured, News

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As the third and last English university to publicly denounce the Parti Québécois' proposed legislation, Concordia responded to the Quebec Charter of Secular Values (Bill 60) with a letter from president Alan Shepard and a joint statement issued on Dec. 18 by the Senate Steering Committee and Board Executive Committee.

Concordia's joint statement, supported by 11 Concordia unions and associations, condemns the Charter of Secular Values in its current form on three grounds: "1. Our particular history and current circumstances, 2. The anticipated effects on recruitment and retention; and 3. The democratic principle of the autonomy of universities everywhere."

Expanding on Concordia's reasons for opposing Bill 60, the joint statement reads, "The prohibition against visible religious symbols would affect our more than 7,000 full- and part time employees, many of whom are also students at the university and who depend on their employment as research and teaching assistants to help pay for their educations."

This explanation mirrors the press release McGill published on Nov. 29 which states, "Be it resolved that while the McGill Senate supports the secular spirit of Bill 60, it strongly objects to the restrictions on the right to wear religious symbols, as described in the draft legislation, which run contrary to the University's mission and values." McGill was the first post-secondary institution to criticize the proposed Charter of Values.

Both universities take issue with certain key elements of the proposed Charter which include prohibiting civil servants from wearing ostentatious religious symbols and limiting time off for religious reasons.

Concordia opposes the Charter on intellectual grounds as well, as the statement reads, "The interaction among such a range of cultures and religions at our university contributes to the intellectual and social development of our community and to the vitality of Quebec." Concordia and McGill oppose Bill 60 as they claim it would make it more difficult to recruit students, staff and faculty.

Concordia argues it is not a government agent and declares its autonomy in the statement.

In his letter, Shepard writes, "Again, an overwhelming majority expressed their dissent [...] The next step is to present our position to the government as part of the consultative process on the draft legislation, which starts in January."



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