

Union for Gender Empowerment

Constitution
July 30th, 2017

Background

The McGill Women's Union, which became the Union for Gender Empowerment, was established at McGill University, which resides on Tioh'tia:ke, commonly known in English as Montreal Island, in Kanien'kehá:ka, the "Place of the People of the Flint" (the Kanien'kéha). The Kanien'kéha are members of the Rotinonshon:ni, the Confederacy of the Completed Longhouse. The Rotinonshon:ni consists of the Six Nations: the Onöndowága (Seneca, the Keepers of the Western Door), the Gayogohó:no' (Cayuga), the Onöñda'gega' (Onondaga), the Onyota'a:ka (Oneida), the Kanien'kéha (Mohawk, the Keepers of the Eastern Door), and the Skarū'ren' (Tuscarora). The lands of the Rotinonshon:ni extended throughout much of what is colonially determined New York state, southern Quebec, and parts of southern Ontario. These lands, which were never ceded by treaty, were forcibly seized by white settlers, missionaries, police, and armies. Despite this, the Rotinonshon:ni still live in the area of McGill, with the Kanien'kéha communities of Kahnawake and Kanatasake closeby and many Rotinonshon:ni people living in Montreal as well. Thus, we in the Union for Gender Empowerment have a responsibility to fight for Rotinonshon:ni self-determination against ongoing American and Canadian colonialism.

Prior to 2002, only cis women, or women who were assigned female at birth, were allowed to become members of the Women's Union. In 2002, trans people, or people who identify at least partially with a sex/gender other than that they were assigned at birth, were allowed to join the Women's Union, out of a stated desire to empower those who are oppressed by the gender binary, in which all people are assigned at birth into one of two sex/genders which are hierarchized (men over women) and declared immutable. This policy was considered at the time to be discriminatory against trans men, or men who were assigned female at birth, given that they would need to out themselves upon receiving Women's Union membership, as cis men were not allowed in the Women's Union. As a result, the Women's Union changed its name to the Union for Gender Empowerment (UGE) in 2004, and the space became open to all genders. This reorganization was believed to promote a wider, more inclusive struggle against gendered oppression. Despite the shift from the Women's Union to the UGE, numerous problems have limited the UGE's capacity to fight gender oppression as was intended. For example, the UGE collective has remained largely white, middle class, and non-disabled for the majority of its existence, and the collective has paid insufficient attention to issues of racism, colonialism, capitalism, and ableism in its gender advocacy. For this reason, in 2017, it was decided that the UGE should explicitly declare itself in its constitution an anti-racist, anti-colonialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-ableist organization as well as a feminist and trans-positive organization. In addition, the UGE recognized its responsibility towards prioritizing BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour), disabled people, and working class people in its organizing through real and concrete changes.

Mission Statement

We aim to provide services to any person who identifies with our **anti-oppressive**, feminist, and **trans*-positive** principles, regardless of gender identity.

The Union for Gender Empowerment provides resources, educational opportunities and a centre for advocacy. Resources include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A co-op selling **alternative menstrual products, safer sex products, and gender empowerment items** on a pay-what-you-can basis
- A zine distro
- Referrals for health and legal issues
- Feminist, queer-positive and trans*-positive resources at McGill and in the wider community
- A lending library of books and periodicals focusing on gender and issues intersecting with gender
- A drop-in centre and lounge, an office with phone and internet access and a kitchen
- Educational opportunities, such as workshops and action groups.
- Act as a centre for gender advocacy by working as allies in solidarity with other organizations.
- Working as a “watchdog” organization at McGill and in the wider community.
- Taking on our own initiatives to actively address, educate on and challenge the enforcement of the gender binary.

With these services in mind, we aim to ensure that all individuals in the space are treated with respect for their identity and background, including political and religious beliefs, and that they have equal access to the resources available. The collective strives to be an anti-oppressive organization that welcomes, but is not limited to, queer, two spirited, transgender, transexual, intersex and genderqueer people. We work to ensure that our services are sensitive to survivors of gender-based violence, people of colour, indigenous people, First people, poor people and people with disabilities. In accordance with the above stated goals of ensuring that our organization welcomes two spirited, transgender, transexual, intersex and genderqueer people, and people of colour, we seek to establish a collective that has a strong representation of people of colour and trans* people.

How the collective will run:

- Open collective
- Consensus-based decision making
- Non-hierarchical organization, with coordinators responsible for bottom-lining the activities of the organization
- Three-fourths attendance of members necessary for quorum at collective meetings (if after two meetings quorum is not met, quorum is re-evaluated based on the number of members who attend)
- Rotating facilitators and minute-takers
- Committees will be organized on an ad-hoc basis to take care of particular needs as they arise (events, new initiatives, etc.)

- The collective will decide whether each ad-hoc committee should remain within the collective or be opened up to volunteers as well

Requirements of collective members:

- A staffer training will be held at the beginning of the fall and winter semesters, as well as in May if a summer training is in demand. 2-4 weeks before staffer training, adequate recruitment of new members shall be conducted by the existing collective.
- completion of staffer training
- attendance at one collective meeting
- commitment of at least one semester
- completion of a collective building session at the beginning of each semester with all other collective members (the collective building session will be an opportunity for collective members to get to know each other and share skills and knowledge)
- a collective visioning to take place every 6-12 months
- commitment to meetings every 2 weeks (maximum of 3 missed meetings per semester and the understanding that the person will be responsible for catching up on the events of the missed meeting)
- maintain 2 hours of staffing per week
- active and equal participation in maintenance tasks (such as meeting facilitation, agenda-building, minute-taking, etc.)
- agreement to mission statement
- (consensus-based) approval by the existing collective based on the applicant meeting all of the above requirements

Role of coordinators:

- all coordinators will be members of the collective
- coordinators will act as bottom-liners for the different aspects of organizing (see coordinator positions) with the understanding that all collective members will participate actively in these responsibilities
- positions may require more than one coordinator each
- coordinator positions will rotate yearly

Role of (non-member) volunteers:

- non-members are welcome to attend and participate in collective meetings, but will not take part in the consensus-based decision-making process
- non-members can take part in open committees organized for particular actions, initiatives, etc.
- general meetings will be held at least once a semester for both members and non-members to check in with each other and give feedback; general meetings will act as a forum for ideas and development of the organization

Changes to Constitution

- changes to the constitution and mission statement will be made based on consensus by collective members
- quorum requirements for a constitution change will be the same as previously stated (three-fourths attendance of members necessary for quorum - if after two meetings quorum is not met, quorum is re-evaluated based on the number of members who attend)
- changes to the constitution must be ratified by SSMU

Coordinator positions in the collective:

Coordinators will act as point persons and bottom-liners for collective activities. They will share the responsibilities related to these activities with the other members of the collective to whom they will *delegate* tasks. Facilitating collective meetings will be rotating responsibilities, and organizing and facilitating events will be the responsibility of the whole collective. All collective members should be aware of internal policy, including (but limited to) this constitution.

External coordinator: an on and off campus watchdog for events and groups of interest to the collective and its services; this requires that the external coordinator be aware of the incoming mail and emails on a weekly basis; this person will relate to SSMU as a representative of the collective on matters relating to the collective, its activities, mandate, etc. Responsible for the upkeep of the website. Ideally this role will be shared between two people.

Library and zine coordinator: responsible for delegating activities related to the upkeep and updating of the library and zine distro; these activities include calling regarding overdue books, entering new books into the database, returning books to the shelves, buying and labeling books, soliciting donations and attending zine fairs.

Co-op coordinator: responsible for the upkeep of the products in the co-op, which includes ensuring that the co-op is stocked, paying suppliers and providing education on alternative menstrual products, gender empowerment items and safer sex products; responsible for ensuring the co-op is relevant to people's needs; the coordinator will do a periodic inventory every 2 - 3 months and liaise with the finance coordinator about moneys related to the co-op.

Outreach and publicity coordinator: Coordinating publicity for the UGE, including networking with other organizations and tabling at various events (i.e. Activities Nights); Managing postering and flyers;

Staffer coordinator: a guide and reference for staffers to ensure that they are educated as to the mandate of the collective; point person for organizing staffer training and for delegating responsibilities to staffers and collective members to ensure the maintenance of the space – i.e. housekeeping duties; will check in with staffers about their involvement with the UGE.

Financial coordinator: responsible for keeping track of expenses, creating and maintaining the annual budget, and dealing with SSMU regarding all financial matters; required to attend the SSMU Clubs and Services info session in the fall; keeping track of stipends and funding requests.