

Dear Concordia Food Coalition,

DARE TO DREAM.

A strategic campaign proposal for taking over the library cafe.

The following is a scheme to take over the cafe in the Webster Library. It will outline everything from organisational strategy, timeline, goals, escalation of tactics, targets, allies, mobilization techniques and fundings sources. The purpose of this document is to act as a spark. A starting point, that ought to be adapted, modified and transformed based on the realities of those attempting to implement it. Read at your own peril.

INTRO

For those who don't know me, I was one of the founding members of the Concordia Food Coalition back in 2013. I acted as the campaign coordinator during the first BiteMe! Food week at Concordia as well as the subsequent fee levy and JavaU Coop referendums. Later, as an executive at the CSU, I was actively involved in opening up the Loyola Hive Cafe, as well as transforming the JavaU Cafe on the 2nd floor mezzanine into the downtown Hive Cafe.

I first became involved with the food movement at Concordia, because I saw its revolutionary potential. By creating student-run social economy alternatives to the corporate food providers on campus we are able to **both** create real life examples of the post-capitalist world we want to live in, all while using the momentum and mobilization to energize a new generation of radical students.

By challenging itself to begin a campaign to take over the Library cafe, the CFC can once again unlock this revolutionary potential.

THE FOOD PROVIDER CONTRACT

A fundamental goal of the CFC is to grow the amount of student-run social economy food providers on campus, ideally at the expense of the for-profit, corporate-run food providers. With the upcoming food provider contract, we are now entering a phase in the Concordia University timeline that is critical in achieving this goal. This window of opportunity only occurs every 5 to 10 years (several student generations) so it's important that the CFC is as prepared as possible to capitalize on it. I believe that woking to extract the Library cafe space from the upcoming food provider contract is an bold and realistic goal that the CFC can achieve. In the following document I outline how it might be possible.

When it comes to a campaign to take over the Library Cafe, this food provider contract is fundamental. Without pretending to know the details of how the contract legally operates, it is my understanding that the contract provides the winning bidder the legal right to serve food in specific physical locations across campus. Downtown these spaces are the 4th floor cafe in the

Hall building, the Gray nuns Cafeteria, as well as the two cafe locations in the Webster Library. At Loyola, they include the SC Cafeteria, as well as a series of smaller cafes scattered across campus.

The ultimate goal of a campaign to take over the Library cafe would be to have the two cafe spaces in the Webster Library excluded from the upcoming contract, and instead leases out by the university to a student-run social economy food provider, rent free. Therefore, the timing of the upcoming food provider contract is extremely important as it is a window of opportunity where students can hopefully exert enough pressure to achieve this goal.

THE PRE-CAMPAIGN

A campaign would have to begin like any other campaign. With a small group of dedicated individuals willing to see the campaign through till the bittersweet end. This is the first, as well as most exciting step, as you can develop a passionate and cohesive team of individuals willing to work together on an inspiring project. Maintaining the passion and inspiration behind the project is crucial as it will attract more and more people to the campaign as time goes on.

This initial group should ideally be between 5-10 committed individuals who are staying at Concordia for at least a couple more years and can be there for the long-haul. Pre-set weekly meeting times, as well as a basic decision making process, (consensus minus-one tends to work well) is all that is needed to get things start. Beginning as a committee or working group of the CFC is ideal as it can have its own autonomous decision making structure all while having access to CFC support and resources. A diversity of individuals is always an important goal to strive for, as diversity creates collective strength.

Here are 3 main preliminary research topics the newly formed collective should undertake before actually launching the campaign.

1- Gain a legal understanding of the current food provider contract.

This includes a full breakdown of the dates and timelines, when it expires, when upcoming negotiations will begin, what past negotiations can tell us about the upcoming one¹. It should also include a full legal understanding of what it would take to exclude the Library cafe space from the future contract. This information will help guide the campaign's strategic timeline, as well as help maintain a parity of knowledge between the campaign collective and the University Admin. The folks working on this aspect of the campaign should be very detailed oriented, as having as much information on the process is vital.

2- Networking to allied groups who can help develop the projects.

This means reaching out to the already existing student-run social economy food providers and allies on campus, letting them know your intentions to take on this large campaign. Notable groups include, the Hive Cafe, as a potential occupant of the future space (more on that later).

¹ Contacting past CFC members that were involved in last food provider contract would be important as they can provide insight on the process and how it works. Notably people include, Anastasia Voutou and Eric Chevrier.

SAF as a funding source for the campaign. The CSU for its institutional power, links to the Admin, potential campaign support as well as eventual funding for a new cafe. SC for its campaign support and mobilization potential, as well as other fee levy groups and newspapers for endorsement and support. By keeping these organisations close and always updated as the campaign develops they become a part of the process and can provide much needed support when the time comes. This work should also include an assessment of the potential opponents to the campaign, as well as the strategic targets in the administration that the campaign would need to convince and/or apply pressure to.

3-Developing the campaign strategy.²

Once a timeline is established as well as concrete list of all the allies and potentials opponents, it then becomes the collective's task to create the campaign strategy. This means developing the detailed plan as to how you are going to **both**, exert enough pressure on the university to give you Library space, all while simultaneously developing the student-run social economy cafe that will take its place. These two separate aspects of the campaign ought to be occurring in unison, because you are going to need a viable alternative in order to effectively pressure the university.

ROUGH SCHEME FOR CAMPAIGN

Once the core collective is established, a key question it must answer is what will replace the current Library cafe. Ideally, the networking to allied groups aspect of the pre-campaign will help guide these reflections. Essentially I see the existence of two viable possibilities.

1- That the Hive Cafe expand its operations and add the newly acquired Library space as a third location.

2- That a new student-run coop cafe is developed by the campaign collective to occupy the Library space. (What about Cafe X?)

The first option is appealing because the Hive Cafe already exists as legal entity as well as acts as viable model that can easily be transferred to that space. This will likely help assuage the university administration's fears of a unsuccessful cafe, all while having a successful example to point to when speaking to students. Furthermore with its already existing inhouse kitchen, a third location could expand its economy of scale, increasing margins and reducing prices for sustainable products. Noticeable drawbacks include the Hive BOD and perhaps AGM potentially disagreeing to such an endeavour, as well as the potential surfacing of negative perceptions of the Hive by students precisely because it is an already existing model with a track record.

The second option is appealing because it does not have to face any of the drawback of the first option. Also, a new model would add greater diversity to the concordia student-run social economy food system, especially if structured as a student-run workers coop, rather than solidarity coop. It's obvious drawbacks lie in the fact that it is untested, and will face a steep

² Contacting key individuals who have experience in campaign development for advice and feedback would be helpful during this stage. The CSU campaigns coordinator Irmak Bahar, as well as professor Anna Kruzynski are good examples of such people.

learning curve, as well as an increased workload for the members of the campaign. It is also fundamental that if the second option is attempted, that it maintains solidarity with already existing student-run food providers(Hive, Reggies and Frigo) so that they are not seen as competitors but rather collaborators.

Overall, I would argue that the first option is the best option and ought to be prioritized. That being said, support from the Hive should not be seen as a prerequisite. The second option is viable, and can have its own merits especially considering the political situation on campus.

Getting the Hive on Board

In order to receive support from the Hive Cafe, it would be wise for the initial core collective to include at least one or more current BOD member from the Hive who are interested in exploring such a project. Collaboratively with these individuals, the collective should develop a very clear and detailed presentation that is brought to the Hive BOD to explain the campaign.

The purpose of the presentation would be for the Hive BOD to pass a motion in support of the idea, without actually committing itself to it in any way. This is important as it would be unrealistic to expect an organisation like the Hive to jump head first into such project with so many open ended outcomes. Yet obtaining its tacit support for the campaign is an important first step. Gradual steps can be then be taken from this starting point to solidify support, up until the official confirmation that the Hive is willing to legally occupy the space if the university offers it a favourable rent-free lease.

Getting the University on Board

Having demonstrably overwhelming support from the student population for the campaign is essential to be successful. The timing as to when to launch the campaign is important as you want to have as much time in advance to inform the student body, all while making it seem like your campaign is in a constant state of growth without a lull period. For this, a properly designed timeline filled with moments of escalation of tactics is crucial. Between one and two years seems like an appropriate amount of time from start to finish. Anything less than one year is too rushed, and anything more that two year risks becoming dull and/or eclipsed by more relevant issues.

If the goal is to pressure the university into giving students the space rent free, then all pressure tactics should revolve around this goal. The best pressure tactics are ones that both mobilize new students into supporting the campaign while at the same time proving to the university that giving into our demands is easier than ignoring our demands. Here is a list of 8 steps that achieve this goal.

1- Petition

The first tactic on a campaign timeline should be the one most focused on mobilizing new students. A classic way for most campaigns to start is with a simple petition. Concretely the goal of the petition could be to add a referendum question to the upcoming CSU elections, yet

symbolically you are also showing the university administration how much student support your campaign has. This is a start for most campaigns as it gives everyone a concrete task to work on, that also lends itself to easily integrating newcomers into the group. It also helps the individuals involved in the campaign refine their arguments in favour of the project by being forced to talk to thousands of everyday students and hearing their concerns. Lastly this is an important step as it allows the campaign to collect names and emails that can be used in the future to mobilise people. Setting a benchmark of 1000 or 2000 signatures helps create a goal to work towards as well as victory moment once achieved.

2-Classroom announcement and 1 on 1 conversations.

Campaign members can collect petition signatures by talking to people in the lobby of the library building in order to draw attention to the space. By doing so you are also reaching out to people who use the library often and either hate or love Tim Hortons and Starbucks. Those that love the corporate brands will likely be one of the campaigns biggest challenges. A simple strategy is to listen, recognise the audience and pivot the argument by saying things like *"I love Tim Hortons too, those timbits are so good. But a student coop cafe would make coffee and food more affordable and more sustainable. Not to mention the profits would stay on campus, rather than going to some rich american CEO"*. Always starting with what you agree then moving to the disagreement is a good strategy. Classroom announcements are also a key tactic in getting the word out for a petitions or otherwise. By building up the skill of public speaking within the campaign collective, and making several classroom announcement a week, you can radically transform the discourse on campus.

3- Social Media and Branding

The campaign should have a well established social media presence, that includes catch-phrases, bullet point goals and detailed FAQs. Consistent imagery, name and colours help develop a brand for the campaign that will hopefully gain the attention of students. Developing a visual icon, such as a button or a patch for people to wear is helpful as they are important visual cues that express a collective solidarity. Also all those who wear the icon, are forced to explain its meaning to friends thereby exponentially expanding awareness and support for the campaign. It also helps scare the crap out of the Admin who have to walk through many of the same halls and classrooms as us, and will see the visual support for the campaign everywhere they go.

4- Democracy and Referendum

This can be the follow up step to a petition, which aims to place a referendum question on the CSU elections ballot. A simple referendum question just to garner support at first could be - *"Do you as a Concordia Undergraduate student support the creation of a student-run cooperative cafe in Webster library"* This is a big step, as a public failure at this stage could undermine the entire project. Careful preparation for a referendum campaign is important, and is not a step that should be rushed into³. Questions like, what's going to replace the current cafes, what about the

³ Folks involved in campaign development should definitely consult the CSU rules and regulation and how they work.
<https://csu.qc.ca/sites/default/files/StandingRegulationsMay18th%202017-09-25.pdf>

workers who work there now, how much would it cost... etc, should all have answers. Even though the answer is not definitive, it should still have been discussed collectively and prepared so as to avoid confusion during the campaign. This is especially important when discussing with student newspapers as they are the groups on campus most likely to look at the campaign with a fine tooth comb.

Besides actually winning the campaign, bringing the question to referendum gives the campaign a strong democratic legitimacy. This way you can always point back and remind people that the students have your back. By winning this referendum, you also create another victory moment that helps maintain the campaign's momentum.

5- Negotiations with the Admin

Following a victorious referendum, it may be good timing to begin negotiations with the University Admin. An ideal model for negotiations would be that the campaign collective elect two spokespeople to be the official negotiation team with the Admin. It is important that they be spokespeople not representatives, so that they do not have any actual decision making power, but rather must bring back all proposals to the group. Finding the right individuals to play this role is tricky as they must be very well informed, radically minded, assertive and open for dialogue, all while maintaining an allure of corporate sensibilities. This position is easily corruptible and can lead to a toxic group dynamic if there is no trust between the spokespeople and the collective. For this, having **two** spokespeople is crucial as they can hold each other accountable.

A good method to apply during negotiations is to play the good cop/bad cop routine, with the bad cops being the on-the-ground mobilizers of the campaign and the good cops being the negotiators. By creating an illusion of separation between the two, those at the negotiation table can still maintain a level of trust with the Admin, while the rest can continue exerting pressure from the outside. A key tactic on the part of the Admin is to ask for the campaign to stop while the negotiations are ongoing. This is a trap, as they will try and stall the negotiations until the campaign momentum is lost. Never let the pressure off, and simply allow the campaign to continue on its predetermined timeline of escalation tactics while the negotiations are ongoing. It is important that the negotiations are seen as mere formality designed to make clear your positions to the Admin. Success will be determined by a balance of power not a convincing argument.

If you are extremely lucky, after completing these first 5 steps you will be successful in winning your demands. Unfortunately the chances of this happening are slim, as the Library cafe spaces are actually important high-revenue space in the food provider contract that the university will not simply let go without a fight. Chances are you will have to enact the phase two of the campaign which involves some more confrontational tactics.

6- Creative Disruption

The next steps are all about creativity. You wanna both continue increasing public support for the campaign, all while exerting pressure on the targets in the University Admin. Some ideas could include, getting the Library Service staff Union on board with the campaign, and having them publicly support the project. Serving free coffee right in front of the Tim Hortons or Starbucks Cafe for an extended period of time. Doing a local media stunt with the petition signatures that makes the Admin embarrassed and uncomfortable. Disrupting BOG meetings is a heavy tactic but always gets their attention. Even street theater on nice warm days can be helpful to mobilize new folks creatively.

Creative tactics in this part of the campaign timeline could also include making bold announcements about the potential student-run alternative. For example announcing that the Hive is officially interested in the space. Or that the space will be open 24 hours during exams if run-by students. Or making public a business plan developed co-jointly by JMSB students detailing how students would run the space. All those things keep your campaign relevant and in the public eye as you assert an increasing amount of pressure on the Admin so that they agree to your demands.

7- Last Straw Referendum

A well developed long term campaign would assume that the University will not fold after only one referendum question, and would require a second more precisely worded referendum that is designed to place the university in a bind. To do so, create a referendum question that speaks directly your demands in the ongoing food provider contract. The question could read something along the lines of *"Do you as a undergraduate student agree that the upcoming food provider contract should exclude the Webster library cafe spaces, and that instead those space be given to a student-run cooperative cafe on a rent-free bases."* This way once successful, the university will be exposed for ignoring the demands of students. A second referendum campaign also allows the collective to have an entire second round of mobilization, that could focus on training the new recruits who only started getting involved after the last referendum.

Once again winning this referendum question is critical as losing essentially ends the entire campaign. This second referendum should ideally be designed to give those at the negotiation table the most levelge possible. It should act as a sort of make it or break it scenario, at the last possible point of negotiations with the Admin.

8- Occupation

Thankfully the campaign does not end there! The greatest thing about a campaign to take over the Library cafe is that its demands can be accomplished without the Universities Admins consent. Once the campaign has passed the point of no return, basically at the point when the new food provider contact is made public and includes the two cafe spaces in the library, then it is pretty much guaranteed that the University Admin will not meet any demands. At this point, the next logical step in the escalation of tactics would be to simply occupy the cafe and

appropriate it without the consent of the University. As you can imagine, this is the nuclear option.

By having a small committed group of people occupying the cafe and keeping it open to serve students free food and coffee until the university accepts the campaign demands, you place the University Admin in the ultimate bind. In order to get rid of the peaceful and loving occupation that is serving free coffee, they would have to call onto campus the violent riot police. This would be a media image disaster for them, and their public image is their achilles heel. The absolutely last thing the University wants is images of protesters and riot police in the media, especially on international media.

Because of this, engaging in such a tactic had a high likelihood of achieving a positive settlement that avoids arrests for students and a bad media image for the University. That being said, students who engage in an occupation, should be aware of the consequences, all while not overstating them. As has been made clear by the 2012 administration building occupation as well as the 2015 student strikes, an illegal occupation will unlikely result in expulsion if it is your first offense, and more likely result in a suspension or even a simple letter of reprimand. The trial would be tried by a majority student jury, that hopefully after 2 years of mobilization for a Library cafe will be sympathetic to the cause. Although highly unlikely, the University might decide to press legal charge for an illegal occupation. This is unlikely because the last thing the University wants would be to keep the story in the public eye by dragging it through courts. Even in this extremely rare possibility, the worse case scenario would be to face mischief charges, which is essentially a misdemeanor charge not a felony. Unless students involved already had previous criminal convictions, they could easily expect to have their charges dropped or discharged without any conditions.

These are only in the worse case scenarios of a occupation, where the police are called onto campus. In a realistic scenario, the university under such a bind simply does not react, allowing the students to continue occupying the space until the point where they either negotiate a fair deal or have no choice but to accept the new reality of a squated student-run cafe in the library building. This would be an immense victory on the part of students and would make a great addition to the already rich history of radical student mobilization at Concordia.

FUNDING

Start up funding for the campaign can come from the CFC and perhaps SC, with more substantial long-term funding coming from SAF. Once the campaign is fully funded it can then focus on applying for funds to actually launch the new cafe. Whether the new space will be taken on by the Hive Cafe, or a new student-run coop, will determine how much start up capital it requires. That being said, even if taken on by the Hive it would be important to still unlock significant funding to actually renovate the space, and purchase the equipment needed. The most substantial and reliable source of funding for this would be the CSU and its SSAELC fund. Having insiders at the CSU involved in the campaign from the beginning would be invaluable if

you want this process to happen smoothly. Also important is that timelines for unlocking funds be taken into consideration when developing the broader campaign timeline.

Conclusion

I hope that this little scheme to take over the Library cafe was helpful, and I look forward to hearing of the campaigns progress. Win or lose, embarking on this journey will positively change the Concordia campus for ever. Don't forget to have fun while doing it!

In Solidarity

-Gabriel Velasco.