

**Université de Montréal**

Parliamentary Panel on Antisemitism

Submission from the Université de Montréal

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TRANSLATION

The Université de Montréal is at the heart of a multicultural city. 28% of the Island of Montreal's residents are immigrants, or more than one in four. There are 120 cultural communities represented in Greater Montreal. Seventy-five different languages are spoken here. In the Greater Montreal area, almost 20% of the population are immigrants.<sup>1</sup> The Université de Montréal is a unique magnet for students and academics from everywhere in the world.

The Université de Montréal has been ranked among the 100 best universities in the world. It is also one of the major universities in the French-speaking world. With its North American roots and its international vocation, it welcomes 10% of its students from outside Canada. Students from 187 countries are enrolled here, principally from Europe (52%) and Africa (28%). Their presence helps to spark wide-ranging discussion, broaden experiences and enrich the education of all our students.

As an institution of higher learning, and a key cultural player in a pluralist society, the Université de Montréal invites members of its community to share a concept of citizenship that values active and informed participation by all citizens. In so doing, the university contributes to the achievement of equity and equality in our society.

As an educational community, the university wants its members to be aware of their social responsibilities and reminds them that debate is the backbone of democratic life. It wants to make them aware of difference, and of the importance of rejecting discriminatory or racist attitudes, and it seeks to develop informed socialization within the framework of a democratic society.

Our institution has developed an acute sensitivity to violent speech and incitement to hatred, having been the target 20 years ago of a murderous attack against women. This tragedy left 14 dead and caused the Parliament of Canada in 1991 to declare December 6 the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. The university community's awareness

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<sup>1</sup> *Choisir... la vitalité et la diversité culturelle* (on line)

[http://www.cmm.qc.ca/documents/publications/choisirMtl/VitaliteDiversiteCulturelle\\_fr.pdf](http://www.cmm.qc.ca/documents/publications/choisirMtl/VitaliteDiversiteCulturelle_fr.pdf) (consulted December 7, 2009)

of the need to adopt behaviours and attitudes, both personal and corporate, that are respectful and egalitarian is a value fundamental to the achievement of our mission.

It was therefore important for us to participate in the work of the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Antisemitism (CPCCA). We followed closely the consultations on cultural diversity carried out by the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices related to Cultural Differences (also known as the Bouchard-Taylor Commission after its co-chairs, Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor). We know how vulnerable our social fabric is and how important it is for us to continue working to increase awareness.

We exercise the greatest possible vigilance, because we do not consider that we are any more sheltered than other institutions of higher learning in Canada. Recognizing its responsibility for creating an environment where its teaching and research mission can be achieved, our university has made a commitment to promote an atmosphere that encourages mutual respect on the part of all members of the university community. This goal, which is linked to increasing the awareness of individuals and bodies, must be sought with full respect for the prerogatives of those individuals and bodies, for academic freedom and for freedom of expression.

At the Université de Montréal, the desire to ensure an atmosphere for study and work free from injustice and discrimination underpins the regulations governing the function and status of our ombudsman, which specify that the intent of his intervention is to bring about the rectification of any injustice or discrimination.

On the disciplinary level, we have regulations governing teaching staff and students that specifically forbid them to attempt to infringe the rights and freedoms of any other member of the university community, by among other things offering violence or making threats (article 3(a)) or harassing any member of the university community on the basis of any of the grounds of discrimination forbidden by Quebec's Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms (article 3(c)). The regulations specify that no one is allowed to behave in a harassing, disruptive or abusive manner, particularly if such behaviour threatens the physical or psychological integrity or the reputation of any person (article 4(a)).

Both our attitude and our action reflect the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance as defined by the United Nations and UNESCO, which stipulates that “Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty, it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace.”<sup>2</sup>

In international disputes and in economic, cultural or social debates, the Université de Montréal has noticed a growing readiness to take offence and a tendency for people to retreat into their particular identity. The tensions resulting from international events appear in a context where there are still traces of cultural, even historical, misapprehension. Outlooks may differ among students, between students and professors, or among members of the faculty.

To improve the welcome and integration that everyone should experience at a university, to achieve harmonious coexistence and promote tolerance, the Université de Montréal hosted a symposium in 1993 entitled “L’adaptation institutionnelle à la réalité pluriethnique”.<sup>3</sup> The then Rector, Gilles Cloutier took the opportunity to say that a strategy for attracting and retaining under-represented clientele must entail a critical examination of the university’s teaching and research, to make sure that these activities adequately reflect the characteristics and needs of a multiethnic society.

In 2002, the Université de Montréal adopted a policy on adapting to cultural diversity. The policy calls for adaptation to pluralism, a campaign against racism and discrimination, equality of opportunity for all and a review of our programs in light of the objectives of cultural diversity. The university conducts an on-going re-evaluation of its teaching, its curriculum and its course content. It is proud of the way in which it is fulfilling its obligation to be sensitive to otherness.

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<sup>2</sup> International Day for Tolerance (on line) <http://www.un.org/en/events/toleranceday/> (consulted December 7, 2009)

<sup>3</sup> Proceedings of the symposium, *L’adaptation institutionnelle à la réalité pluriethnique à l’Université de Montréal*, 1993, p.79

We are able to count on the support of the Centre d'études et de formation en enseignement supérieur [centre for studies and training on university teaching, or CEFES]. The mission of CEFES within the university is to promote and encourage university-level teaching skills. Recognized for its expertise, CEFES is a place for learning, discussion and training that supports our teaching staff in carrying out their role of teaching and guiding students. Under the aegis of the office of the Deputy Rector, Academic Affairs, CEFES acts in close collaboration with the various faculties, units, and educational and student support services. Its whole focus is on making faculty aware of the most appropriate pedagogical approaches both to planning and teaching methods and to student support practices, and of the most appropriate evaluation methods. Through publications, lectures and seminars, CEFES shares ideas on taking diversity into account in teaching and training. In a context where it is important to preserve academic freedom and freedom of expression, CEFES's mandate testifies to the university's willingness to assist its community in developing intercultural best practices in teaching activities.

The Université de Montréal considers that its human resources should reflect the entire Quebec population. We are glad that our access to equality program complies with Quebec's *Act respecting equal access to employment in public bodies* and has been approved by the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse [Quebec's human rights and youth protection commission].

Everywhere on our campus, new initiatives are helping to encourage dialogue and combat ignorance. For example, every year the university presents a cultural diversity award. The award, which is accompanied by \$500, pays tribute to a member of the university community who in his/her work or activities has helped to deepen and promote the values of diversity on campus.

In addition, our student services are keenly attentive to the development of a society open to pluralism. Through (for example) various topical weeks such as Intercultural Week, Antiracism Week and Harassment Prevention Week, the determination to promote diversity's richness is well and truly present here.

Conferences that deal specifically and directly with the issue of diversity are held regularly at various locations on our campus. We promote these values as well in our international relations. The International Forum of Public Universities (IFUP), a 2007 initiative by the Université de Montréal to meet the need for collaboration among public universities all over the world, last summer held its first postgraduate school in Italy; the school, presided over by essayist and novelist Umberto Eco, had cultural diversity as its theme.

The Université de Montréal is fortunate to have many students and professors from a wide range of cultural communities, including many from the Jewish community. We count ourselves lucky to share the university with them, and we applaud the advancement in knowledge that results from their presence.

Over the years, the Université de Montréal has provided prominent leadership on issues involving cultural and linguistic pluralism. Aspects of this issue include the restructuring of the relationships between majority and minorities, the adaptation of educational environments to pluriethnicity, educational programs and policies tailored to culturally heterogeneous populations, heritage languages, the study of the great religious traditions, racism, ethnomusicology and the sociology of ethnicity.

We are pleased to provide accommodation to the Centre d'études ethniques des universités montréalaises [Montreal universities' centre for ethnic studies, or CEETUM], a hub of interdisciplinary research and training in ethnic studies. CEETUM, which is home to the Canada Research Chair in Religious Pluralism and Ethnicity, comprises 34 researchers from the Université de Montréal, HEC Montréal, INRS-Urbanisation, the Université du Québec à Montréal, McGill, Concordia and the Université de Sherbrooke. It publishes the journal *Diversité urbaine*, and hosts numerous activities; recently (Thursday, November 19, 2009), it organized a panel entitled "Les rapports entre les francophones and la communauté juive au Québec : présence de l'antisémitisme aujourd'hui?" [relations between francophones and the Jewish community in Quebec: is there antisemitism today?] The quality of the discussion was

enhanced by the presence and enlightening contributions of members of the Jewish community who have been pondering this question for a long time.

We applaud the initiative of Marie McAndrew, head of CEETUM, and Victor Goldbloom, then President of the Canadian Jewish Congress, who in April 2008 jointly developed a plan<sup>4</sup> to define and implement a research and action program on the role of formal and informal education in promoting relations between Jewish Quebecers and other Quebecers, particularly those of school age; to support the development of research and action partnerships and the organization of joint events between the Research Chair and a variety of organizations within the Jewish community, among them the Association of Jewish Day Schools and the Holocaust Museum; and to support the development of collaboration between the Research Chair and various Israeli research centres interested in immigrant integration, intercultural education and intercommunity relations.

The Université de Montréal is also very proud of its firmly multidisciplinary Centre d'étude des religions [centre for the study of religions, or CÉRUM]. Founded in 2000, CÉRUM has some 80 professors and lecturers from a variety of disciplines and welcomes undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students to its activities: courses, research teams, scientific workshops, publications, symposiums, lectures. Among the disciplines studied at CÉRUM are religious sciences, theology, law, history, philosophy, art history, literature, social sciences, health sciences, music, pure sciences, urban planning and architecture.

Among the Université de Montréal's faculty, we are privileged to benefit from the work of Professor Daniel Mark Weinstock, director since 2002 of the Centre de recherche en éthique de l'Université de Montréal [the university's ethics research centre, or CRÉUM]. CRÉUM's mandate is to promote interdisciplinary research on normative issues related to public policy and

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<sup>4</sup> Les relations entre la communauté juive et les québécois d'autres origines : le rôle de l'éducation (online) [http://www.chereum.umontreal.ca/activites\\_pdf/Projet%20relations%20communaut%C3%A9%20juive%20et%20qu%C3%A9bécois%20d'autres%20origines%20mai%202009.pdf](http://www.chereum.umontreal.ca/activites_pdf/Projet%20relations%20communaut%C3%A9%20juive%20et%20qu%C3%A9bécois%20d'autres%20origines%20mai%202009.pdf) (consulted November 26, 2009)

professional practice in areas such as law, medicine, teaching and business. Professor Weinstock also chairs Quebec's Comité d'éthique de la santé publique [public health ethics committee]. In 2007, he worked with the Bouchard-Taylor Commission.

Our faculty of theology and religious sciences, too, is very mobilized around issues involving cultural differences. In 2007, it prepared a brief for the Bouchard-Taylor Commission entitled "Accueillir la diversité religieuse dans une laïcité ouverte" [making a place for religious diversity in an open secular society].<sup>5</sup> The authors, who included the then Dean, Jean Duhaime, recalled in the brief that it is vital to promote dialogue and mediation not only between individuals but also with groups in the community. In its conclusion, the brief emphasized that what is at stake is not so much solving a problem as welcoming, without exclusion or discrimination, the resources and energies of everyone who wants to be part of building the generous, new and democratic society growing today on Quebec soil, and channelling those resources and energies into the collective well-being.

Our multicultural and multifaith university welcomes diversity, adapts to it and is being enriched by it, under various aspects of our mandate: as a place for training and research through knowledge development, as an employer and as a living environment. The university works with the members of its community to develop genuine cultural diversity and respect. The list of the expertise being developed at the Université de Montréal could be prolonged, but what we wanted to do was highlight a few of the contributions that confirm we are willing to match words with deeds.

For many years now, the Canadian government has been voicing its desire to combat all forms of racism and seeking to introduce the best strategies for guaranteeing a society that will be ever more inclusive and more egalitarian.

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<sup>5</sup> Pour une «laïcité ouverte», FORUM, November 19, 2007 (online)

<http://www.nouvelles.umontreal.ca/archives/2007-2008/content/view/650/311/index.html> (consulted November 26, 2009)

The Université de Montréal regards this mission as congruent with its own responsibilities. The university has a duty to analyze, understand and resolve the complex problems faced by a multicultural society, and to shape students who will be able to contribute to this process. Society expects us to be an active partner in social and economic progress. The Université de Montréal reiterates its support for this initiative by the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism and its President, MP Scott Reid. We also want to assure you that if the Inquiry Panel chaired by MP Mario Silva develops an action plan, the Université de Montréal would be happy to be one of your most committed partners.