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UNIVERSITY STAFF FOCUS ON INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Representatives from 25 different Quebec and Ontario post-secondary institutions gathered at Concordia in late April to discuss the challenges facing international students.

As hosts of the annual meeting of the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), Concordia chose intercultural relations as the theme for the day-long seminar. Delegates were invited to share tips and strategies for recruiting international students and making things easier when they arrive on campus.



▲ Jacques Proulx had delegates connecting through playing cards.

“We really wanted the event to be hands-on, instead of lecture-based,” said Kelly Collins, Coordinator of the International Students Office, who helped organize the event, held on the seventh floor of the Hall Building.

Dozens of student counsellors, administrators, recruitment officers, and student services representatives spent the day exchanging ideas with a number of experts.

The morning session featured Jacques Proulx, a professor from the Université de Sherbrooke, with expertise in psychology and intercultural relations, who William Cheaib, Director of Concordia International, invited to the event. Proulx invited guests to experience firsthand, culture shock and cultural awareness through a series of dynamic activities.

Equipping everyone with playing cards, he urged them to connect with others in the room, and then discussed how nearly everyone automatically tried to meet others with the same suit or number. “People connect with those who are similar,” Proulx remarked, describing the scene in almost any lunchroom in the country. “Everyone searches for the common resemblances, not the differences.”

The afternoon session featured a panel of five students discussing some of their experiences either as new students to Canada, or as exchange students abroad.

One student described arriving from Guinea in the middle of a winter snowstorm.

“We all speak with students from all over on a daily basis,” said Collins. “But we don’t always get the chance to listen to their stories.”

Students also talked about the culture shock they experienced travelling. Many noted that knowing ‘the language’ may not prepare you for the way it is spoken at your destination. A Quebecois student described the linguistic challenges he experienced the first three months in Switzerland.

Another student described confusion at seeing people in Buenos Aires give the bus driver candy when they boarded. Turned out that it is common practice in Buenos Aires to provide change in candy at local corner stores. This ‘currency’ is good for bus fare. It was only talking with locals that helped the student understand what was going on.

Organizers took advantage of the event to schedule Forum d’échange sur les étudiants étrangers the day before the CBIE conference which brought Quebec and Canadian Government as well as Ministère de l’Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport representatives to the university campus.

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