A City for Students

Ailiki Tryphonopoulos

It is hard to think of a city more exhilarating for a student to live in than Montreal. Where else can you hear a conversation shift between two or even three languages with ease and playfulness at the local coffee shop? Cosmopolitan and cultured, la belle ville is unique in North America for its intersection of two historically established language groups with a large and growing immigrant population. Montrealers have translated this rich cultural diversity into a vibrant civic life with world-renowned festivals, a well-established art scene, lively café culture, and acclaimed international cuisine and fashion. Few cities in the world offer the affordable living, student amenities, and cultural dynamism that Montreal does.

Long-standing socioeconomic factors make Montreal an affordable city for students—no small consideration given that Canadian undergraduate tuition has risen by 111 percent since 1990 (“Bottom Line,” 2004). Naysayers point out that although Quebec has the lowest tuition rates in Canada (frozen since 1994), out-of-province students must pay roughly twice as much as Quebec residents, placing them in the higher bracket of national tuition payers. Some students get around this disadvantage by working and taking part-time classes for a year in order to qualify for the in-province tuition rates. For those who are required to pay the higher rates, however, the financial burden is more than offset by the relatively low cost of rental housing in Montreal (Canada Mortgage, 2004, table 2). One of the best ways for students to economize is by living close to the university. Montreal is a walking city, so it is possible for students to conduct all of their business within a five-block radius.

Pedestrian-friendly urban planning plays a large part in Montreal’s reputation as a festival city that hosts over 40 events annually. In the sultry summer months, streets shut down for the Jazz Festival, the Montreal Grand Prix, and Just for Laughs, while the Fête des Neiges and the Montreal High Lights Festival provide outdoor activities and culinary delights in the winter. Students find plenty of ways to keep active—cycling, jogging, skating, skiing, dancing and drumming at Montreal’s sexy Tam-Tams in Mount Royal Park—and gain an appreciation of the city’s vibrant...
arts scene, from the numerous galleries in Old Montreal to fine art cinemas such as Cinema du Parc and Ex-Centris. Students can argue the merits of the latest Denys Arcand film in one of the many cafés along St. Denis frequented by their compatriots from Concordia, McGill, Université de Montréal, and Université du Québec à Montréal. As for ambience, the eclectic mix of old European limestone mansions and North American glass towers lends this oldest of Canadian cities a unique architectural allure.

Montreal’s cultural dynamism, whose historic roots draw comparisons to such international cities as Barcelona and Brussels, is not only the city’s most attractive attribute, but sadly, what scares many students away. Bill 101, meant to protect the French language in Quebec, contributed to the exodus of nonfrancophones from Montreal during the 1980s and 1990s. That trend is slowly reversing (DeWolf, 2003). A recent study reveals what Montrealers already know: the unique interaction of francophone, anglophone, and allophone (languages other than French or English) cultures in Montreal is characterized by mutual respect, accommodation, and even a sense of fun (Lamarre, 2002). Students can absorb and appreciate the international flavour of the various boroughs and contribute to the daily cultural exchange. With the city’s high rates of bilingualism and trilingualism, anglophone students do not need to know French in order to function, but their social and cultural life will be far richer if they do. And what better place to learn la langue française than in the second-largest French-speaking city in the world!

Education is as much about what goes on outside the classroom as in it. Those students who are willing to embrace Montreal’s vibrant cultural milieu will find their worldviews challenged and broadened. In a global environment fraught with the dangers of intercultural miscommunication and ignorance, that kind of education is vital.

REFERENCES


NOTES AND DEFINITIONS

This is a model student essay with APA (American Psychology Association) documentation style, which is the style used for social sciences.

STRUCTURE AND TECHNIQUE

This short research essay has the basic five-paragraph structure taught in essay-writing courses. It has a one-paragraph introduction with thesis statement, three developed body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Each body paragraph starts with a clear topic sentence giving the main idea of the paragraph. This essay shows how research is incorporated in the writing. It also uses both persuasion and description.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. Would you like to live in Montreal? Why or why not? Did this essay persuade you of the merits of the city?
2. How important is it for English-speaking Canadians to learn French? Were you satisfied with the French instruction you had in school? Why or why not? Is French a good second language to have, or would students be better off learning Mandarin, Arabic, Japanese, or some other language?
3. Where would you prefer to live as a student? On campus or off campus? In a big city or a small town? Discuss the pros and cons of different living arrangements.
4. What makes your city or town a good place to live?
5. What would you consider as student-friendly in a city? Do not list. Explain your points adequately.