CCE Centre for Continuing Education
McGill
THE BRIDGE
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LIFELONG LEARNING AT McGill

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

Giving credits where they're due

Giving credits where they're due – that's Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) in a nutshell. In Canada and elsewhere, PLAR is also known as Recognition of Prior Learning or RPL, Accreditation and Recognition of Prior Experience and Learning or A/RP(E)L, and *Reconnaissance des acquis et des compétences* or RAC, among other names and acronyms. Whatever it's called, and wherever it's implemented, the PLAR objectives are the same – to assess and recognize knowledge, skills and abilities that adult learners and other students have gained through on-the-job learning, volunteer work and other non-formal means. In the university setting, credits are typically assigned following assessment using tools such as exams, portfolio reviews, interviews, simulations, or some combination of these.

While PLAR has caught on in France, Australia and other countries – and to some extent within Canada too – it's not on everyone's radar screen, according to Dr. Judith Potter, Dean of Continuing Education (CCE). Potter, who was involved with PLAR efforts at the University of New Brunswick, points out that it offers potential opportunities for McGill, and especially for the CCE, given its relevance to adult education.

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PHOTO BY: Toby Goodfellow

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CCE's new program for CGA candidates

Strength of new accounting program is blend of student backgrounds

"What do the numbers mean? When I am using the services of professional advisors, I need to be able to understand the reasons behind their advice," says Messaoud Abda. Mr. Abda is a member of the Ordre des CGA du Québec (Certified General Accountants). He was recently hired by the Centre for Continuing Education to help develop and teach some of the courses for McGill's new Graduate Certificate in Accounting Practice. While there are similar programs in other Quebec universities, McGill graduates will be able to fill current market demand for bilingual expertise.

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MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

Dr. Judith Potter
Dean of Continuing Education

Learning, Re-positioning, Re-inventing

A true spring highlight in any university community is the celebration of convocation, and, as I write this message for the Spring Edition of the McGill Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) newsletter, I am very much looking forward to participating in my first Spring Convocation at McGill. The formalities of gowns, ceremonies, and speeches are important elements, to be sure, but the recognition of our graduates and their achievements is the central theme. CCE graduates are largely working adults who manage multiple priorities, and the completion of a challenging program of study is a wonderful achievement to be celebrated and treasured.

So to those readers who form part of the McGill 2009 Graduating Class, the CCE academic and administrative staff join me in extending our warmest congratulations! We hope that you will stay connected to CCE through our alumni activities—and that CCE will be your first choice as you continue to learn and explore.

When I joined McGill and CCE last fall, I embarked on another immensely rewarding phase in my own learning journey. Likewise, CCE is in the process of reinventing itself – as a truly client-centred entity with a mission to meet the professional, cultural and personal development learning needs of a rapidly changing society. We are currently in a consultative and deeply reflective stage, as we strive to reposition continuing education at McGill. This summer, we will release our Strategic Directions document, outlining strategies and metrics that will take us closer to our goals. This is truly an exciting time in our development! As community engagement is fundamental to our purpose, I welcome your input in our reinvigoration process.

My warmest thanks to the many individuals who have contributed to this edition of The Bridge. Please read, enjoy and send us your comments.

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Front page INSIDE section second photo:
Montreal Mayor Gérald Tremblay thanks Translation lecturer Dr. Daniel Zamorano. See page 4.

THE **BRIDGE**

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CMYK

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

Giving credits where they're due

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"The PLAR process does not award credits for experience itself, but rather, for the relevant learning gained from that experience," says Potter.

Benefits adult learners, schools, and society

"Greater emphasis on PLAR implementation within the university setting would greatly benefit adult learners," adds Joy Van Kleef, CEO, Canadian Institute for Recognizing Learning (CIRL). For instance, academic credits for knowledge already gained elsewhere can help to eliminate duplication of educational efforts – good news for students and schools alike. Plus, recognition for knowledge gained through experience can be a particularly encouraging confidence booster for adult learners. That in turn makes it a useful recruitment tool for adult-learning programs.

Capitalizing on the "brain gain"

"PLAR can also help Canada to capitalize on the talents of newcomers to this country – by filling skills gaps, and enabling businesses to pursue opportunities in Ontario and abroad," says Martha Ireland, Program Manager, Prior Learning and Competency Evaluation and Documentation (PLACED) in The G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education at Ryerson University, in Toronto. PLACED, funded by the Ontario government, is part of Ryerson's Gateway for International Professionals program. The PLACED program works with internationally educated professionals (IEPs), employers, occupational and regulatory bodies, professional associations, universities, subject matter experts and PLAR assessors to assess, validate and document prior learning and current competency. "We help people to transfer knowledge and skills acquired overseas to the Canadian context," adds Ireland. "PLAR helps them to demonstrate their knowledge and capabilities."

PLAR is very much alive in Manitoba too – although it's commonly referred to as RPL in that province. "At Red River College of Applied Arts, Science and Technology, some administrative positions are devoted exclusively to PLAR," says Deb Blower, PLAR/RPL Facilitator. "In addition to the RPL Facilitator position, we have an RPL Advisor in our Student Services Centre."

In 2007-2008, Red River College conducted approximately 800 PLAR assessments in over 55 College programs, such as early childhood education, civil engineering technology, and many other fields of study. The PLAR commitment runs deep here – the college's 10-course Certificate in Adult Education (CAE), mandatory for all faculty members, includes a built-in PLAR/RPL process. The college trains PLAR advisors, assessors and trainer/coordinators from other colleges and universities, too. More than 550 participants from across Canada and around the world have completed Red River's RPL Foundation course. The college also works with local businesses such as Manitoba Hydro to develop and implement RPL efforts.

Blower also sits on the board of directors of the Canadian Association for Prior Learning (CAPLA). This national practitioner association is Canada's leader in PLAR/RPL-related resource development and research.

First step for McGill – awareness

"PLAR awareness is a great first step at McGill," says Potter. "We need to develop a clear policy for the university, especially for our Continuing Education programs with their adult-learner-oriented offerings. The policy must be appropriate for McGill and fair for our learners as well."

A PLAR TO-DO LIST

According to Joy Van Kleef, PLAR awareness is up at universities. However, there is still a need for increased understanding that this is an academically sound and credible process – as well as for greater interaction involving senior-level university representatives and Canadian ministers of education on the PLAR front.

While 10 Canadian universities do have PLAR policies, this does not automatically mean implementation. Contrast this with France, where all institutions including universities must provide PLAR, and entire degrees can be obtained through PLAR; and with Australia, where all registered training organizations must provide PLAR.

Van Kleef's action steps for successful PLAR implementation in Canada:

1. Establish clear policies and procedures governing PLAR processes (including PLAR assessment data collection)
2. Develop assessment tools that are aligned with adult teaching theory and practice
3. Train faculty
4. Support faculty
5. Ensure clarity and transparency for candidates

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McGill in the community and the world:

Spanish Translation students translate Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities

McGill's distinguished history of promoting and protecting human rights harks back to law professor, John Peters Humphrey, author of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Over the years, not only academic staff, but students as well, have become involved in meaningful ways. A recent case in point: Spanish Translation 3 students, who banded together as "student citizens" to translate the Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities into Spanish.

The Montreal Charter, adopted in 2005, has been hailed by UNESCO as a model. It spells out the fundamental values of respect for human dignity, equality, inclusiveness, tolerance and justice. The Charter also details a number of responsibilities, including exercising the right to vote, keeping the city clean, respecting laws, bylaws and the public good, and respecting the rights of others.

The Spanish translation was prepared under the direction of Dr. Daniel Zamorano, who was named a distinguished teacher at the 2009 Spring Convocation, and coordinated for the city by Michèle Bernier, International Affairs Advisor, and a student in Zamorano's class.

PHOTO BY: Éric Bloré, Ville de Montréal

The team that translated the Montreal Charter into Spanish: From left to right ***Kneeling:*** Ricardo Varsi, Bernard Vaillancourt, Ricardo Bello ***Front row:*** Elena Negron, Michèle Bernier, Ariana Almaraz, Dr. James Archibald, Mayor Tremblay, Eva Laverne, Mélanie Menjivar, Raquel Dulevich, Brigitte Pioro, Simonetta Mulatero ***Back row:*** Ricardo Restrepo, Suzan l'Heureux, Catherine Sévigny (City councillor responsible for cultural affairs), Dr.Daniel Zamorano, Jules Patenaude (advisor in public consultation) ***Not pictured:*** Gaétan Carbonneau, Martina Denis, Constance Girard, Véronic Morin, Gretzel Moya, Oleh Replanski, Elisa Riveiro

"Light bulb moment" leads to student involvement

The idea was one of those "light bulb" moments, Bernier recalls. Jules Patenaude of the City of Montreal, public consultation coordinator in the *Bureau des relations gouvernementales*, received an e-mail from someone in Argentina inquiring whether there was a Spanish version of the Charter. "I offered to talk to Dr. Zamorano, and he immediately agreed to take it on."

The twenty-plus students in Spanish Translation 3 took on the translation as a class project and worked on it for two months. There was a lot of back and forth, says Bernier. "Some terms, such as '*milieu de vie*,' aren't necessarily clear. Sometimes we had to work from both the French and English versions of the Charter."

Signing the Mayor's Golden Book

Revision was a lengthy process, with the final imprimaturs coming from Zamorano and Patenaude. Last December the students, Zamorano, and James Archibald, Director of the Department of Translation Studies, were invited to attend a reception and sign the Livre d'or at City Hall.

The existence of the Charter in languages other than French (the official version) clearly underscores the multicultural nature of this city and its openness to cultural communities. CCE students have played an instrumental role in turning that idea into reality, notes Archibald.

Once more – in Arabic!

Montreal Mayor Gérald Tremblay is "thrilled" with the translation, Bernier reports. So much so that another version is on the drawing board – this time in Arabic. Once again, McGill translation students will be involved – "projecting a sense of what a translator can do in society, especially in this multicultural city," says Archibald with obvious pride.

The Charter and translation may be found on the City's website: http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=3016,37021558&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

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PHOTO BY: Lorna Lytle

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Résumé

Les étudiants du cours de Traduction espagnole 3 donné par M. Daniel Zamorano ont récemment traduit en espagnol la Charte montréalaise des droits et responsabilités. Cette charte, promulguée en 2005, a été qualifiée de véritable modèle par l'UNESCO. « L'engagement actif des étudiants illustre ce qu'un traducteur peut aujourd'hui accomplir dans la société, signale James Archibald, directeur – Unité de formation en traduction, plus particulièrement au sein d'une ville aussi multiculturelle que la nôtre. »

Rappelons que le projet avait été suggéré par Michèle Bernier, conseillère –Affaires internationales à la Ville de Montréal, elle-même membre du groupe ayant participé à la traduction. Le maire de Montréal, Gérald Tremblay, a convié les étudiants ainsi que MM. Zamorano et Archibald à une réception et à la signature du Livre d'or à l'Hôtel de Ville. Il s'est dit emballé par la traduction, affirme Mme Bernier. On prévoit d'ailleurs la publication d'une autre Charte, en arabe cette fois-ci. Une fois de plus, les étudiants de McGill auront un rôle important à jouer dans cette réalisation.

Resumen

Recientemente, los estudiantes de la clase de Traducción al Español III del Dr. Zamorano tradujeron al español la Carta de Derechos y Responsabilidades de Montreal. La Carta de Montreal, aprobada en 2005, fue aclamada por la Unesco como modelo en su género. La implicación de los estudiantes -señaló James Archibald, Director del Departamento de Traducción- proyecta "una parte de lo que un traductor puede hacer en la sociedad, especialmente en una ciudad multicultural como ésta."

El proyecto fue sugerido por Michèle Bernier, Asesora en Asuntos Internacionales de la Municipalidad de Montreal, y miembro del grupo de estudiantes del profesor Zamorano que realizó la traducción. El alcalde de Montreal, señor Gérald Tremblay, invitó a los estudiantes, al Dr. Zamorano y al Dr. Archibald al Ayuntamiento para una recepción en la que tuvo lugar la ceremonia de firma del Libro de Oro de la Ciudad. "El alcalde está encantado con la traducción - informó Bernier - tanto es así que se planea otra versión de la Carta, esta vez en árabe." Y los estudiantes de traducción de McGill nuevamente jugarán un papel decisivo en este proceso.

"Urgency and reality really fired up the students"
Public relations students respond to a community in need

PHOTO BY: Lorna Lyttle

One of five public relations student teams who presented a communication plan to Common Sense Crossings. (left to right): Jillian Ruiz, Claudia Riendeau-Boucher, Nathalie Scott and Isabelle Grégoire.

Twenty students in the final course of their public relations program put their skills to use last March when they came to the aid of a real client on short notice.

Common Sense Crossings (CSC - www.commonsensecrossings.com) an organization of Ottawa residents, approached the lecturer, Elizabeth Hirst, when they needed a communication plan. A bridge slated to be built elsewhere suddenly threatened to turn up in the middle of Ottawa's popular Greenbelt near their Orléans neighbourhood. Despite lots of local talent and ideas, the group needed assistance in pulling their media/government/community relations strategy together.

Their cry for help was heard by Stephanie Lyttle, a McGill public relations graduate and now a consultant at NATIONAL Public Relations, whose family is affected by the plan. Recognizing a great opportunity, she tipped off her former instructor.

The case was complex and challenging," recalls Hirst, "and the urgency and reality of the situation really fired up the students." The clients visited on two occasions and a third, inter-city meeting was led via skype by Louis Caron, founder of CSC.

"We were impressed with your presentations and the wealth of ideas that you offered us," wrote Alexa Brewer and Lorna Lyttle of Common Sense Crossings. "We have already held our first event, a great success. Many local politicians attended and we had over 150 people sign up for membership in our group. . . . many more of your ideas will be implemented as time goes by."

"Public relations students are known for wanting to make a difference," says Hirst. "This group certainly got their wish!"

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CCE's new program for CGA candidates

Strength of new accounting program is blend of student backgrounds

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Offered through the Department of Career and Management Studies (CMS) since January 2008, the program aims to turn out graduates who are able to provide their employers and clients with more than just accounting and financial reports, explains Larry Goldsman, Accounting Liaison Officer for CMS. "They must also be able to analyze and interpret the numbers – and understand the relevant business and management issues in order to provide appropriate advice."

Preparing to pass the CGA exams

Students need to complete a program like McGill's before obtaining their CGA designation. But that's only part of the process. After being accepted as candidates by the professional order, and taking university courses to complete their knowledge, students must then pass additional exams administered by the Ordre des CGA. (In CGA terms, these exams are known as PA1 and PA2.) They must demonstrate competency in four key "quadrants": accounting, audit, finance and taxation.

"We observed that most of the failures in the exams were occurring, not because the candidates weren't good enough," Abda says, "but because they were not prepared to structure their answers in a professional way: short, concise, to the point, with the right level of detail, and adapted to the audience."

Larry Goldsman adds: "McGill's program was developed to address these weaknesses – to provide students with a solid base and ensure that CGA candidates are able to see both the overall picture and the details."

Saying it in one page

"Through our lengthy experience at the CGA," explains Abda, "we've observed that in general candidates are able to calculate easily, but when it comes to explaining the situation and making recommendations to a Board of Directors for example, they have difficulty expressing the essentials concisely, whether verbally or in writing. Clients don't need a 50-page analysis; they need one page with a professional opinion. We're building professionals who can deal with that need."

Facing ethical dilemmas

In addition to courses in the four professional quadrants, students are exposed to issues which raise questions of ethics and integrity through a required corporate governance course.

"Students may have some knowledge of corporate governance," Abda notes, "but they have not dealt with it in practice. We need to make sure our graduates can answer two basic questions: 'Do you know what to do when faced with ethical dilemmas?' and 'Can you manage them?'"

Strength in diversity

The challenges of the program lie in the diverse academic and professional backgrounds of the students. However, notes Abda, this is also its strength, one that is directly drawn from the CGA.

PHOTO BY: Toby Goodfellow

Messaoud Abda

"The CGA deliberately opens itself up to a variety of sectors. There is a transferability of skills found in varying backgrounds, and every sector – whether it be financial, healthcare, accounting practice, engineering or government institutions – needs skilled professionals. The more you mix origin, expertise and sectors, the stronger the program becomes." Citing certification of RCMP officers, members of the Canadian Armed Forces, city managers and municipal employees, he adds, "the idea is that certification through the CGA is open not to just anyone, but to everyone."

For more information on the Graduate Certificate in Accounting Practice, go to http://www.mcgill.ca/conted-cms/programs/grad/accounting/gradcert/.

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GRAD PROFILE

PHOTO BY: Howard Kay

Len Lewkowict

LEN LEWKOWICT: Combining the cerebral with the entrepreneurial

"It was 1987. I had just finished my honours psychology degree at Western; my thesis was on behaviour in the courtroom and I had plans to do a joint Law-PhD program. At the same time, I was running a summer camp. The father of one of the other counsellors, who was a professor at McGill, noting my style and interests, suggested I talk to James Archibald, who was then the director of McGill's Diploma in Management.

That step proved a pivotal point for Len Lewkowict.

"It changed my life. I got to understand business in a way I never had before. Not only was the course content amazing, I got work opportunities through my professors."

A few weeks into the program, Lewkowict got a paid internship at VIA Rail through Dr. Archibald. This was followed by an opportunity to do some consulting work at Coopers & Lybrand.

"Consulting was a perfect fit for me – combining the academic/cerebral side with the business and entrepreneurial side." Lewkowict took only a year to complete his studies, and on graduation in 1988, he was hired on at C & L full-time.

Diploma program good base for MBA studies

A few years later, Lewkowict followed up his McGill Management Diploma with a MBA at the specialized Theseus International Management Institute in France, an institution created to train managers to fuel the innovation process. "I was well prepared for it, because I was equipped with all the fundamentals I got at McGill," he recalls.

Lewkowict's work now consists of investing in, and building, business start-ups. His firm, ML Partners, cultivates and makes connections for innovative new businesses, handling such areas as funding, incubating, and cultivating – what he calls "the deal flow".

Uses what he learned every day

Does he still use what he learned at McGill? "Every day. It was a phenomenal program. I'm still using what I learned in psychology, too, but it's the fundamentals I learned at McGill that are so important."

Lewkowict's work, as well as his studies, have involved very long hours, but home life is important to him. He values his close involvement in the lives of his wife and three children, now aged 8, 11 and 13, whom he credits with being very supportive about the travel required to support his ventures.

Lewkowict smiles when he talks about his career that started with McGill's Diploma in Management: "I love it, but it's not for the faint of heart because of the uncertainty. We've had failures, and they're not fun. But there is the great excitement of starting something from scratch and watching it grow into something successful."

"I got to understand business in a way I never had before."

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New CMS Director brings unique adult learning expertise

PHOTO BY: Toby Goodfellow

Carmen Sicilia

Carmen Sicilia joined the CCE as Director of Career and Management Studies in May. In addition to a background in human resource management, Ms. Sicilia has private sector experience in the field of adult learning as a former Director of Delta College. She is currently completing a doctorate in educational psychology at McGill with a focus on change management. She also holds a Master's in Education Psychology (McGill) and a baccalaureate in Psychology and Applied Sciences (Concordia).

In introducing the new CMS Director, Dean Judith Potter spoke about her role: "Carmen will be working collaboratively with McGill Faculties and business and professional leaders to extend the intellectual resources of McGill to the broader community.

"She has a unique combination of education and experience that has prepared her for the role of leading and re-energizing the largest department in the Centre," Potter continued, "including a passion for adult learners and learning. She will bring tremendous assets to CMS and to the leadership team of CCE."

Adjunct Professor Suissa "motivated me to do better"

Dr. Zina Suissa, an Adjunct Professor at the CCE, received the Award for Distinguished Teaching at the May 25 Continuing Education convocation. Dr. Suissa has been teaching at McGill for 15 years, in the MBA program and in the Centre's Department of Career and Management Studies. Her courses have included Introduction to Organizational Behaviour, Managing Organizational Teams and Social Psychology.

In his introduction at the ceremony, Dr. Alfred Jaeger noted, "She brings to her work a familiarity with adult learning which comes from both sides of the lectern, as she herself returned to university to do her PhD more than 10 years after completing her Bachelor's and Master's degrees. She was also awarded an FCAR grant for her doctoral research. The best accolades for Zina come, however, from her students' comments and they ring true to those who know her: '. . . she motivated me to do better;' '. . . she clearly loves to teach;' '...she really cares about her students and it shows;' '. . . she is a fun person and makes it fun to learn;' '. . . including my undergrad – the best instructor I have had at McGill'".

"I am honoured to win the Distinguished Teaching Award," said Suissa on learning of it. "I love teaching and I am pleased to know that I have made a difference in so many students' lives, inspiring them to engage in the learning process. I believe in an interactive process in the classroom setting, which in an adult environment such as the CCE, provides for a mutual process of respect, understanding and communication."

PHOTO BY: Toby Goodfellow

Dr. Zina Suissa

The Business of Communication

Dr. James Archibald, Director of Translation Studies, was recently awarded the Francis W. Weeks Award of Merit by the Association for Business Communication (ABC). The Francis W. Weeks Award of Merit acknowledges contributions to the profession and recognizes outstanding advancement in the discipline of business communication through a singular accomplishment or a series of accomplishments. The Association for Business Communication (ABC) is an international organization committed to fostering excellence in business communication scholarship, research, education, and practice.

PHOTO BY: Scott Inniss

Dr. James Archibald

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