

Concordia: Engaged in Innovation and Agent of Social Change

Notes for a Presentation by Dr. Claude Lajeunesse
President, Concordia University
to the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal
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Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

Thank you for offering me the opportunity to address this prestigious forum. It's a great pleasure and an honour for me to speak to you this morning. When I returned to Montreal six months ago after being away for a number of years, I made it one of my top priorities to meet representatives of the Board of Trade and to learn about its activities. I must say that I am very impressed with your vision, your leadership and your dynamism. Your president, Isabelle Hudon, personifies this energy and your savoir-faire. I also appreciate her thoughtfulness in calling me this morning to wish me good luck.

Your recent *Study on Private Financing of Culture* combines a sophisticated understanding of what makes Montreal unique, with a wealth of practical steps for moving forward. That's hands-on leadership with intellectual credibility, and I congratulate the Board of Trade for it. It is also an area where Concordia has made

a strong contribution, in support of Mayor Tremblay's push to establish Montreal as a world cultural capital—something we can all support.

It's obvious that Montreal is going through a period of growth that presents enormous potential—in part thanks to you all. You embody our community's great strengths, and I know you care a great deal about the future of our city. That is why I want to talk to you today about the role Concordia intends to play in the successful development of our city and our province.

Montreal's university sector contributes enormously to the city's economic, intellectual and cultural life. Professor Fernand Martin, of l'Université de Montréal, estimates the impact of the city's universities and research institutes at nearly \$6 billion a year, including the creation of 65,000 jobs!

I am very proud of Concordia's performance as a major player in this sector. In academic year 2005-2006, we have had 38,685 students pass through Concordia's doors in the credit stream, while Continuing Education has served 5,370 students. This means that more than one in five of Montreal's university students are attending Concordia.

The last few years have challenged our capacity to adapt, as we have been growing faster than any other Quebec university. This reflects the widespread recognition that cultural diversity and knowledge are the very drivers of growth. In the last eight years, our total number of our students has risen by 41%, but over the same period, our international student body has grown by 275%!

Our university provides a stimulating environment of diversity, well-equipped to address the big issues that society must confront, and to propose appropriate solutions. I am passionate about Concordia, but what I find most attractive about it is the fact that it is **engaged**: it is a university engaged with its community. It is active and present, using its influence to make a positive difference in outcomes. The university engaged with its community anticipates events and needs. It mobilizes the forces around it, in synergy with its own resources, to serve society in a proactive way. Concordia always has been, is now, and always will be engaged with its community.

While Concordia itself has only existed for thirty years, its traditions go back to the 19th century. Whether it was the Jesuits, who founded Loyola College in 1896 to serve the English Catholic community, or the YMCA, which was the first to offer

night courses to young workers in 1873, our founders always sought to understand the needs of the community, and to meet those needs as best they could.

Building on this rich heritage, Concordia is also integral to Montreal's future as a city of knowledge, technology and innovation. Our university is becoming an important agent of change, well worth getting to know.

First, let us talk about its impact on the urban fabric of Montreal. If you spend any time downtown, you have probably noticed the progressive changes to our Sir George Williams Campus. For example, our new Engineering, Computer Science and Visual Arts Complex is a spectacular addition. If you have walked along McKay Street, or Ste-Catherine west-bound, you cannot have missed the magnificent glass mural which stretches over 6,000 square feet of the building's eastern facade. The mural, by former Concordia student Nicholas Baier, is the single largest work of art every created under Quebec's "One per cent Program".

Concordia is in the process of revitalizing the long-neglected western part of downtown, to be known as Quartier Concordia: a dynamic new area of economic, social and cultural activity in the

heart of the city. It will be a wonderful environment for stimulating exchanges and innovation, a meeting place for education, research and leading-edge entrepreneurship.

Quartier Concordia is an ambitious and transformational project, already well under way. In addition to building a new home for the John Molson School of Business on the southwest corner of Guy and de Maisonneuve, it encompasses the revitalization of the Motherhouse of the Grey Nuns. This late 19th-century architectural jewel originally served to expand and continue the work of Marguerite d'Youville, the remarkable woman who founded the Grey Nuns more than 250 years ago.

In addition to Quartier Concordia downtown, we have also been expanding our beautiful Loyola campus in the west end of the city. If you have not been there for awhile, I urge you to go: you will be blown away by the scale and the quality of transformation. For example, as our faculty and students will tell you, the Richard J. Renaud Science Complex is an extraordinary, state-of-the-art centre for learning and research. At 33,000 square metres, it is a model of beautiful and environmentally sound architecture, which has already won several major prizes. The \$20 million renovation of the Drummond Building provides our communications and

journalism students with access to cutting-edge studios. Of course, having these kinds of facilities makes it much easier to recruit excellent students and professors who will, in turn, provide superb teaching and research in the future.

On the Loyola Campus is another example of our commitment to making public art widely accessible: the impressive sculpture *The Emergence of the Chief*, de Dave McGary, a homage to the First Nations.

Concordia continues to evolve. For example, we are in the planning stages of our participation, with other universities, including l'Université de Montréal, in an initiative to establish our presence in the City of Laval as part of la Cité du savoir.

Needless to say, we are very proud of these achievements and projects. But there are less visible things going on behind the walls of our buildings that are no less wonderful.

Since its inception, Concordia has been the place of choice for new Quebecers. Even today, I find the commencement ceremonies particularly moving. There are always parents and relatives whose origins can be traced all over the world, who are there to honour

the first member of their family to obtain a university degree. More than ever, our first-generation graduates are sending their offspring to their alma mater. They are very proud... and so are we.

Concordia is also the port of entry for many international students. They come from 157 countries and speak more than 100 languages other than English and French. This diversity is entirely consistent with the dynamic modern Quebec in which we live. We encourage our students to learn or improve their French, in order to speed their integration into Quebec society, and to maximize their chances of success.

Today's students will have to operate and succeed in a globalized economy. We offer them a combination of recognized and rigorous academic programs, and a rich social experience in a dynamic and diverse environment. What better preparation for their future? It is obvious that this demanding academic environment and window on the world are great assets for our students, for Montreal, for Quebec and for Canada. Our links with 89 sister institutions in 29 countries demonstrate that there is an international appetite for what we have to offer as well.

We have developed strong relationships with the rising stars of the world economy, such as India and China, and our 125,000 alumni give us access to many valuable networks worldwide.

Few people realize how much Concordia has grown. For example, we now have Canada's second-largest school of Engineering, measured by number of students, ranked immediately after the University of Toronto's. At the graduate level, we are the largest. Our Engineering, Computer Science and Visual Arts Building houses more than 1,500 researchers, the largest concentration of engineering researchers in Canada—many of them women.

Concordia is now home to 62 research Chairs and 29 research Centres. At the time of my installation last fall, I committed to bring the number of research Chairs to 100 by the end of my term. To help accomplish this, we will soon have a dedicated Vice-President of Research, whose job will be to expand our research activities by building the networks and relationships we need, raising funds, overseeing knowledge transfers and facilitating the commercialization of our research.

Constant change is not easy, of course—and that's putting it mildly. But the resulting institution is always more vigorous and

dynamic. Rapid growth also enables us to recruit the best professor-researchers, the best staff, and therefore, the best students.

This drive towards excellence is consistent with Concordia's commitment to innovation, in a constantly changing world. It's a matter of initiating, managing, being in the right place at the right time, and acting! We work on creating networks and partnerships that bring together the right elements to advance social change and innovation.

For example, thanks to the generosity of Stephen Jarislowsky, we were recently able to partner with l'École des hautes études commerciales, HEC, to create the Institute for Governance of Private and Public Organizations. It will become a centre of excellence for governance research and training, as well as developing new and effective governance models, not only for publicly traded companies, but also for cooperatives and public-sector organizations. All its activities will take place in both English and French. In a post-Enron era, and in view of the corporate governance scandals in the last few years, I'm sure I won't have to convince you of the relevance of this initiative! We are very proud of this collaboration with the HEC, and of the

recent “best paper” prize won by JMSB Finance Professor Lorne Switzer and his colleague Catherine Kelly at the McMaster World Congress, for their paper titled *Corporate Governance Mechanisms and Small Cap Firm Performance: Evidence for Canada*.

In Aerospace Engineering, we have developed partnerships with Bombardier, Bell Helicopter, CAE Electronics, Canadian Marconi, the Canadian Space Agency, Pratt & Whitney, EMS Technologies, Rolls Royce and others to allow our students to work on real projects within the industry even before they finish their studies. In collaboration with our partners in a remarkable network—l’École polytechnique, l’École de technologie supérieure, Laval, McGill and Sherbrooke—we offer a Joint Masters program in Aerospace Engineering. Each of us brings something unique to the partnership, which helps our economy maintain its leading edge capacity in this strategic industry.

Concordia has always been a pioneer of the interdisciplinary approach—in part because our history afforded us some flexibility in evolving academic traditions. We all know that sometimes, these traditions can get in the way of innovation! In our traditional spirit of pushing boundaries, we chose to put computer engineers

and artists together in the same building, in the expectation that they would stimulate each other with ideas and new tools that would yield enriched results.

One exciting outcome is the creation of an organization called Hexagram. It's a borderless environment for exploration, collaboration and innovation that we created in partnership with UQAM, Cirque du soleil, Radio-Canada, the Daniel Langlois Foundation and many others. L'Université de Montréal and McGill are also represented at the project level.

Hexagram is home to 70 artist-researchers and 350 students who are working hard to make Montreal one of the world's top five cities in media arts. It is a meeting place to link academic research, the arts and the private sector, worldwide. Hexagram is helping us meet the growing demand for qualified talent in this high-potential sector. Think of video/computer games alone, for which the market now exceeds that of traditional film. The artist-researchers at Hexagram are pushing the boundaries of the possible in so many ways: virtual reality, immersive environments, interactive textiles, prototyping and no doubt all kinds of things we haven't even thought about!

This is a true contribution to the future of Montreal.

But innovation is not just about the economy. Concordia also has a long history of social innovation, which is essential to a modern society. It is engaged with its community and with the world.

Through its multiple research activities; through its audacious and generous presence, both physical and social; through the remarkable body of artistic achievement that emanates from it... the university spills over into society, which in turn takes root there, influencing Concordia and taking inspiration from it.

To illustrate: our John Molson School of Business and our Faculty of Arts and Sciences have created dynamic and sensitive partnerships with the Crees of Northern Quebec. Together, they have customized educational modules specifically for the needs of the Crees. The economic and societal impact of these projects is profound. Through working with our people, the Crees have equipped themselves with human and intellectual resources that are advancing their educational and health care institutions by leaps and bounds. They have laid the foundation for a culture of entrepreneurship and healthy governance of which they are rightly proud...and so are we!

Like the Crees, we all face societal challenges that are complex, difficult and yet urgent. Above and beyond the excellence of our research and the success of our students, this requires a commitment towards democratic society as a whole. We must foster critical spirits, social consciences and the emergence of engaged, informed citizens.

One of the many tools we use to do this is our *University of the Streets Café* Program. This is a series of constructive, intelligent public dialogues that we animate in an outreach effort to all elements of society. Up to now, we have organized 150 of these encounters, with guests as diverse as Dany Laferrière and the community group Santropol roulant. The program has attracted interest in people from many quarters, from Eastern Europe to Africa and the United States; all are thinking about replicating it.

As you can see, Concordia's activities are timely, relevant, inclusive and stimulating... trends we expect to continue and even accelerate.

However, we have been asking ourselves how we could do a better job of telling the story of all these activities. And it seemed to us that we should be talking about them regularly. But how to begin?

Well, one thing that strikes a young Quebecer like me, returning to Montreal after years of absence, is the obvious common will to confront the challenges of building a society and an economy. I find it particularly interesting that the community, under the leadership of Mayor Tremblay, has identified priority sectors and industrial clusters in which we have a good chance of being competitive worldwide. So why not demonstrate, and quantify, Concordia's contribution to making our common dreams a reality, including international success?

That is why we have decided to publish *Concordia: Central to Montreal's Future* later this year. This first report to the Montreal community will present Concordia's contribution as a builder and partner, and particularly this year, to the advancement of the industrial clusters that the city has identified as strategic to its economic success. In future, we will report to you each year on our efforts to build the future of Montreal.

Up to now, I have spoken a great deal about Concordia. But we are very conscious of our role in the firmament of Quebec universities, and we want to express our solidarity with our sister institutions. Montreal has the extraordinary opportunity to be a

university centre, with a per-capita student population that ranks only behind Boston in all of North America. But if we want to maintain this strength and advance our issues, we will have to work together.

I am sure I speak for all my colleagues when I say that the January 26th announcement by Minister Jean-Marc Fournier of an additional \$720 million between now and 2010 for university infrastructure and technology was most welcome. But we need to do more to address our chronic under-funding problem.

As we wait to find out more about the intentions of the new government in Ottawa, I can share with you what my experience tells me. Whether it was as President of Ryerson University in Toronto, or as former head of AUCC, which represents all of Canada's post-secondary institutions, I have consistently found that our various governments always need to be reminded of the importance of investing in higher education to prepare for the future.

Canadians have voted for a change, but the federal government's commitment to financing post-secondary education and research absolutely must continue, and in fact deepen if we are to meet our

societal objectives. We have a number of files to carry forward together, including the need to obtain our fair share of any solution to the fiscal imbalance between Ottawa and the provinces. We will need to watch this carefully in the weeks and months to come.

In this spirit of solidarity, I believe that the university sector must take on a leadership role well beyond its primary mission of teaching and research. We certainly intend to join our sister universities on the front line in dealing with the major challenges our society faces in the years to come:

To address the challenges of the knowledge economy,

Concordia offers a rapidly growing contribution in research and development, a platform for innovation and prosperity for the future, always open to the appropriate partnerships and networks, and in support of the efforts of Mayor Tremblay and his team in this area.

To address the social challenges particular to Montreal and to Quebec, Concordia offers an active tradition of practical engagement, from the psychology clinic to the street-level workshop, from the concert hall to the respectful dialogue which is a prerequisite to viable transformational change in society.

I am announcing today two initiatives that we will be putting forward in the months ahead:

First, our departments of communications and journalism are celebrating their 40th and 30th anniversaries, respectively, this year. In the next few months we will therefore present a symposium on the evolution of the role of the media in Canada, to be followed by an academic conference on the same subject next year.

Second, in view of the suspicion and apathy that many citizens, especially young people, are expressing towards the electoral process, we will organize a lecture series featuring prominent public personalities who will come to Concordia to speak about civic engagement and our common future.

To address the demographic challenge, our universities must offer strategies that create hope for the future. Every year, we award thousands of Quebec diplomas to dynamic new graduates from around the globe who are essential to our future. These graduates are ideally equipped to stay in Quebec. They do not have to overcome the barriers facing those who come to this country with foreign credentials. So we need to take action to

ensure that our students fall in love with Montreal, with Quebec, with Canada, and even with each other! And even if in the end they choose to return home or make their mark elsewhere in the world, they will provide precious networks for us wherever they end up. They will always have a bond with Concordia, and with Montreal.

Our university has a strong welcoming tradition. This was obvious on December 28, when our international students' association and our our alumni association got together to organize a holiday dinner for 200 international students who could not go home over the Christmas break. But wonderful as this is, we must do more.

I am therefore announcing today in the name of Concordia the creation of a blue ribbon committee to be chaired by Dr. Arvind Joshi, Chief Executive Officer of St. Mary's Hospital, a professor at McGill University and a member of Concordia's Board of Governors. Its mandate will be to find realistic ways to convince our graduates to stay and make a life here, joining the vital communities in Montreal, Quebec and Canada. This committee will work closely with our sister universities, the Board of Trade, Montreal International, the City of Montreal and the other levels of government to better understand the factors that influence a

graduate's decision to stay in Quebec, or to leave. After analysing these factors, the committee will propose proactive strategies to recruit and retain our students, to the benefit of our society and our economy.

In closing, let me say that I'm very happy to be home, and to be heading up a remarkable institution with so much to offer. I think a university engaged with its community in the ways I have been describing can make a huge difference to our common future. I see Concordia's vast web of activities as fertile terrain for promising and dynamic developments in science, business, arts and culture, and our knowledge society as a whole. I invite you to talk to us about how we can work together : partner with us, teach us and learn from us in the years to come.

As you can see, Concordia has much to offer, but we also need you. We need partners in order to fully play our societal role in Montreal, Quebec, Canada and the world.

Whether you are associated with another university or with the Board of Trade, whether you are a guest today, and whatever your interest—cultural, economic or social—I urge you think about

Concordia, and the ways in which we can, together, build an open society in which the greatest dreams are achievable.

Thank you.