

Support Staff

An opinion rendered by the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation pointed out that extra-curricular activities help enrich the meaning of studies, provide youths with opportunities to explore, help them in making career and academic choices and thereby contribute to success.¹ The staff working for the animation service at Cégep Ahuntsic couldn't agree more. Carmen Brière and Denis Brassard, both recreational activities technicians and Monique Kadowaki, a former office clerk with the animation service and today secretary with student services, share this opinion: animation contributes to creating the soul of a college.

If the college succeeds in becoming a stimulating living environment for students rather than a cold institution that merely dispenses courses and issues diplomas, it's partly thanks to these people. In fact, the animation service organizes a wide variety of activities and events that help make college life dynamic: intercultural activities, poetry contests, CEGEP rock music contests, CEGEP show contests, exhibitions for final year graphic arts students and for natural science students, conferences, concerts given by well-known artists, films at the college's auditorium, theatre, classical music concerts, etc.

Although the organization and planning of activities and events are an important part of the work of recreational activities technicians, Carmen Brière, Denis Brassard and Monique Kadowaki all stress the human aspect of their work. Students often come to see them in their office to find out about an activity, to register for a contest or to prepare for an audition. "For most youths who participate in the theatre activity or in the CEGEP show, this is their initiation, their first experience with the stage. Monitoring and supporting students is very important," says Denis Brassard. For other students, these activities are the springboard for a vibrant arts career: Daniel Boucher, Martin Deschamps and Stéphane Yelle, of the Yelo Molo group, are former Ahuntsic students who took part in the CEGEP show event. "Our goal is not to turn out stars, but to allow students to create their own fond memories, and to be proud of having accomplished something memorable," adds Denis Brassard.

Although participation in activities of scope such as theatre and CEGEP show may be an exciting experience for students, the recreational activities technicians must also deal with the difficulty of balancing studies and cultural life. "We are like mentors for the students who take part in these activities. Sometimes that means we have to bring them down to earth and remind them that they also have to consider their studies and academic results," says Carmen Brière. A positive aspect of



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Monique Kadowaki, Denis Brassard and Carmen Brière, members of the Syndicat du personnel de soutien du Collège d'Ahuntsic (CSQ) with Jacques Pétrin, union president.

their work is that students will go to see them because they genuinely want to get involved. But some situations are more delicate: students don't succeed at every audition or win all the contests. "We have to be careful, we are manipulating emotions," adds Denis Brassard. That is why it's important to build a relationship of trust with students and to work in a convivial atmosphere. "Accessibility, availability and flexibility are the three words that best describe us," according to Monique Kadowaki.

Not only do socio-cultural activities contribute to making the CEGEP a stimulating living environment, they also make it possible to develop a sense of belonging to the college, to motivate students to attend CEGEP, to develop friendships with the students who participate in the activities and to maintain contact with the parents who attend the exhibitions and shows of their children.

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1 Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *Au collégial, l'orientation au cœur de la réussite*. Québec, avril 2002, p. 41.