

Summer 2014 Internship Research Project

International Students Off-Campus Housing Conditions



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CSU HOJO Housing & Job Bank
Concordia University

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INTRODUCTION

Montreal is one the best destinations to be a student in the world, highly multicultural, rich in history and home to excellent universities like Concordia make this city an amazing place to learn. That same international reputation brings students from all over the globe to Concordia University and its vibrant urban campus which makes necessary a comprehensive research project to understand the off-campus housing conditions of current international students in order to make them better for future students.

This research project was an attempt to investigate what are the issues in terms of housing that international students are facing, and in order to do so the metrology employed was based on existing data from Statscan, raw data from HOJO's partner organization UTILE and research on methods of approach to housing based on real students experiences.

WHO IS AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT?

According to the international Students office at Concordia, an international student is any student who is not a Canadian citizen. With that in mind, the University classifies international students in different categories depending of the student length of time at the university and their immigration status.

HOW LONG DO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS STAY AT CONCORDIA?

LENGTH OF STUDIES	IMMIGRATION STATUS	UNIVERSITY STATUS
1 year >	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Student visa· Student permit· Permanent resident· Convention Refugee / Protected person with a CAQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Degree seeker· Independent student· Continuing education
1 year ≤	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Student Visa· Student permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Exchange student· Visiting student· Independent student· Continuing education
1 year to 6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Temporary resident visa· Protected person with a CAQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Exchange student· Visiting student· Independent student· Continuing education

CATEGORIES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS:

Independent Student

Is part-time undergraduate student non degree seeker, who is required to have a CAQ, before applying to this category at Concordia. An independent student can be a convention refugee, a permanent resident/ Landed Immigrant, or someone who already holds a study permit.

Visiting Student

Is a student whose home university does not have an exchange agreement with Concordia University.

Exchange Student

Is a student whose home university has an exchange agreement with Concordia University.

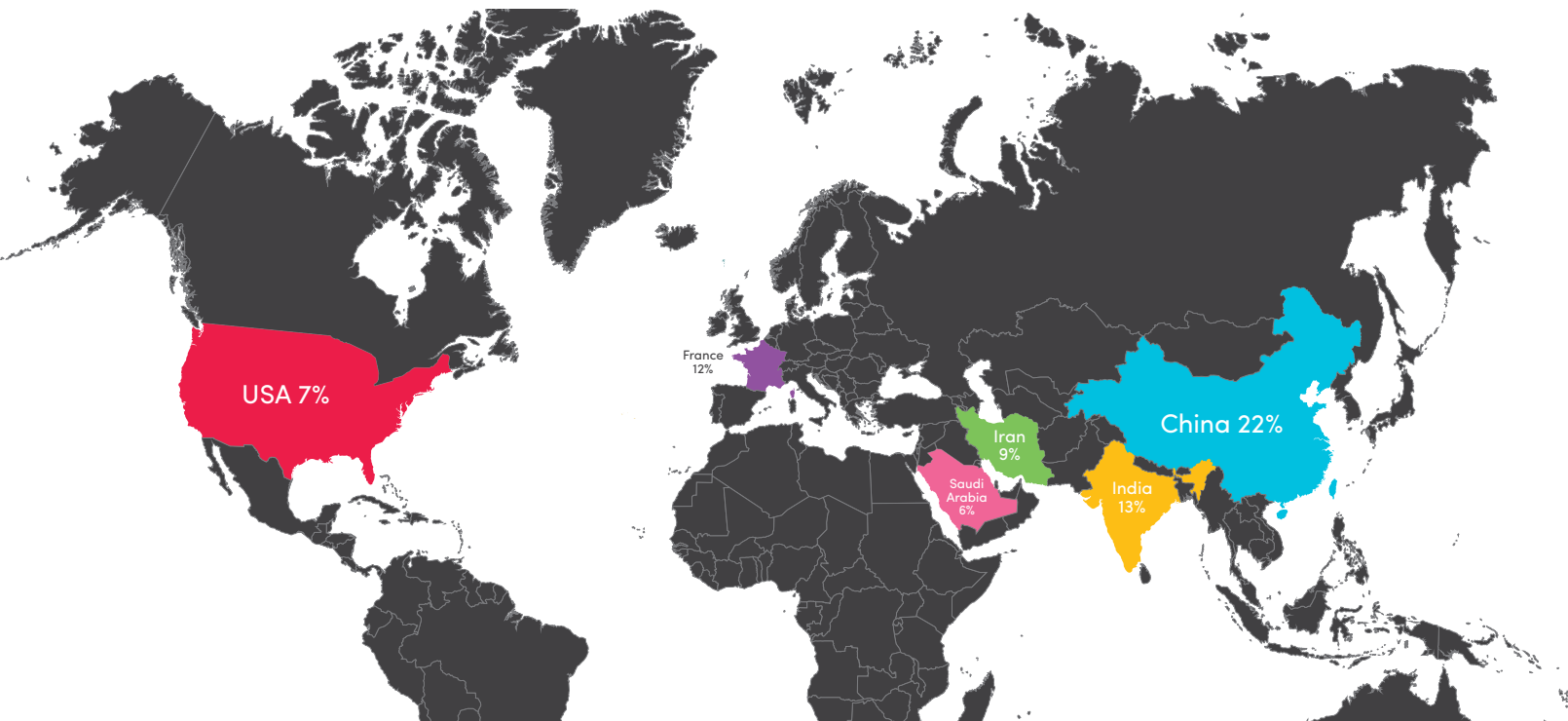
Continuing Education

Students at the School of Extended Learning who are non-degree seekers, but who are working towards a certificate or admission to a University program. International Students enrolled in the School of Extended Learning are usually working on their language skills, before being accepted in a degree program.

WHERE DO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS COME FROM?

According to the university fast facts, Concordia is home to 6300 international students from 150 countries, which makes Concordia one of the most culturally rich and diverse learning institutions in Canada. Among those 150 countries, there are six (6) countries where the majority of international students at Concordia come from.

These percentages represent the number of student visa-holding international students in 2012/2013 for undergraduate and graduate studies (Concordia fast facts).



The provincial numbers of international students in Quebec, show a similar reality to Concordia University international students demographic. The principal country of origin from international students at the provincial level is France with about 37%, followed by the USA with nearly 9% and China with 8.1%. Iran ranks fourth with 3.4%, India fifth with 3%, and Saudi Arabia comes eleventh with 1.3% of international student at the provincial level.



WHAT ARE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS STUDYING?

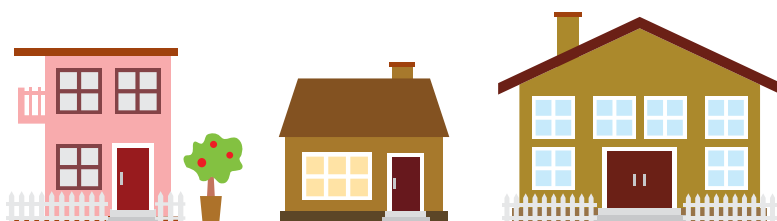
The degree choices of Concordia’s international students are as diverse as their countries of origin. The majority of them are concentrated in the John Molson School of business, which is also the most expensive school at Concordia university. With that been said on average an undergraduate international student pays around \$25,000 a year in tuition in the hope to obtain a degree of superior quality from a University in North America, according to The Bank of Communications Sea Turtle Index Benchmarking potential returns on investment in international education (The Economist Intelligence Unit Ltd and Bank of Communications Limited 2013)

JMSB

For the John Molson School of Business, 48% of international students working towards an undergraduate degree come from China.

French students are the second largest group of international students at JMSB, but with students coming from France it must be kept in mind that a significant number of them are not degree seekers, but part of an exchange student program between Concordia and their home university.

Morocco and Saudi Arabia account for 6% of the total number of international students at JMSB with 3% each, and The United States of America and India make up for 4% of the international undergraduates’ students at JMSB.



ENGINEERING AND COMPUTER SCIENCE

According to the information gathered from both Concordia fast facts and the International students' office at Concordia, about International students by country of origin at the School of Engineering and Computer science; India is the top country of origin with 28% of the international students. However, most of those students are working towards a graduate program.

Iran has the second largest group of international students with 17%, and like Indian students, Iranian students are most likely to be working towards a Master's degree or a PhD.

Chinese students are the 3rd largest group of international students in this school, and in comparison between Indian and Iranian students, Chinese students are working towards an undergraduate degree.

Saudi Students are the fourth largest group or 10% of International students at ENCS, and they seem to be at both undergraduate and graduate levels of studies. A large percentage of Saudi students are sponsored by various governmental programs, scholarships and grants from their country of origin.

Even though Brazilian students are not among the largest group of international students at ENCS, they are increasing at this school, because of the Science without borders exchange program that the Brazilian government signed with the Canadian government according to the Canadian Bureau for International Education (Canadian Bureau of International Education [CBIE] 2014).

ARTS AND SCIENCE

The diversity of international students in the school of arts and sciences is as diverse as the number of programs in this faculty. About 22% of the students come from France, and similarly to the French students at JMSB, they come either in an exchange program or under the visiting students' category. Additionally, most of them are enrolled at the department of political sciences.

The second largest group of international students at the faculty of Arts and science are Americans, they account for 18% ; most of them are in an undergraduate program and, because of the agreements between the Canadian and American governments it is easier for American students to get a study permit.

Chinese are the third largest group of students at the Arts and Science school with 15%, and similarly to the Chinese students at JMSB, they are mostly enrolled in an undergraduate program of studies.

FINE ARTS

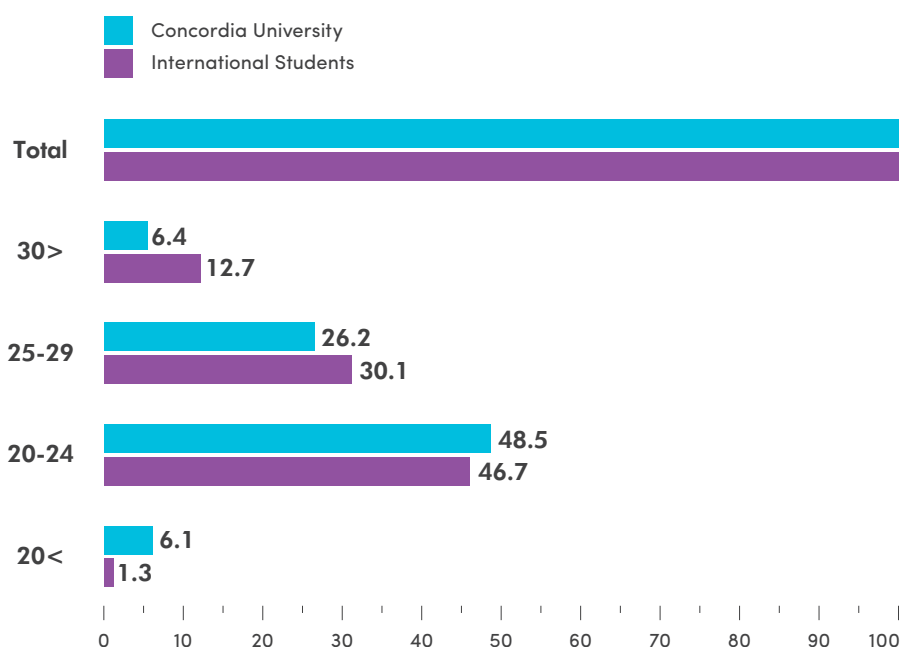
The countries of origin the Fine Arts international students' population show a slight variation from what we have observed so far in this analysis. The 1st source of international students in the school of Fine Arts is the US, with a 34% of the total of student visas. France is the 2nd source of international students and Mexico is 3rd with 7% of foreign students at this school. China ranks in four places with a 3% presence of students.

PROFILE OF A CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

To find out what the housing needs of international students are, it is first necessary to create a profile of who are they in terms of age group and income among other variables that would allow us to create a clearer picture of possible housing needs, as well as their current housing situation. Most of the data that will be used in this analysis comes from UTILE's *Prospection des Habitudes Et Aspirations Residentielles Etudiantes* survey conducted in May 2014 among students of McGill, Concordia University, UQAM, and Laval University.

Age will be the first factor taken into consideration, and as it can be seen in the chart below, international students at Concordia University tend to be slightly younger than their Quebecer and Canadian fellows; therefore, when it comes to housing issues they are most likely to be exposed to illegal practices by landlords and private companies, since they are new to the country, young, and in many cases do not speak either of the official languages fluently.

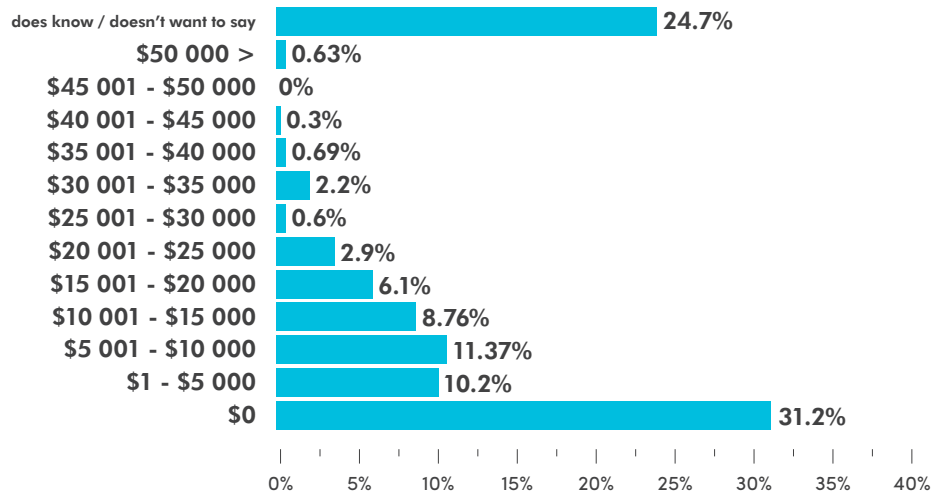
TABLE 1 AGE COMPARISON BETWEEN CONCORDIA OUT OF PROVINCE AND QUEBECER STUDENTS, AND CONCORDIA INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



As mentioned above, Concordia university international students are most likely to be subjects to irregularities by landlords when looking for a place to live. They usually are asked to pay higher rent prices and deposits, this reality translates into the results of the survey on students housing conditions conducted by UTILE.



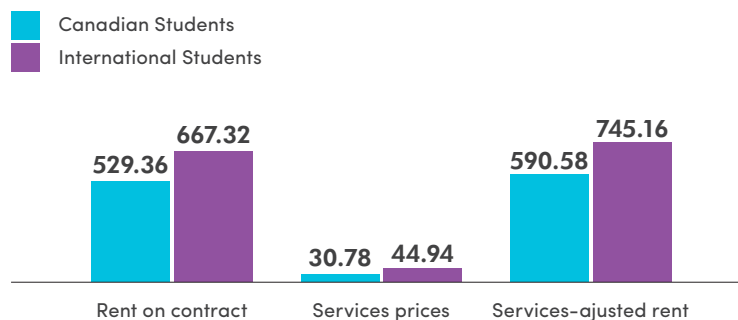
TABLE 2 CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS INCOME



In terms of income the majority of international students at Concordia University surveyed (31%) admitted to not having any. Although, international students enrolled in full time university programs are allowed to work in part time jobs, most of the participants in the survey do not work, so it can be assume that given their age and status, most of them are financially supported by parents, scholarships, or bursaries from their countries of origin, and actually only 19.4% of all the international students that responded to the survey said that they hold a paid position.

On to table number 3 where it is easy to observe that when compared with out of province students, International students pay on average of \$185 per month more than out of province students in a similar housing situation.

TABLE 3 DIFFERENCE IN RENT PRICE BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND OUT OF PROVINCE STUDENTS

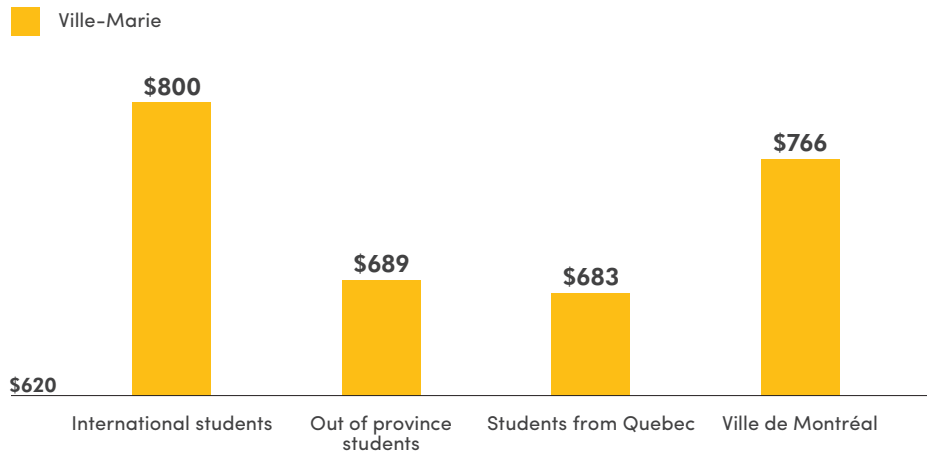


The disparity in rent costs between Quebecers, Canadians, and international students becomes even more egregious within the most student populated neighborhoods in the city of Montreal: Plateau Mont Royal, Notre Dame de Grace-Cote des Neiges and Downtown.

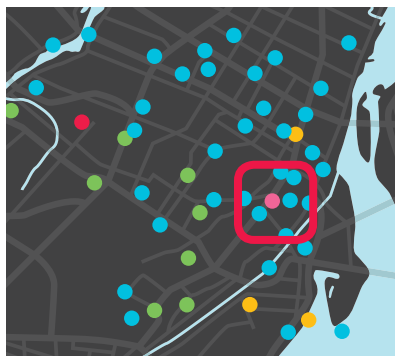
To begin a more detailed analysis, table number 4 displays the average rent price for Borough of Ville Marie, the downtown area of Montreal, where Concordia University is located. This location is ideal for students that wish to live within walking distance from school and amenities

The city average rent price for a 1 ½ or studio apartment is \$766 a month in this area (Ville Marie), international students living in this location according to the UTILE survey pay in average \$800 a month. In contrast, Canadian out of province students living downtown pay about \$689 a month which is \$924 less in a year than an international student living in the same type of dwelling; in addition to that Quebecer students pay \$683 a month for the same type apartment in this borough.

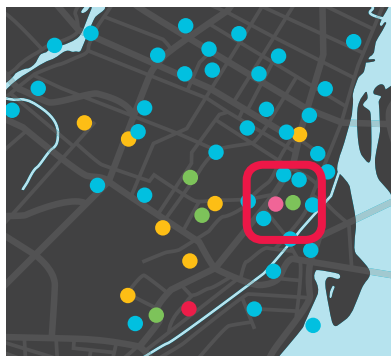
TABLE 4 AVERAGE RENT PRICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS VERSUS LOCAL STUDENTS IN THE VILLE MARIE BOROUGH



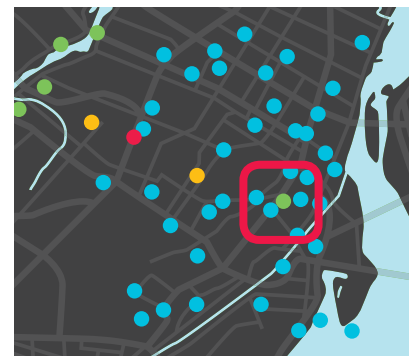
By using data from statistics Canada and the UTILE’s survey for students housing conditions it was possible to track the origin of international students living in the borough of Villa Maria by their mother tongue. Chinese (map 1), Persian (Map 2) and Arab (Map 3) are the most spoken languages in downtown by people ages 20 to 30, which matches with the students’ age group.



● 2225> ● 2000> ● 1600> ● 1000> ● 200>



● 1020> ● 1000> ● 600> ● 400> ● 200>



● 10550> ● 10000> ● 8000> ● 4000> ● 2000>

Map 1 Chinese

Source: Martin St Denis

This Map shows the concentrations of native Chinese speakers in the downtown area. It can be argued that one of the reasons for such a high number of speakers in this area of this language is the proximity to Concordia University.

Map 2 Persian

Source: Martin St Denis

Similarly to Chinese students, the Statscan census shows that Iranian speakers have a significant presence in the downtown area, this trend can be the result of international students from Iran, living in downtown, because of its proximity to Concordia University.

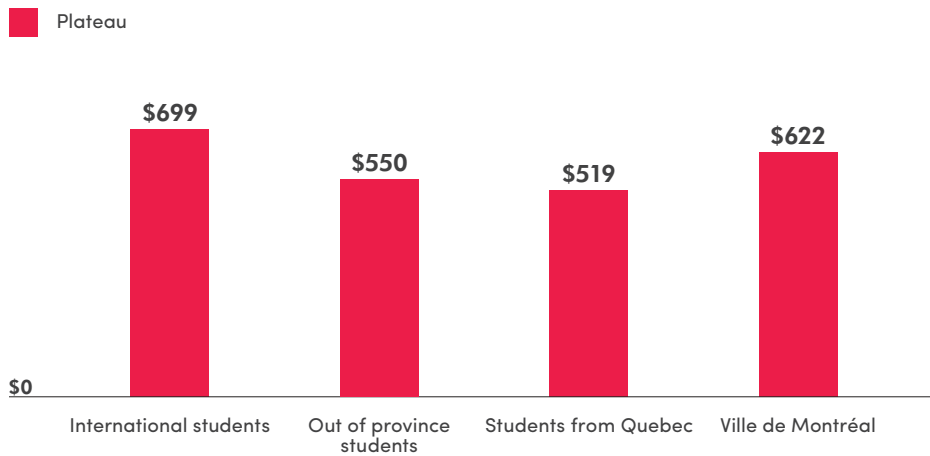
Map 3 Arab

Source: Martin St Denis

Similarly to the maps above, one of the reasons for a significant number of Arab speakers in downtown can be the international students of Concordia University living in near to the school.

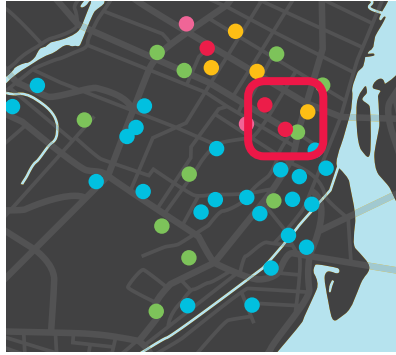
Plateau Mont Royal is Canada’s most populated borough, it is also one of the most desirable locations for students due to its high walkability, location within the city, and amenities. However, like Villa Maria, The plateau area seems to be more expensive for international students than for any other Concordia University student demographic.

AVERAGE RENT PRICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS VERSUS LOCAL STUDENTS IN THE PLATEAU AREA



On table number 5 one can observe that students coming from countries other than Canada pay on average \$699 dollars per month for a dwelling in the Plateau area, the city average for this location is \$622 and both out of province students and Quebec students usually pay below average rent prices in this part of Montreal usually, because in the Plateau-Mont Royal neighborhood lease transfers are a common practice that helps to keep the prices of rent low; however, since international students are not in the “know” of this practice, they usually are subject to higher prices.

In terms of ethnicity according to the data found in UTILE’s survey *Prospection des Habitudes Et Aspirations Residentielles Etudiantes* and statistics from StatsCan the majority of international students living in the Plateau-Mont Royal are of Iraqi, Portuguese(Brazilian) and Hispanic origin; however, it is well-known that this area of the city is home to French international students, but due to the fact that French is Montreal’s official language challenges exist in tracking down students from France.

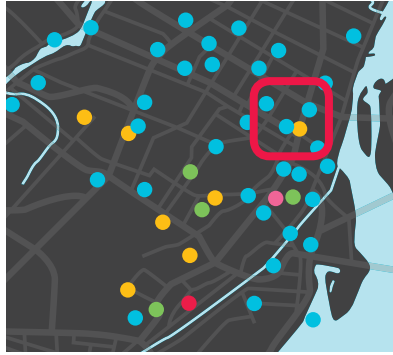


● 1000> ● 800> ● 600> ● 400> ● 200>

Map 4 Portuguese

Source: Martin St Denis /
Statistiques Canada

The High concentration of Portuguese speakers in the Plateau area could be interpreted as an elevated number of International students living in this area due to its trendiness and key location close to amenities and transportation.

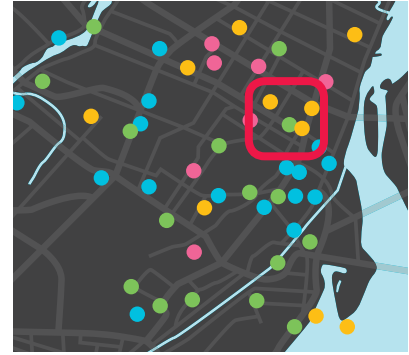


● 1020> ● 1000> ● 600> ● 400> ● 200>

Map 5 Persian

Source: Martin St Denis /
Statistiques Canada

Like Portuguese speakers, Persian speakers are concentrated in high numbers in the Plateau area, and as described above, one of the reasons for such high numbers could be the presence of international students in the popular neighborhood of Montreal.



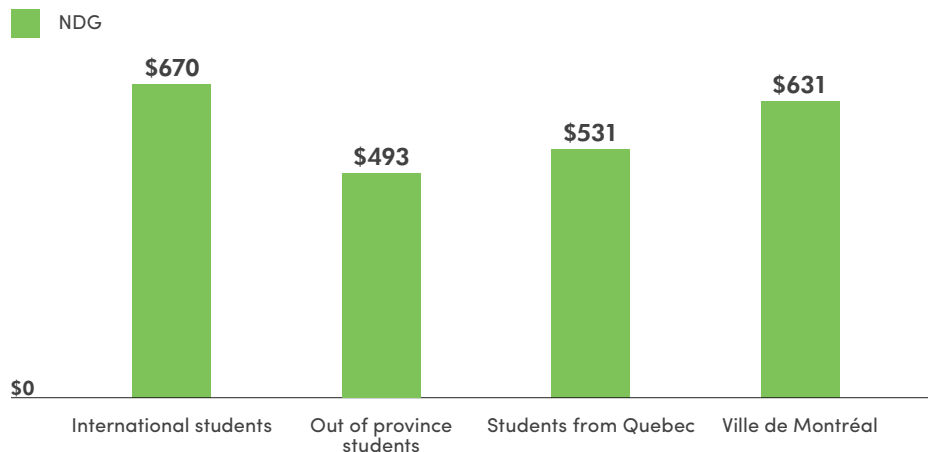
● 5470> ● 4000> ● 3000> ● 2000> ● 1000>

Map 6 Spanish

Source: Martin St Denis /
Statistiques Canada

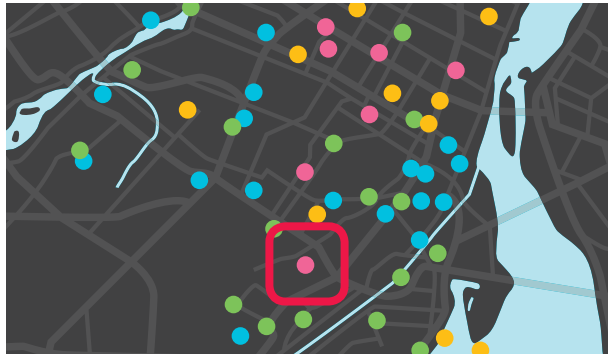
Spanish appears to be the third most spoken language in the plateau area. This city area offers proximity to cafes, shops and public transit that is why it is appealing to international students who have a bigger interest in amenities than proximity to school in the case of Concordia University international students.

TABLE 6 AVERAGE RENT PRICE PAID BY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS OF CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY VERSUS LOCAL STUDENTS IN NDG



The borough of NDG-Cote des Neiges is the 3rd most popular housing destination for students at Concordia University. Likewise, this area is popular, because of its proximity to both campus of the university, its access to public transit and amenities. But as well as the other neighborhoods, NDG-CDN also shows higher rent costs for international students: these costs are higher than the average rent price for this area in the city, and international students living in this area can expect to pay up to \$468 dollars more per year than any regular resident of the neighborhood.

In order to identify the origin of international students living in this area of the city the same method described before was used in order to map language and age range in a specific area of the city. Hispanics (map 7) and Iraqi (map 8) seems to be the origins of most of students in the NDG-CDN area.

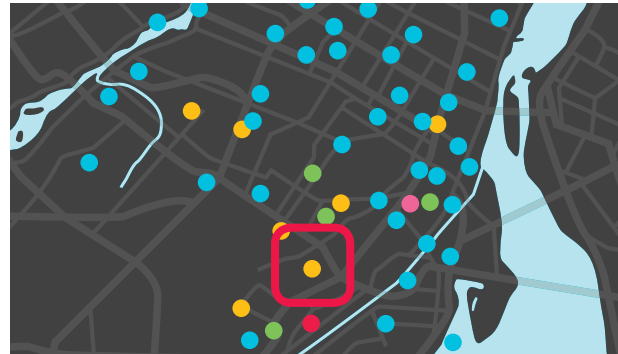


● 5470> ● 4000> ● 3000> ● 2000> ● 1000>

Map 5 Spanish

Source: Martin St Denis / Statistiques Canada

One of the reasons of the high concentration of Spanish speakers in the CDN/NDG area could be because of its proximity to the main universities in Montreal; therefore, this area becomes a less expensive alternative for those looking for proximity to campus.



● 1020> ● 1000> ● 600> ● 400> ● 200>

Map 8 Persian

Source: Martin St Denis / Statistiques Canada

Persian is one of the most spoken languages in this area of the city, and it could be said that is the result of international students living in this area of the city, these students favor less expensive rent prices and access to public services when choosing a place to call home.

Chart 1 illustrates the rent costs on average for Canadian students (out of province students) and International students between the four universities that took part on the survey by UTILE's *Prospection des Habitudes et Aspirations Residentielles Etudiantes*. Some of the most important points in this chart are that McGill and Concordia university International students have the highest cost of rents, with McGill students paying on average \$100 more a month than Concordia University Students and \$255 dollars more per month than UQAM International students.

Also in the chart it can be observed that about 30% of the international students, pay up to \$220 per month of rent, which is extremely high, even for what is already considered excessive for an international student to pay; therefore, it can be said that due to their lack of knowledge about the cost of living in the city international students are subjects of irregularities in prices above the city average when renting a dwelling.

CHART 1

	OUT-OF-PROVINCE STUDENTS				INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS				ALL STUDENTS			
	Rent on contract	Services prices	Services-adjusted rent	Number of occupants	Rent on contract	Services prices	Services-adjusted rent	Number of occupants	Rent on contract	Services prices	Services-adjusted rent	Number of occupants
UQAM												
Average	668.39	34.22	701.63	1.77	552.82	31.47	585.63	2.38	514.46	26.24	542.41	2.21
Median	620	0	650	2	520	0	530	2	475	0	500	2
75 th Centile	625	80	775	3	650	45	675	3	620	0	655	3
Number of Observation	12	14	12	13	207	242	207	231	1233	1343	1234	1319
Concordia Students												
Average	529.36	30.78	560.58	2.48	697.32	44.94	745.16	2.84	586.40	43.93	632.31	2.40
Median	500	0	515	2	605	0	670	2	525	0	570	2
75 th Centile	620	50	655	3	825	70	875	3	700	65	768	3
Number of Observation	358	375	358	344	308	344	308	313	1298	1407	1298	1332
McGill												
Average	529.36	30.78	560.58	2.48	697.32	44.94	745.16	2.84	586.40	43.93	632.31	2.40
Median	500	0	515	2	605	0	670	2	525	0	570	2
75 th Centile	620	50	655	3	825	70	875	3	700	65	768	3
Number of Observation	358	375	358	344	308	344	308	313	1298	1407	1298	1332
All 3 Universities												
Average	705.47	32.52	739.19	3.26	713.58	44.80	762.38	3.51	631.08	37.29	670.34	2.80
Median	650	0	685	2	655	0	700	2	571	0	600	2
75 th Centile	950	50	950	3	900	50	930	3	780	50	830	3
Number of Observation	715	755	714	696	819	907	819	837	3347	3612	3347	3455

THE PROCESS OF SEARCHING FOR AN APARTMENT

After students have been admitted to Concordia, the most challenging part of their journey to make Montreal home is usually the apartment search. Although, International student’s office provides future Concordians with a pre-departure guide, the reality is that students usually don’t really stick to it, or even when they do, there are plenty of challenges that international students have to face in order to find a place to live.

The majority of international students begin their searching process on line in websites such as Kijiji, Craigslist, social network sites and forums around the web which makes them easy targets for unethical landlords whose only intention is to make money out of naïve international students.

International students are a vulnerable sector of the student population at Concordia, because they are not only new to the country in most cases, but also lack language skills in either of the official languages and do not have adequate knowledge of their housing rights.

PICTURE 1 A NEWLY ADMITTED STUDENT FROM INDIA AT CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY ASKS FOR HOUSING ADVICE ON AN ONLINE FORUM

Deepika says:

November 6, 2013 at 11:40 am

Hello

I am Deepika. I got admit from Concordia University. Will be arriving there at December End. I found this website through searching. I really love to stay with indian peoples. Does any indian family allows for homestay as paying guest? or suggest any indian student groups to stay with !!! I am stranded as of now :(about where i go and stay. Plss help.

Admin says:

November 7, 2013 at 10:01 am

Indian Students' Association (ISA), Concordia University, Montreal. Indian Student's Association is one of the largest organizations of the Concordia University. We at ISA, strive hard to create a place where we can rediscover the home we all have left behind, a home to a billion of the mankind, rich in culture and vibrant in heritage, a microcosm where people from different religions, ethnicities, languages and regions co-exist, a home we are all proud to call India.

<http://indian.concordia.ca/index.html>

According to HOJO the most common malpractices that international students are subjects of by landlords are demands for a security deposits, personal documents such as student visas, credit card information, and even harassment. And since students are usually afraid that they will be "kicked out of their home" and do not know their rights they usually remain silent and do not take action against these issues.



PRIVATELY OWNED RESIDENCES

Due to the fact that Montreal is a top world destination for education, ranked number 1 by The Bank of Communications Sea Turtle Index Benchmarking potential returns on investment in international education (2013 The Economist Intelligence Unit Ltd and B 42 bank of Communications Limited). And the second destination for international students in Canada (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada). New players have come to the students housing market, like private-owned student housing by the hands of corporations such as Campus Suits and Campus Crest that specialize in creating a real college experience. Currently there are at least six major privately owned residences in Montreal, located near the campuses of the 4 biggest universities in the city.

NAME	ADDRESS	NUMBER OF UNITS	NUMBER OF BEDS	RENT PRICE PER MONTH
Parc Cité	3440, Avenue du Parc	140	280	From \$814
Edison Residence	3525 rue University	30	39	From \$795
Evo Square Victoria	777 University Street	715	1290	From \$805
Evo Sherbrooke	420 Sherbrooke West	470	N/A	From \$900
Varcity 515	1430 Rue City Councillors	110	400	From \$759
St Cathy's	492 Rue Sainte-Catherine West	60	89	From \$699

These residences offer full luxury, internet access, common areas and real college dorm experiences but there are many down parts to this business model such as high cost of rent, unhealthy life style, and requests for private information that are not allowed by Quebec's rent board.

The least expensive room in any of these residences is around \$800, and in many cases two students will be sharing a hotel size room for an entire semester or even a year; in addition to that, most of these residences' prices are above HOJO's students' affordability policy taking in to consideration the small space of the dorms. So students are basically compromising living space for luxury and amenities like gyms and swimming pools.

Most of this private student housing complexes offer activities where alcohol is usually involved, and since most of the students living there are in their 1st year of university, far from home and in some cases under age the consume of psychoactive substances such alcoholic drinks, can lead to unhealthy life styles and many other issues.

The request for personal information such as credit cards, co-signers and ever car information on the application forms is something that students have to deal with when they wish to apply for a dorm in these housing complexes and in many cases, since the students' parents do not live in the country they need to provide their parents financial information as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the housing situation of international students, these are a few recommendations that can make the difference for future students:

- 1** Educate international students prior their arrival to Montreal about HOJO and the services that are available for them.
- 2** The university should be able to provide a reference letter to landlords which explain that in order to obtain a student visa international students must go through a screening process by immigration Canada to prove that they have sufficient economic means to afford tuition and living costs in this country.
- 3** ESL classes are an easy outlet to reach international students at the beginning of their academic studies at Concordia; thus, CSU and HOJO could work together with the ESL department in order to reach these students and provide them with housing knowledge and support about their rights and what to do if they have problems or questions.
- 4** Information about how to deal with landlords regarding issues like heating, bedbugs, etc. Should be available in the most spoken language by international students (Chinese, Hindi, Arab, Spanish and Portuguese) because often these handouts have legal terms that are not always easy to understand for a non-native English or French speaker.
- 5** American and French students speak the official languages of the country; however they often are not aware that the housing regulations are not the same or even similar to their countries of origin; therefore, they need to be reach out during orientation week and pre departure process about housing issues
- 6** Better communication between different school departments that deal with international students during all the steps from getting accepted until they arrive to Montreal can truly make the difference in terms of better housing conditions and a smoother adaptation process.
- 7** HOJO's student affordability policy is a great guide of how much students should be paying for rent and a tool to keep housing costs low, so in order to make these policy effective students need to know how much is too much!
- 8** Ethnic students' organizations should also be informed about housing conditions and tenants' rights to spread the awareness among their members.
- 9** As a future research topic, a more detailed survey could be conducted among Concordia University students through social media to collect housing experiences and approaches to housing search processes.

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