

# No “haughty and inaccessible ivory tower”: Laval University and Adult Education, 1930–1965

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Scott McLean

*University of Calgary*

## Abstract

Canadian universities today assert their social relevance through highlighting processes such as community engagement, knowledge mobilization, and the promotion of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Much can be learned about such processes through examining an era in which Canadian universities asserted their social relevance through another vocabulary: that of adult education and extension. This article provides a case study of adult education work undertaken at Laval University from 1930 through 1965. Through reconstructing programs and practices at Laval, this article offers insight into past and present efforts of universities to pursue educational objectives with which they are not traditionally associated. The article narrates an important chapter in Canadian educational history, and also elucidates five lessons of importance to contemporary educational scholars and leaders: beware of institution-centric thinking, know how you can help people make a living, partner with external organizations, play to your institutional strengths, and serve and learn from others.

*Keywords:* adult education, university extension, knowledge mobilization, community engagement, history, Quebec, Canada

## Résumé

Aujourd'hui, les universités canadiennes affirment leur pertinence sociale en mettant l'accent sur des processus comme l'engagement communautaire, la mobilisation des connaissances et la promotion de l'équité, de la diversité et de l'inclusion. L'examen d'une époque où les universités canadiennes déclaraient leur importance sociale au moyen d'un autre discours, celui de l'éducation des adultes et de l'éducation permanente, permet d'en apprendre beaucoup sur ces processus. Cet article présente une étude de cas sur le travail de formation des adultes menée à l'Université Laval de 1930 à 1965. En reconstituant les programmes et les pratiques de cette université, il donne un aperçu des efforts consentis, d'hier à aujourd'hui, pour poursuivre des objectifs de formation qui ne leur sont traditionnellement pas associés. L'article relate un chapitre important de l'histoire de l'éducation au Canada et dégage cinq leçons importantes pour les chercheurs et les leaders contemporains en éducation : se méfier de la pensée centrée sur l'institut, savoir comment aider les gens à gagner leur vie, établir des partenariats avec des organisations externes, tirer parti de ses forces institutionnelles, et enfin, être au service des autres et apprendre d'eux.

*Mots-clés* : éducation des adultes, éducation permanente, mobilisation des connaissances, engagement communautaire, histoire du Québec et du Canada

## Introduction

Canadian universities are engaged in an ardent pursuit of social relevance. Universities Canada defines social impact as “the positive outcomes of initiatives that tackle social, economic, environmental and cultural challenges faced by people, organizations and communities,” and has defined eight principles to guide universities’ work “to create positive change” (Universities Canada, 2021). Many universities are involved in efforts relating to community engagement, knowledge mobilization, community-based research, and the promotion of equity, diversity, and inclusion.<sup>1</sup> Such efforts are sometimes positioned in a vocabulary that makes them seem novel—as if people at Canadian universities were inventing previously unimaginable strategies to better connect universities with communities. This article argues that much can be learned about such matters from analyzing the past work of Canadian universities in domains that were known as adult education and extension.

Few realize that over the first half of the 20th century, far more Canadians participated in university-based adult education programs than enrolled as post-secondary students. The total number of degree-credit students enrolled at Canadian universities rose from 23,214 in 1920 to 68,595 in 1950 (Statistics Canada, 1983). In these decades, hundreds of thousands of Canadians each year participated in university extension programs. As examples: the University of Saskatchewan organized massive knowledge mobilization campaigns in the 1920s that provided instruction in agricultural production and household management through “Better Farming Trains” and non-credit courses (McLean, 2007b); in the 1920s, the University of Toronto began offering non-credit evening and correspondence courses on topics relating to the humanities, social sciences, and business administration (McLean, 2022); from the 1930s through the 1950s, St. Francis Xavier and the University of British Columbia (UBC) undertook community engagement with members of fishing communities, employing field workers who promoted co-operatives and credit unions (McLean & Damer, 2012); in the 1930s and 1940s, the University of Alberta and

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1 See the following websites for details of the initiatives identified above: for Universities Canada, <https://www.univ-can.ca/priorities/social-impact>; for Community Campus Engage Canada, <https://ccecCanada.ca>; for Research Impact Canada (knowledge mobilization), <https://researchimpact.ca/about-us/membership>; for Community-Based Research Canada, <https://www.communityresearchCanada.ca/institutional-members>; and for the Tri-Council Dimensions Program (EDI), [https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/EDI-EDI/Dimensions-Program\\_Programme-Dimensions\\_eng.asp](https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/EDI-EDI/Dimensions-Program_Programme-Dimensions_eng.asp).

UBC delivered lectures, slideshows, and movies to large audiences in widely dispersed communities (McLean, 2007a). In the 1940s and 1950s, university extension units across Canada were partners in Citizens' Forum and National Farm Radio Forum—programs that combined radio broadcasts with local discussion groups (Sandwell, 2012; Selman, 1995; Welton, 2013). The idea that universities should transcend a “pure” focus on higher education and research and engage with the “applied” concerns of broader communities has a lengthy heritage.

This article contributes to historical scholarship about university extension in Canada—and provides insight for contemporary leaders in knowledge mobilization and community engagement in higher education—by narrating the history of adult education at Laval University. Among Canadian universities, Laval was an innovator in educational programming for adults who were not enrolled as regular students. Between 1871 and 1921, its Faculty of Arts delivered evening courses open to members of the public. In the 1930s, the School of Social Sciences and the School of Commerce began offering evening courses, and the Faculty of Philosophy began offering summer courses. In the late 1940s, the Faculty of Theology began delivering public courses, and the Faculty of Humanities began offering evening courses in modern languages. Together, these programs amounted to a significant provision of adult education, provision that declined after 1965 as Laval focused on more conventional forms of instruction.

## **Literature Review**

The story of adult education at Laval is rooted in the broader history of university extension and in the social history of Quebec. Adult education work at Laval was inspired by university extension movements in England and the United States. Extension initiatives were started in the 1870s by Cambridge, Oxford, and the London Society for the Extension of University Teaching (Burrows, 1976; Jepson, 1973). University extension in England was positioned as a means to expand access to higher education and to maintain the relevance of universities in a context of social change. The British extension movement migrated to North America with the support of an “American Society for the Extension of University Teaching” established in 1890 (James, 1892). Convened by the Ontario Minister of Education, leaders from Queen's University, the University of Toronto, McGill University, and Laval established a Canadian University Extension Association (CUEA)

in 1891 (CUEA, 1892). Established “to bring within reach of the people opportunities of sharing in the benefits of higher education” (CUEA, 1892, p. 2), this association held only one meeting before disbanding (Adams, 1892; MacLaughlin, 1894). In the United States, university extension took on a different character after 1900. Rather than expanding access to university lectures, the “Wisconsin idea” focused on providing a range of scholarly and professional services to communities and industries (Woytanowitz, 1974). By 1914, 30 American universities had established general extension divisions, and a further 25 agricultural colleges engaged in agricultural extension (Shannon & Shoenfeld, 1965).

In English-speaking Canada, the earliest, sustained university extension initiatives were extra-mural courses inaugurated by Queen’s University in the 1880s and public lectures established by the University of Toronto in the 1890s. In the early 1900s, both Queen’s and Toronto began offering evening and summer school courses so that school-teachers could pursue higher education on a part-time basis. The first “Wisconsin-style” extension departments in Canada were established by the University of Saskatchewan in 1910 and the University of Alberta in 1912. By 1940, extension departments had been established at Toronto (1920), Queen’s (1925), St. Francis Xavier (1928), McGill (1928), and UBC (1936). Published scholarship about the adult education work of Canadian universities prior to 1965 is scarce, apart from studies of the Antigonish Movement (Alexander, 1997; MacAulay, 2002; Welton, 2013) and universities in Western Canada and Montreal (Cormack, 1981; McLean, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008, 2009, 2011; McLean & Damer, 2012; McLean & Rollwagen, 2008, 2010; Welton, 2003). Notably, there has been little published about Canadian university extension work focused on urban or francophone settings, or about the adult education work of universities who did not establish centralized extension units.

In Quebec, there is a rich historiography of adult education. Historical overviews include those by Chabot (2002), Jean (1983), Larose (1991a, 1991b, 1991c), Pénault and Senécal (1982), Ryan (1964), and Turgeon et al. (2007). Narratives of programs, policies, and research focused on adult education in Quebec include those by Aubin (1972), Bélanger and Gagner (1971), Bélanger-Simoneau (2017), Blais (1995), Gagnon (1972), and Lavoie (1990). However, in this literature, only Chabot and Pénault and Senécal make more than a passing mention of the historical role of Laval. The adult education work of Université de Montréal—which was established as a branch of Laval in 1876 and became

an independent institution in 1919—was documented by Blais et al. (1994) and Touchette (1973). Historical scholarship focused on Laval (Girouard, 1991; Hamelin, 1995; La-berge, 1978; Université Laval, 1952; Warren, 2014) rarely even mentions adult education.

The role of universities in the early history of adult education was more modest in France and Quebec than in Britain and anglophone Canada (Freeman, 2020; Groupe d'étude, 2010; Laot & Solar, 2018; Terrot, 1997). As such, the neglect of Laval in historical scholarship about adult education is understandable. However, Laval was a leader in university extension in the 1800s, and it had an important role in the expansion of adult education in Quebec from 1930 through 1965. As such, it is unfortunate that the only publications focused on the history of adult education at Laval are book chapters written by retired Laval administrators (Bussière, 1988b; LeBlanc, 1988). The scarcity of French-language scholarship about the history of adult education at Laval relates to an absence of recognition, in anglophone Canada, of Laval's work in adult education. Although Kidd (1950) and Corbett (1952) profiled extension work at Laval in national overviews, I found no scholarship in English assessing the contributions of Laval to the history of adult education.

While narrating the social history of Quebec is beyond the scope of this literature review, one should note that the story of adult education at Laval is intertwined with social changes from the 1930s through the 1960s that culminated in what historians refer to as Quebec's "Quiet Revolution" (for general narratives, see Behiels, 1985; Bélanger, 2011; Gauvreau, 2005; McRoberts, 1993; for the role of Laval in the prelude to the Quiet Revolution, see Racine St-Jacques, 2020; Simard & Allard, 2011). Such social changes included urbanization, rising levels of literacy and formal educational attainment, rising levels of participation in wage labour markets and unions, the entry of larger numbers of women to paid employment, and dislocations caused by economic depression and war.

## **Research Methods and Conceptual Framework**

This article constitutes a historical case study (McCulloch, 2004). In my past work on university extension in Canada, much of which is cited above, I found that historical case studies focused on individual institutions enable insight into the diverse ways that educational policies and practices are connected to local social contexts and global processes of change. I chose Laval because it was an innovative institution that developed a large and

diverse adult education program that served francophone adults, was oriented primarily to urban residents, and was organized without a centralized extension unit. My study begins in 1930 because at about that time Laval began delivering evening classes in social sciences and business. My study ends in 1965 because in that year the university's Board of Studies recommended that Laval disengage from instructing courses that were "at a sub-university level" and instead focus attention on "the development of higher education and research" (Commission des Études, 1965, pp. 6–7).

I gathered data for this article from archives at Laval and the Musée de l'Amérique francophone in 2021. References to archival materials are identified by the title of the fonds along with numbers associated with the series in which materials are filed (e.g., U567/15/1). Note that all archival materials are in French. I translated the materials myself. Of course, all processes of translation are also processes of interpretation. My interpretation of French-language archival materials was rooted in extensive prior work with parallel English-language materials, and in several years of experience working with colleagues at Laval on continuing education programs.

Since Laval only established a centralized extension division in 1962, data gathering involved sleuthing to determine who had previously been involved in adult educational activities. I found three faculty-specific units with major roles: the External Service of the Faculty of Social Sciences ("Service Extérieur d'Éducation Social," or SEES) operated from 1944 to 1951; the Centre for Adult Education and Community Development ("Centre de Culture Populaire de Laval," or CCPL) operated from 1951 to 1964; and the External Service of the Faculty of Commerce operated from 1954 through the late 1960s. In addition to these units, people in the Faculties of Theology, Philosophy, and Humanities engaged in adult education work.

Once I had gathered archival documents, data analysis involved three stages. First, I reconstructed a programmatic chronology of the evolution of adult education work at Laval. This chronology identified the nature and scope of various programs and sorted such programs by substantive topic and delivery mode (e.g., evening courses, summer courses, correspondence courses, and short courses). Second, I narrated claims made by those involved regarding the context and impact of various programs. Third, I analyzed this programmatic chronology and discursive narrative with the goal of determining what could be learned that would be of value to contemporary post-secondary

educators—particularly those responsible for processes of knowledge mobilization and community engagement. My inductive analysis was rooted in two decades spent as a scholar and administrator in these fields.

My analysis led me to present findings in an unconventional way. Rather than write a linear chronology of events or a thematic description of programs according to discipline or delivery mode, I organize the body of this article into five major lessons of value to contemporary scholars and leaders of community engagement and knowledge mobilization: beware of institution-centric thinking, know how you can help people make a living, partner with external organizations, play to your institutional strengths, and serve and learn from others. Scholars interested in knowing what took place at Laval during these decades will find a descriptive historical narrative embedded within the article. However, the organization of my findings according to “lessons learned” provides an analytical framework that demonstrates the value of historical scholarship for the broader audience of those engaged in contemporary educational leadership.

It is important to note that the lessons highlighted in this article were not unique to the experience of adult education at Laval. Indeed, while those lessons emerged inductively from my reading of historical documents from Laval, they could be further explored through a deductive reading of the heritage of the university extension movement in North America. This heritage is reflected in works by leading scholars of adult education from the 1940s through the 1960s (see Hallenbeck et al., 1962; Houle, 1957; Overstreet & Overstreet, 1941). Further, each of the lessons elaborated below resonates with the experiences of other Canadian universities from the 1930s through 1965. Readers wishing insight into related experiences in this era should consult studies of institutions such as Queen’s University (Dunlop, 1981), the University of Saskatchewan (McLean, 2007b), the University of Alberta (Cormack, 1981), and the University of British Columbia (McLean & Damer, 2012), as well as studies of the role of university leaders in the establishment of organizations such as the Canadian Association of Adult Education (Selman, 1995) and the Canadian Association of Directors of Extension and Summer Schools (Baker, 1994).



## Findings

I present findings under five headers, each of which identifies an important lesson learned from the history of adult education at Laval. The university was established in 1852, making it the oldest French-language university in North America. From 1871 to 1921, the university's annual calendars consistently announced "public courses" offered by the Faculty of Arts:

These courses, which are given at 8 o'clock in the evening, for the convenience of the public, do not have a time limit and vary from year to year, such that the same subject is not repeated for a period of at least three years.... The subjects are varied and are chosen from among those that offer the most appeal and utility for the public. (*AGUL*, 1871, p. 119)<sup>2</sup>

Topics for these courses came from the general fields of study within the domain of the Faculty of Arts: philosophy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, botany, zoology, astronomy, mineralogy, geology, and architecture. Annual calendars published the following description of the audience for whom such courses were oriented: "Capitalists and, in general, educated men who are interested in the development of the resources of the country, are especially invited to these courses" (*AGUL*, 1871, p. 119). Such gendered language was intentional: from 1871 through 1903, only men were allowed to attend Laval evening courses.

Laval evening courses were part of the curricula for students in law and medicine, along with those studying to become teachers and priests. Annual calendars claimed

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2 To avoid repetitive items in the list of references, I cite all references to the *Annuaire Général de l'Université Laval* with the letters *AGUL* followed by the year of publication. References to the *Annuaire de la Faculté des Sciences Sociales* are cited as *AFSS* followed by the year of publication. References to the *Annuaire de la Faculté de Philosophie* (the institutional home for the École de Sciences Sociales from 1932 through 1938 and the École de Sciences Sociales, Politiques, et Economiques from 1938 through 1943) are cited as *AFP* followed by the year of publication. References to the *Annuaire de la Faculté de Commerce* (and its historical predecessors, known as the École Supérieure de Commerce de Québec from 1937 through 1947 and the École de Commerce de l'Université de Laval from 1947 through 1952) are cited as *AFC* followed by the year of publication. References to the *Annuaire de la Faculté de Théologie* are cited as *AFT* followed by the year of publication. To provide bibliographic information for these academic calendars, I have included one entry in the list of references for each calendar. See Faculté de Commerce, 1953; Faculté de Philosophie, 1936; Faculté des Sciences Sociales, 1944; Faculté de Théologie, 1951; and Université Laval, 1932.

that intramural students would “draw from these courses a host of practical, useful ideas that they would contribute to disseminating throughout the country, as priests, doctors, lawyers, notaries, and teachers” (*AGUL*, 1871, pp. 119–120). As such, evening courses at Laval brought together young students and mature adults in the study of arts and science topics that had utility for business and the professions. References to public courses disappeared from Laval calendars after 1921, but about a decade later the university adopted more intensive forms of engagement with adult education. It is that more intensive engagement upon which this article focusses.

### **Beware of Institution-Centric Thinking**

From the early 1930s through the early 1950s, Laval endeavored, without much success, to attract adults to evening courses in the social sciences. In 1932, Laval established a School of Social Sciences; for six years this school delivered its courses exclusively in the evenings to facilitate the participation of working adults. It offered courses in law, ethics, sociology, political economy, household economics, social action, and journalism (*AFP*, 1936, p. 14). Diplomas were granted to students who “diligently attended” evening courses over a period of two years and passed examinations. In 1938, the School of Social Sciences became the School of Social, Political, and Economic Sciences and began delivering its regular program of study during the daytime. The program of study was lengthened from two to three years, and courses were offered in mornings and afternoons “like in the other Faculties” (*AFP*, 1938, p. 51). The school continued to offer selected evening courses “to give to those who cannot register as regular students the benefit of receiving at least a part of its teachings” (*AFP*, 1938, p. 54). From 1938 through 1941, the school organized two thematic series of evening courses: “Social Mondays” and “Co-operative Wednesdays.”

In 1943, Laval established a Faculty of Social Science. To attract more adults to evening courses, the faculty launched various certificate programs. In 1944, it restructured a “Certificate in Family Studies” (initially created in 1942) and inaugurated certificate programs in “Economic Studies” and “Public Administration.” For each of these programs, students took evening courses and were granted a certificate after attending 80 hours of instruction and successfully completing a final examination. The prospectuses for these programs of study were impressive; in each case, dozens of highly qualified experts lectured on compelling topics in well-organized series of evening sessions (SEES,

1944, pp. 15–44). Despite offering carefully constructed programs of study, the faculty could not attract students to its evening courses. Certificates in Economics and Public Administration were cancelled after just two years, having amassed a cumulative total of 87 course enrollees and 33 graduates (*AGUL*, 1945, 1946; *CCPL*, 1952). The program in family studies fared little better; over a six-year period only 38 students graduated with a Certificate in Family Studies.

In the latter 1940s, the Faculty of Social Sciences developed three new programs of study consisting of evening courses leading to certificates (*SEES*, 1950; *CCPL*, 1956a). Table 1 provides basic information about these two-year programs of study. About one-third of the curriculum of the Certificate for Recreational Instructors focused on theory (e.g., leisure, psychology, and working with groups) and two-thirds focused on practice (e.g., games, songs, dance, and storytelling). The Certificate in Labour Relations included courses on industrial relations, collective bargaining, applied statistics, and labour economics. Courses for the Certificate in Personal Development involved a range of topics in philosophy, psychology, personal well-being, and self-development.

**Table 1**

*SEES Certificate Programs, 1948–1955*

Name of program	Years of operation	Total enrolment	Mean annual enrolment	Contact hours
Recreational Instructors	1948–1953	181	36	116
Labour Relations	1949–1955	183	31	200
Personal Development	1950–1953	152	51	120

In these short-lived certificate programs, one sees the impact of institution-centric thinking. Programs were well-designed and delivered by accomplished professors. However, they enrolled few students and were cancelled within a few years. Programs closely reflected faculty members' academic interests and the faculty's departmental structure. Not only was the content of these programs oriented to the resources of the institution; so too were teaching styles employed. In explaining the decision to disengage from evening course delivery, Napoléon LeBlanc (*CCPL* Director) cited falling enrolments and stated, "the professors themselves failed to adjust their teaching so as to retain a heterogenous classroom" (LeBlanc, 1955, p. 11).

## Know How You Can Help People Make a Living

In 1931, Laval began offering “Special Commerce Courses.” Between 1931 and 1937, average annual enrolment in such courses was 26. In 1937, Laval affiliated itself with a School of Commerce (“École Supérieure de Commerce de Québec”) and began offering both day and evening courses in business management. In 1937, courses were offered on Monday and Friday evenings in: money, credit, and banking; industrial law and professional legislation; political economy; public finance; and transportation (*AFC*, 1937, p. 10). Enrolments in evening courses grew slowly. From 1937 through 1939 an annual average of 34 students enrolled in evening courses in business (*AFC*, 1944, p. 161). In 1940, The School of Commerce launched a strategy through which larger numbers of adults would be attracted to evening courses: the organization of programs of study that led to certificates. The first of these certificates were in Accounting and Finance (*AFC*, 1940, p. 8). Each certificate required the completion of three core courses and four elective courses (*AFC*, 1944, pp. 31–32). Through the 1940s, the school expanded the number and size of its certificate programs. In 1943, the school launched Saturday afternoon courses in sales, oriented to those who worked as travelling salespeople during the week. These courses, offered in Montreal and Sherbrooke in addition to Quebec City, led to a “Certificate in Sales” for students attending them for two years. In the mid-1940s, the School of Commerce added a “Certificate in Commercial Sciences” and a “Certificate of Higher Studies in Insurance” to its evening programs in Accounting and Finance. The expansion of certificate programs led to substantial growth in enrolments. From 1941 through 1943 the annual average number of students enrolled in evening business courses was just over 200 (*AFC*, 1944, p. 161). Between 1947 and 1951, an annual average of over 475 students enrolled in evening and correspondence courses in business, while between 65 and 70 additional students per year enrolled in Saturday afternoon sales courses (*AGUL*, 1948 through 1952).

In 1952, the School of Commerce became the Faculty of Commerce, and in 1954 the faculty established an External Service to coordinate evening courses, professional development workshops, and correspondence courses. During the subsequent decade, enrolments grew substantially, reaching over 2,500 enrollees annually in the early 1960s (Faculté de Commerce, 1963, p. 19). During this decade, evening courses in accounting, commercial law, industrial organization, and business administration constituted the largest programming initiative of the External Service, and courses in sales remained

consistently popular. Other courses offered throughout these years included those for insurance agents and those working with securities and investments.

In addition to awarding its own certificates, the Faculty of Commerce worked with external professional associations to coordinate its evening course offerings such that students completing those courses would be prepared to write examinations leading to professional designations. In the 1950s and 1960s, the primary certificates granted by the Faculty of Commerce were the “Certificate in Accounting Sciences” and the “Certificate in Industrial Sciences,” while the main professional designations pursued by evening course students were those of Chartered Accountant (C.A.), Certified General Accountant (C.G.A.), and Registered Industrial and Cost Accountant (R.I.A.).

While courses offered by the Faculty of Commerce constituted the largest evening program at Laval in the 1950s and 1960s, the Faculty of Humanities also offered programs oriented toward working adults. Evening courses in modern languages became quite popular in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1962–63, 615 people enrolled in evening language courses at Laval, distributed amongst courses in English (44%), Spanish (22%), German (15%), French (10%), Russian (6%), and Italian (3%) (Extension de l’Enseignement Universitaire, 1963, p. 4). Through such courses, people could improve their language skills and obtain certificates attesting to such skills.

In Laval’s evening courses in business management and languages, one sees two lessons for those wishing to promote community engagement and knowledge mobilization. First, programs are more likely to sustain people’s participation if they directly relate to how those people (want to) make a living. Quebec City had a labour market in which business management skills and second-language competencies were valued as pathways to career advancement. Second, programs are more likely to sustain participation if they provide formal recognition for learning accomplished. Evening courses in business only became highly subscribed at Laval once the university granted certificates and partnered with external organizations to enable students to obtain professional designations.

## **Partner with External Organizations**

Several adult educational programs at Laval were grounded in partnerships with external agencies (LeBlanc, 1988). In 1939, the head of social sciences at Laval (Georges-Henri

Lévesque) led the establishment of the Quebec Council for Co-operation. Members of this Council included the provincial Ministry of Agriculture, Federated Co-operatives of Quebec, the Quebec Alliance of Consumer Co-operatives, the Quebec Federation of Credit Unions, and the Catholic Farmers' Union. Laval provided the headquarters and a secretariat for this Council and published its journal. Laval's first certificate program was the "Certificate in Co-operative Studies." Students obtained this certificate through taking one evening class per week over the course of two academic years. The program was supported financially by the Quebec Association of Credit Unions, the Association of Maple Syrup Producers, and local credit unions. In 1939–40 Laval enrolled over 200 students in evening courses relating to co-operatives (*AGUL*, pp. 202–207), and by 1942, 30 students had graduated from the certificate program (*École des Sciences Sociales, Politiques, et Économiques*, 1942, p. 32). In the early 1940s, Laval developed correspondence courses in co-operative studies. By the mid-1940s, these courses had become formalized into nine modules, each of which had a study guide published under the direction of Eugène Bussière (SEES Director). From 1945 through 1948, an annual average of 100 students enrolled in at least one module (CCPL, 1958a).

Partnering, through the Quebec Council for Co-operation, was essential to the success of Laval's program of co-operative education. Partnerships were also integral to delivering annual short courses to four other target audiences: community leaders and adult educators, radio and television broadcasters, recreational instructors affiliated with Catholic social agencies, and leaders of Young Farmers' Clubs. In each case, sustained adult educational work was made possible through partnerships with government agencies and non-governmental organizations. The flagship program for Laval's work with adult educators and community leaders was "Camp Laquémac," an annual summer camp organized in collaboration with MacDonald College of McGill University and sponsored by the provincial and federal governments (CCPL, 1958b). Work with broadcasters was centred on a summer course sponsored by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Quebec Ministry of Youth, and involving studio work undertaken in collaboration with radio and television stations in Quebec City (CCPL, 1956b, 1960). Laval brought young farmers together for an annual, five-day residential seminar sponsored by the provincial Ministry of Agriculture and focused on leadership development and group facilitation skills (CCPL, 1957). Recreational instructors participated in an annual summer camp sponsored by the Quebec Ministry of Youth and

organized in collaboration with a provincial association of Catholic dioceses engaged in recreational programming for children and youth (Provencher, 1959). Table 2 provides additional details about these five adult education initiatives characterized by sustained partnerships with external organizations.

**Table 2**

*Synopsis of CCPL Short Courses and Their Participants*

Target Audience	Years of operation	Total enrolled	Mean enrolled	Contact hours	Typical ages	Educational attainment
Co-op managers	1948–1954	269	38	30	20–50	7–10 years
Adult educators	1947–1957	418	38	80	30–55	12–15 years
Broadcasters	1948–1961	308	22	80	20–35	12–15 years
Young farmers	1951–1956	188	31	32	16–23	6–9 years
Recreation instructors	1947–1960	1,483	106	55	17–23	10–12 years

Partnerships were also central to an initiative that touched many adults across Quebec. In 1955, Laval established the Laval University Film Library (“Cinématèque Universitaire Laval,” or CUL), and in the subsequent years this unit became an important resource for adult education by lending films for showings by educational institutions and community groups. The National Film Board provided CUL with several hundred French-language films (CUL, 1955, pp. 2–4). CUL loaned films to institutional and community-based groups willing to screen such films for educational purposes. By the early 1960s, CUL reported loaning over 2,000 films annually, and estimated that 90,000 people watched the films (CCPL, 1961). Partnerships were central to this work, both in obtaining movies and in arranging for screenings through places like high schools and community associations.

## Play to Your Institutional Strengths

While institution-centric thinking led to problems with certificate programs in the social sciences, recognizing and making the most of institutional strengths led to successful adult programming in theology and languages. The difference is that institution-centric thinking takes the priorities of disciplines and departments as the starting point in program planning, while playing to your institutional strengths involves understanding how one’s university is distinctively positioned to provide programs that address people’s



pressing needs and aspirations. From 1930 to 1965, Laval had two competitive advantages in the domain of adult education. First, it was a prestigious Catholic institution, in a province where the Catholic church had a strong role in the provision of education, health, and social services. Second, it was a French language institution, in a continent where most people were English-speaking. Laval mobilized these strengths to deliver two adult programs: public courses in theology and summer courses in French.

From 1948 through the late 1960s, the Faculty of Theology provided adult education to nuns, priests, and lay people through “Public Courses.” Courses were delivered in afternoon and evening time slots to accommodate a broad range of students. Courses were 12 weeks in length and offered in autumn and winter semesters. Students could obtain two Laval credentials through public courses: a “Certificate of Religious Studies” was granted to students attending regularly for two semesters and successfully completing exams at the end of each, and a “Diploma in Religious Science” was granted to students successfully completing three certificates. Public courses and credentials in theology were oriented toward teachers in Catholic school systems and “lay people wishing to penetrate more deeply into the domain of the sacred sciences” (*AFT*, 1956, p. 21).

Public courses in theology were popular. Between 1948–49 and 1966–67, an average of nearly 150 students enrolled in such courses each year. Of those enrollees, roughly 40% were lay people, 40% were nuns, and 20% were priests. From the late-1950s through the mid-1960s, the Faculty of Theology granted an average of a dozen diplomas each year to students having successfully completed three years of public courses. The curriculum varied from year to year and was structured to avoid repetition for students pursuing a three-year diploma. Topics included grace, morality, spirituality, incarnation, canonical law, justice, prudence, penitence, the Catholic sacraments, holy texts, and the nature of God. Final examinations required students to write short essays in response to the content for each topic.

Religious personnel were also central to the launch of summer courses. Laval first offered summer courses in 1935, when members of the Faculty of Philosophy taught two-week courses in pedagogy to primary schoolteachers—most of whom were Catholic nuns—during the vacation period (*AFP*, 1936, p. 11). Summer courses in pedagogy continued annually and were organized to enable students to obtain a credential from Laval for completing four summers of study; between 1946 and 1952 such courses annually attracted 150 students.



Beginning in 1938, Laval's summer school was extended to a period of four weeks, and expanded to include courses in French, English, philosophy, and other languages. By 1943, the summer school had expanded to five weeks in duration, and courses in French had overtaken those in pedagogy as the most popular ones. Of the 319 summer school enrollees that year, 43% enrolled in French, 19% in English, 18% in pedagogy, 12% in philosophy, and 8% in Spanish (*AGUL*, 1944, pp. 358–365). Students of French were typically schoolteachers from outside Quebec, while students of English were typically schoolteachers from Quebec. In the 1940s, Laval added other languages to its summer course offerings, and lengthened the summer session to six weeks. In the 1950s, summer courses at Laval diversified even further, to involve the study of librarianship, natural sciences, mathematics, the Gregorian chant, music, history, geography, and business administration. By the late 1950s, over 2,000 students attended summer courses each year at Laval. Analyzing 1959 and 1960 enrolments, 45% of students took French, 13% took pedagogy, and the remainder were distributed in courses in English, natural and social sciences, other languages, music, librarianship, and business administration (Université Laval, 1960).

From the late 1930s through the 1960s, summer courses at Laval were a distinct form of adult education. As was the case with other Canadian universities, summer courses at Laval provided in-service schoolteachers with the opportunity to complete higher education through intensive courses taken during the summer vacation period. Laval was unique in developing a large program dedicated to teaching French to non-French speakers. Playing to its distinctive strengths—as a Catholic and francophone institution—enabled Laval to deliver theological education and French as a second language programs to large numbers of adults.

### **Serve and Learn from Others**

From the late 1930s through the mid 1960s, Laval promoted adult education across Quebec by providing consulting services and organizational support to external organizations having educational mandates. I have outlined such work in the co-operative sector. Consulting work expanded substantially in the 1950s with the establishment of the CCPL. LeBlanc (1955) wrote that the CCPL had two functions: teaching and the provision of

consulting services to “people responsible for educational activities within groups and associations” (1955, p. 2). LeBlanc defined four roles for the CCPL in its consulting work:

1. Help these groups to define the content of their educational programs.
2. Advise them regarding the choice of competent people to deal with content involved in given programs.
3. Counsel them regarding working methods likely to ensure the effective participation of learners and enable them to embrace new educational experiences.
4. Recommend written documentation and audio-visual materials useful for the comprehension of given questions. (LeBlanc, 1955, p. 2)

LeBlanc reported that the CCPL worked closely with the Quebec Council of Co-operation, the Confederation of Catholic Workers of Canada, the Federation of Industrial Unions of Quebec, the Canadian Institute for Adult Education, along with various credit unions, recreational associations, and Catholic social action groups. Each year until the mid-1960s, CCPL annual reports referred to organizations that the Centre had supported through its consulting services. As such, Laval University promoted adult education both through the direct work of its faculties, and through the indirect impact of working on behalf of external organizations.

While serving external organizations enabled Laval to leverage its expertise in adult education for the benefit of Quebec society, learning from other organizations enabled Laval to construct more effective programs. Indeed, the establishment of co-operative education at Laval was inspired by Father Georges-Henri Lévesque’s knowledge of St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia (Bussière, 1988b). Learning from others took two basic forms. First, people at Laval networked extensively with other professionals engaged in adult education. In a document from the 1950s, the CCPL claimed that it had active relationships with 137 other organizations, including co-operatives, unions, universities, national and provincial government agencies and non-governmental organizations, and United Nations’ agencies (CCPL, n.d.). Second, Laval leaders undertook study tours to universities with adult education programs. In the early 1930s, Lévesque studied social science in Europe and worked at the Université de Montréal prior to founding the Laval School of Social Sciences (Bussière, 1988a). In 1945, Bussière travelled to Ohio State University, University of Florida, National Autonomous University of Mexico, Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, the Center for Adult Education in Boston, Colum-

bia University, and the School of International Co-operation in New York (Bussière, 1945). In 1953, LeBlanc travelled to 14 university extension units in Western Canada and the United States (LeBlanc, 1953).

## Discussion

Why should contemporary scholars and leaders in higher education care about adult education work undertaken at Laval between 1930 and 1965, or about the generalizable insights that I have distilled from such work? The historical narrative presented above—and the principles that I used to structure that narrative—are important because past practices conceptualized as adult education and extension, along with current practices conceptualized as knowledge mobilization and community engagement, represent efforts to address a disconcerting feature of the relationship between universities and society. As outlined in the introduction to this article, prior to 1950 only a small number of Canadians attended university. Universities were understood as institutions of privilege, educating the children of political and economic elites and preparing privileged youth for entry to the professions (Axelrod, 2008). University extension activities were explicitly designed for two purposes: to provide educational services to a broader range of people, and to improve the public perception of universities who were financially dependent upon philanthropic and (increasingly over time) taxpayer support. The emergence of adult education work at universities was rooted both in efforts to democratize higher education and in efforts to further the public relations agendas of university leaders.

Since 1950, there has been a tremendous expansion of university enrolments. In 2019–20, there were 1,377,597 university students enrolled in Canada, 83% of whom were Canadian citizens (Statistics Canada, 2021). This represents a 2000% increase over the number of students enrolled in 1950. Considering the growth of the Canadian population (Worldometer, 2022) the proportion of Canadians enrolled at universities has increased by over 600% since 1950. One might be tempted to assume from such numbers that the democratization of higher education in Canada has been accomplished—that “mass” universities have superseded the “elite” institutions of earlier decades and, as such, that the social importance of extension work has declined.

Upon closer inspection, however, one finds that the relationship between universities and the social class structure has not dramatically changed, and that Canadian uni-

versities remain institutions of privilege. Canadians with a university degree earn substantially more, on average, over their lifetimes, than do Canadians whose highest level of educational attainment is a college certificate or a high school diploma (Frenette, 2014). Canadians whose parents possess a post-secondary credential are more likely to attend university, and to move on from an undergraduate degree to graduate or professional training (Finnie et al., 2008; Frenette, 2007; Turcotte, 2011; Zarifa, 2012). As such, the educational attainment of one's parents has a significant impact on one's own educational attainment and labour market outcomes. This fact has persevered in Canada despite the significant expansion of access to post-secondary education in recent decades (Chow & Guppy, 2021; Davies et al., 2014), due in part to the reality that labour market outcomes associated with credentials vary by program of study (Frenette & Handler, 2020) and post-secondary institution (Milla, 2018; Mullen et al., 2021). In short, while the number of university students has increased dramatically in the past 70 years, the basic relationship between universities and social class reproduction in Canada has remained intact.

Since the democratization of higher education has not been fully accomplished in Canada, how can one understand the contemporary focus of university leaders on themes such as knowledge mobilization and community engagement—themes that have inherited from the adult education and extension movements a concern with equity, justice, and universities' social impact? From an institutional perspective, one needs to carefully analyze linkages between universities' evolving public relations concerns and processes that have been dubbed the “corporatization” of higher education (Brownlee, 2015; Chan & Fisher, 2008; Polster & Newson, 2015). Corporatization has taken place in the context of significant reductions in the proportion of universities' budgets obtained through the transfer of tax revenue from governments. Contemporary claims to social relevance—frequently made through vocabularies of knowledge mobilization and community engagement—should be critically assessed considering the public relations agendas of institutional leaders who have been forced to seek other sources of revenue to compensate for declining public support.

In short, the history of university-based adult education—at Laval and elsewhere—is important to contemporary scholars and leaders in higher education because it provides insight into efforts both to democratize higher education and to promote universities' corporate interests through academic activities having significant public relations benefits.

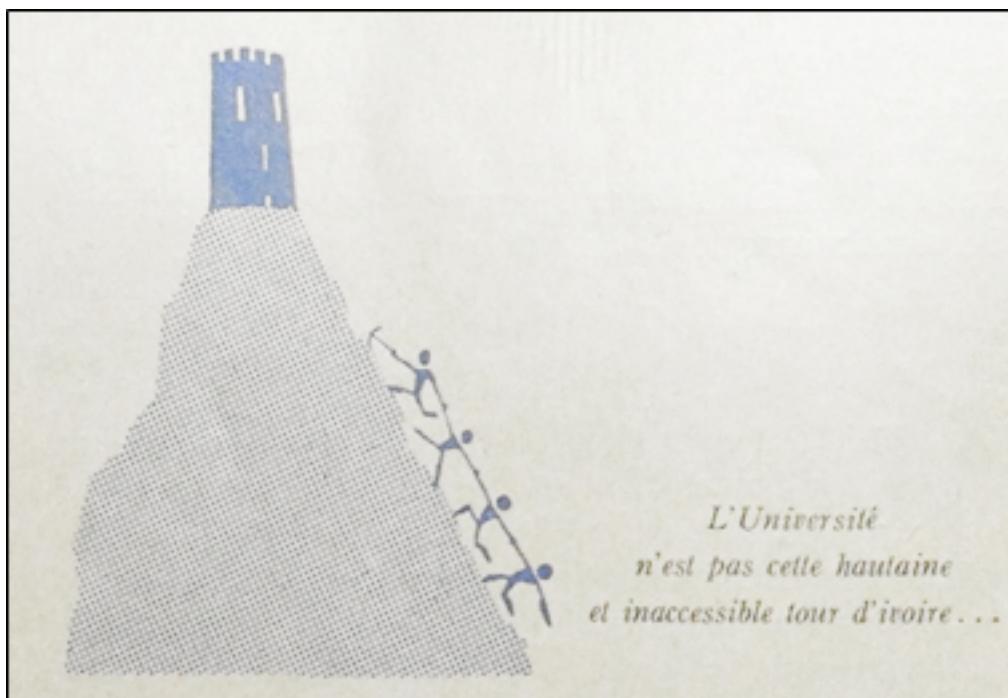
## Conclusions

This article has narrated an important chapter in the history of education in Canada regarding the integration of adult education work within an institution of higher education. It has identified the avant-garde work of Laval in the period between 1871 and 1921, and it has narrated the deployment of strategies of evening courses, correspondence courses, short courses, workshops, summer courses, and educational films to reach adult learners between 1930 and 1965 in areas ranging from the social sciences and humanities to theology and business management. Laval developed a large and diverse program of adult education that reached significant numbers of adults. Bringing the story of that program to light is the first contribution of this article.

This article has also provided significant insight of value to contemporary practitioners of knowledge mobilization and community engagement. In 1948, the Laval Faculty of Social Sciences published a retrospective of its work, which included the graphic reproduced as Figure 1 (Faculté des Sciences Sociales, 1948, p. 48).

**Figure 1**

*The University Is Not This Haughty and Inaccessible Ivory Tower*



Much has changed in the past 60 years. Canadian universities now serve vastly larger numbers of students and are substantially more research-intensive than they were in the middle of the 20th century. Canadian society has changed dramatically, with levels of educational attainment far outstripping those of earlier times, and with a proliferation of institutions and media competing as sources of information for Canadians. I do not suggest that Canadian universities should “return to the good old days” of extension. Contemporary initiatives in knowledge mobilization and community engagement must use fundamentally different methods from those employed in the past. However, I do assert that we could learn much from the experience of our historical predecessors in the effort to ensure that universities contribute to society in ways that transcend our conventional work in research and higher education. The lessons elucidated here—beware of institution-centric thinking, know how you can help people make a living, partner with external organizations, play to your institutional strengths, and serve and learn from others—are as relevant to Canadian post-secondary institutions today as they were to Laval in the middle of the 20th century. Reflecting carefully about these lessons enriches our work as educational scholars and leaders.

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