

Professors Make the Grade: International Students cite Canadian educators as one of the best things about their learning adventure in Canada

Ottawa, October 5, 2009: Canadian educators are open, engaged, at the top of their field and at the cutting edge of research, says Karron James in describing her Canadian learning experience. This message resounded in a letter that Karron wrote, as did hundreds of other letters from applicants for the prestigious **Liz Paterson International Student of the Year Award**.

The annual competition invited international students to share their insights into the study in Canada experience by writing a letter home to family or friends.

The Liz Paterson International Student of the Year Award was founded and is managed by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), in honour of a leader in international education.

With over 400 original, funny and touching letters received from international students across Canada, the selection committee, comprised of CBIE members from Cégep John Abbott College, Georgian College, MacEwan College, University of British Columbia, University of Manitoba, Université de Québec à Montréal and Queen's University, faced a difficult task. The standout, however, was Karron James, a McGill graduate student from Antigua. Her energetic letter described the ups and more ups of studying in Canada, such as the peaceful and welcoming atmosphere, the quality of teaching and the multicultural classrooms. Karron is also a Commonwealth Scholar, having held an award from the Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship Program since 2005.

The runners-up for the prize, César Sanchez of Université Laval and Nkeiruka Vivian Okarji of University of Ottawa, also gave their Canadian learning experience top marks, mentioning especially the multicultural and multilingual mosaic and the close contact between professors, students, teacher's assistants and staff, both contributing to a sense of belonging.

"Our top three applicants this year wrote decidedly different styles of letters, and we are thrilled that we continue to get so many thoughtful submissions from across the nation, in English and French, from students candidly sharing their experiences with us," said CBIE President Karen McBride. "CBIE is committed to helping international students get the best out of their experience in Canada, and we believe that this awards program draws attention to international education and Canada's successes in this field from the perspective of the direct beneficiary. It's exciting to read about their experiences and gratifying to know that what we value in Canadian education, international students value too."

CBIE established the International Student of the Year Award in 2004 in honour of Elizabeth (Liz) Paterson, who for 25 years served as Director of the International Student Centre at the University of Toronto, guiding and encouraging thousands of young people from diverse countries. The program is supported by the Elizabeth Paterson Endowment Fund, formed from voluntary individual donations of international student advisers across Canada. To contribute, contact Denis Guertin at dguertin@cbie.ca or by phone at 613-237-4820 ext. 243.

CBIE thanks StudentGuard Health Insurance for its generous contribution to the endowment fund. CBIE also thanks the British Council whose similar competition has inspired our own.

The full texts of the winning letter and those that received honourable mention can be found at www.cbie.ca.

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WINNING LETTERS:



Karron James
McGill University

Dear Sherry,

Its been a while since I left Antigua to pursue graduate studies at McGill but I promised that I would keep in touch. At first, I was a bit nervous about moving to the big city but I have been having an amazing time thus far. This opportunity to study at one of Canadas world renowned universities was a bit overwhelming in the beginning. Many of the professors are at the top of their field and their research is best described as cutting-edge. However, many of these professors are also good teachers who are willing to provide the resources, human and otherwise, to help you get up to speed with the field. This has really helped me to become more at ease and adept at my work. As if that wasnt enough, I have been given opportunities to attend scientific conferences where Ive networked with students and professors from other universities in Canada and around the world. My department also routinely invites scientists from other parts of the world who are eager to share and discuss their research. A few of these scholars have even expressed excitement at being able to do so in such a peaceful and welcoming environment. I feel very fortunate that this country in which I chose to pursue my education is so well revered by others for the quality of research conducted here as well as its sense of community.

Being from such a small island, it has been amazing to meet so many different people, from so many, many different countries, cultures and ethnicities who have also chosen Canada to pursue graduate studies. I am experiencing real multiculturalism here. I have developed relationships with people from other parts of the Caribbean, South America, North America, Europe, Asia and Australia. Weve shared our food, our music and our thoughts on everything from history, to politics, to religion, to pop culture. Our experiences and points of view often vary but we have a deep appreciation for each other nonetheless. We also support each other in our research whenever possible, whether this happens at our workbenches, in the hallways of the Lyman Duff building, or at the university pub on a Friday evening.

Its endearing how the Canadians whom Ive met are so eager to hear about my culture as well as share theirs with me. A professor in my department invited us graduate students and staff members to his club to teach us how to curl. Im not sure if youve heard of this sport but it has nothing to do with hair! If you ever come across it on TV, trust me, its way more fun than it looks. Ive also tried snow-shoeing and ice skating and managed not to fall too many times. Amazingly, I have also become a fan of hockey! Canadians go absolutely wild for this sport and their enthusiasm is too infectious to ignore.

Overall, my experience here so far has been a very positive one. I won an award for an oral presentation at a scientific conference this past summer. That was great to realise that merit is awarded based on the quality your work and that being an international student does not disqualify you. You should really think about doing your studies here in the future. In the mean time, theres a lot to do before I can join you back home again. Ill keep you up to date on life here.

Cheers!

Karron



César Sanchez
Université Laval

Chers parents :

J'écris cette lettre pour vous décrire brièvement mon expérience de vie au Canada. J'y poursuis mes études et c'est une expérience incroyable pour mon cheminement scolaire et pour ma vie. Acquérir de nouvelles connaissances et avoir l'opportunité de développer de nouveaux défis, m'ont permis d'apprendre une troisième langue (le Français), obtenir mon certificat en Français langue étrangère ou seconde et commencer mon Baccalauréat en Administration des Affaires. Au Canada, j'ai eu la possibilité de développer mon potentiel et d'élargir mes connaissances grâce au haut niveau d'exigence d'éducation, dans une culture d'apprentissage où mon intégration a été facile, grâce à l'accueil de la communauté canadienne. La formation académique acquise au jour le jour, à l'Université Laval, renforce mon apprentissage par des excellents modèles d'éducation. Le contact avec l'ambiance multiculturelle canadienne m'a permis d'avoir une perception différente des choses, en regardant d'autres habitudes et façons de vivre.

Je vis actuellement une expérience exigeante et exceptionnelle concernant le sport-études au sein de l'équipe de football de l'Université Laval (Rouge et Or). La combinaison sport-études m'a amené à devenir un meilleur étudiant, un meilleur athlète, et surtout une meilleure personne grâce aux compétitions du SIC (Sport Interuniversitaire Canadien) où j'ai rencontré des étudiants-athlètes de partout au Canada et dans le monde. La poursuite des études universitaires et la pratique d'un sport d'excellence, réuni des gens de toutes races, ethnies et tous ont en commun, la passion du sport et la réussite de leurs études universitaires. Le jeune étudiant-athlète qui est parti du Mexique pour poursuivre ses études au Canada est devenu une personne plus mature, plus responsable, plus ouverte et plus sociable. Ce que je suis devenu aujourd'hui, est un enrichissement pour ma communauté. L'assurance et l'expérience que j'ai acquise par mon séjour au Canada vont bien m'aider dans mes futures décisions, me serviront grandement dans ma performance personnelle et professionnelle. Merci maman et merci papa de m'avoir donné cette merveilleuse opportunité.

César



Nkeiruka Vivian Okorji
University of Ottawa

How you dey my brother? Mummy and daddy tell me you writing your SSCE final exams. I hope you get excellent grades so you can also come over to Canada just like I did, because you're exposed to a lot of great opportunities. How is "Oga driver-small boy"?

Hehe, I have seen snow oo. Kai!! First of all, it was cold ehh, this is not even rainy season cold like in Nigeria ooo, as in ehnn, it was colder than deep-freezer! You remember in all those American movies that we see snow on tv, I touched it Keluba, life and direct, "omo" mehnn, the thing na "fokasibe". They even have furnace that doesn't show the wood burning the fire, you'll see fire but not real fire, they call it "electric furnace" Yes Keluba! I even went to the mall. The place is so big. On the way, we saw many tall buildings oo. They call it "skyscrapers".

My school is university of Ottawa and it so big. You know how in our schools, the libraries have no computers. But in Morriset Library, OH MY GOD- there are like 6 floors and on each floor, there are over 60 computers! The first time, I saw computers everywhere! WOW! Can you also imagine, the professors post their notes ONLINE, we don't have copy notes in class! There's this thing we call "Virtual Campus", it's like a website where professors, students and teacher assistants communicate with each other. Like you can even post what you think about the class or if you have problems you can just

post a question. Also, you know how teachers whip us in class in Nigeria, they don't do it here. Nobody whips you for anything...haha! Interesting and funny, sheyy?

Studying in Canada opens you up to a lot of options because your post-secondary certificate can be used in all parts of the world, so you don't have to worry your certificate being accepted there. The immigration issue a visa for you to stay and work in Canada if you want after you graduation.

Canada is a multicultural country so it's easier for you mingle as there are a lot of people from different cultural backgrounds that you would meet.

I got my first job! I worked with Rogers- it's a telephone company. I have been exposed to the typical Canadian culture. I became the president of my faculty! At first I thought I would not do so well academically since, the system here is different. But with the help of my T.A.'s and my friends, I am able to stand on my own. Yes!! I forgot to tell you, I now know how to speak French. It's so cool.