

# OUTDOOR CLASSES

IN HIGHER EDUCATION DURING THE  
CONTEXT OF COVID-19 IN CANADA



Guide to support management during the first phases of implementation



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June 2020

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This guide was created with the support of



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To quote the document: Ayotte-Beaudet, J.-P., Beaudry, M.-C., Bisaillon, V., & Cordeau, P. (2020). *Outdoor Classes in Higher Education during the context of Covid-19 in Canada, Guide to support management during the first phases of implementation*. Université de Sherbrooke. 21 p.

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## PREAMBLE

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the start of the fall 2020 school year will be a challenge for higher education establishments. Many institutions are wondering how they can provide their students with some kind of campus life experience. This is the starting point of Sherbrooke University's initiative, which, in the context of the pandemic, has chosen to allow a larger number of students to participate in as many in-person activities as possible, while respecting the sanitary rules in place, as the success and perseverance of our students are at the heart of our mission.

The implementation of outdoor classes on the campuses of higher education establishments represents a solution to increase in-person activities. While they do contribute to increasing the number of teaching spaces available, their significance is mainly due to the quality of the experience they can provide, furthermore, in teaching environments which are rarely utilized.

As well as providing an original experience, outdoor classes have the potential of becoming a pedagogical resource in order to make learning more concrete. It provides spaces which favor the implementation of strategies inspired by outdoor education. When used properly, this educational method is known to have cognitive, physical, mental, and academic benefits.

The goal of this document is to allow the management of higher education establishments to view the first steps that Sherbrooke University has taken during the implementation of outdoor classes in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and to benefit from this experience. A pedagogical guide will be developed before the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year in order to allow institutions to maximize the potential of these spaces.

## STEPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OUTDOOR CLASSES

This section presents the steps that Sherbrooke University has taken in order to implement outdoor classes. They are related to the planning of the project (steps 1 and 2), the choice of locations (steps 3 and 4), and the implementation (step 5). While the steps are presented one after the other, the process included many feedback loops.

### 1. Appointing a Committee Responsible for the Implementation of the Outdoor Classes.

Management must appoint a committee responsible for the implementation of the outdoor classes, with one person responsible for coordinating the project. This committee will propose a strategy to implement the deliverables clearly defined by the institution, ensure the proper layout of the sites, and will think of ways to sustain the sites post Covid-19.

- The members of the committee must be in a position to use their expertise regarding both the pedagogical considerations and logistical issues that could be encountered.
  - We can solicit - continuously or punctually - outdoor education, sustainability, development, and physical education specialists, as well as the training support service, audiovisual, real estate, and health and safety departments.
  - We strongly recommend involving at least one teacher and one student in the project.
  - The mandate must be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART).
- ❖ At Sherbrooke University, a committee of 4 people was appointed by the Secretary General of the university. A few other collaborators were solicited punctually according to the needs of the project. The mandate became clearer through several conversations between the person responsible for the committee and management.

### 2. Defining the Committee's Objectives and the Deliverables.

It is essential to properly define the objectives given to the committee responsible for the implementation, as well as the deliverables expected by the institution. This is especially important if you have a short deadline. The committee must be clear on the manner in which it must report its proposals to management, and to what extent these proposals must be detailed.

- Is the committee strictly responsible for evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of the implementation of outdoor classes, or is it also expected to ensure the operationalization of the implementation?

- Is the committee responsible for the budget, or is the budget managed by management or another department?
- ❖ At Sherbrooke University, management decided that the committee was responsible for identifying potential sites, analyzing them, developing data sheets for each outdoor class, and reporting any potential pedagogical or logistical issues to management for consideration. The implementation of outdoor classes itself falls into a more global planning regarding the resumption of university activities in the context of social distancing.

## EDUCATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

A guide dedicated to pedagogy will be developed specifically for the teachers over the next few weeks. However, it is still important to keep certain pedagogical considerations in mind when implementing outdoor classes.

- Outdoor classes increase the areas in which to hold pedagogical activities in the context of Covid-19. Long term, they will allow teachers to innovate and implement new pedagogical strategies.
- Research has shown that the teachers who have the most success teaching outdoors are those who use pedagogical strategies which allow their students to be more active.
- A major advantage of outdoor classes is that the locations in which they are carried out can become authentic and significant pedagogical contexts.
- Learning while in contact with nature is known to favor concentration and reduce stress.

### 3. Locating and Characterising Potential Sites.

The identification and characterization of potential sites to hold outdoor classes represents a key step in the process. The first identification phase can be done using a plan of the campus (outdoor agora, grassy spaces, courtyard, parking lot, etc.). It is essential to visit the campus and each of the locations in person in order to evaluate their true potential from a teaching/learning perspective.

- A chart is useful when characterising the sites. This chart should include different types of information:
  - Physical characteristics: size of the site, its capacity considering social distancing rules, accessibility, possible periods of use of the site according to weather conditions, potential visual and auditory distractions (ex: construction site, delivery trucks, etc.).

- Pedagogical characteristics: favorable pedagogical conditions at the site, configuration of the layout of the class, resources needing to be mobilized.
  - Technical parameters: wifi availability, access to a power source, bathrooms in the vicinity, voice amplifying requirements and the possibility of providing visual support (whiteboard, projector, etc.).
  - Development parameters: can the site hold an open sky outdoor class, a covered outdoor class, or both? Does furniture need to be added for the comfort of the students and teachers (covered area, chairs, desk, etc.)?
  - Taking pictures and using apps such as Measure on *iPhone* can be useful for collecting information.
- ❖ At Sherbrooke University, sites were identified using Google Maps, and the main campus as well as the health campus were visited. All the information was gathered and saved in an Excel file.

## TYPES OF OUTDOOR CLASSES

We can distinguish uncovered and covered outdoor classes.

Four types are proposed.

### **Outdoor Classes with an Organized Layout**

The presence of several agoras comprising stone benches on different levels on Sherbrooke University's main campus corresponds to the first type: the outdoor class with an organized layout. This type of class is usually great for lecturing large groups. Students can easily remain on site and hold discussions in subgroups. These sites were already used for outdoor classes by certain teachers.

### **Outdoor Classes without an Organized Layout**

The outdoor class without an organized layout allows students to experience nature in a more immersive way. Its organization is flexible and easily adaptable to the teacher's pedagogical strategies. A picnic table could be set up for the teacher to lay down their material.

### **Covered Outdoor Classes**

The covered outdoor class provides shelter from light rain. According to the space available, it generally accommodates smaller groups. The layout can be variable according to the use of the space (tables, chairs, etc.).

### **Outdoor Classes under a Tent**

Outdoor classes under a tent provide good protection from the elements. If the tent can close on the sides, it can provide even better protection. Closed tents can even be heated in order to prolong their period of use. Geodesic domes are also a good alternative to tents.

#### 4. Choosing the Sites and Determining the Configuration.

In order to ensure that the implementation of the outdoor classes is a success on every level, the final selection of the sites must be made with the collaboration of management, pedagogical specialists, and the people responsible for the logistics of the project. Each party has an essential point of view to take into consideration. Once all the sites have been confirmed, the committee will be able to produce technical sheets for each class. These sheets will help the teachers to plan pedagogical activities, and the people involved in the implementation to make the best decisions.

- The selection of the sites involves confirming certain questions raised during their characterization, for example if additional furniture needs to be added.
  - The technical sheet may include descriptive information (picture of the site, basic description of the site, if it is covered or not, dimensions, capacity while respecting social distancing, etc.), technical information (wifi, electricity, voice amplification, visual support, etc.), information relating to the layout (accessibility, tent, canvas, pergola, open sky, ground covered, furniture required by the teacher, furniture for the students, etc.), pedagogical information (estimated period of use, scenario in case of bad weather, ideal pedagogical modalities, etc.), and sanitation information (waste disposal, access to a bathroom, clearly indicated seating (respecting social distancing), disinfection station, etc.).
- ❖ At Sherbrooke University, the characterization exercise allowed us to distinguish 4 different types of outdoor classes with different layouts (previous page). As an example, all the technical sheets used for Sherbrooke University's main campus are presented in the annex.

#### 5. Planning the Implementation with all the Services Involved.

Once the technical sheets have been validated by management, it is time to plan the implementation of the outdoor classes with all the services involved. An exhaustive list of the requirements for the implementation of outdoor classes and the institutional services that can fulfill those requirements provides a harmonious deployment of the outdoor classes. Here are a few examples of services that should be involved.

- **Commissioning of the sites and general coordination:** people need to be identified who are responsible for commissioning each site. At Sherbrooke University, teams from the Sports Center, Cultural Center, as well as the graduating class were identified as being able to ensure the coordination of the commissioning of certain sites.

- **Reservation system:** all the sites must be accessible to everyone in the institution in order to allow the teachers to access the sites which best correspond to their pedagogical needs. Training Support and IT services can ensure the function and deployment of the reservation system.
- **Outdoor plan of the campus:** the institution must provide a plan of the campus on which the sites of outdoor classes are clearly identified.
- **Broadcasting the implementation of the outdoor classes and signage:** the communications service can take care of broadcasting the implementation of the outdoor classes on the campus. Signs must also allow teachers and students, as well as the rest of the community, to clearly identify their outdoor classes on the campus.
- **Integrating the outdoor classes into campus life:** the property management service ensures the coordination of the outdoor classes with the other activities on campus (construction, future events, snow removal, etc.).
- **Audiovisual requirements:** the property management service and the IT service should be involved in the installation of the equipment and technical support, if needed.
- **Management of the sites:** identify the service or personnel responsible for managing the sites (ex: material management, surveillance, first responders, etc.). The safety service or its equivalent must ensure that the sites are available, especially if they are usually used as a leisure area, for example.
- **Promotional objects:** the university bookstore could have a special offer featuring objects that could improve user experience (ex: waterproof notebook, 2m x 2m covers, hats, sunscreen, etc.).
- **Respecting sanitary rules:** evaluate the need to mark the ground in order to enforce social distancing measures according to the location. The property management service or sports center can take care of the marking (with the help of chalk or non-permanent paint). With the help of the health and safety department, plan for disinfection stations as well as disinfection procedures.



## SANITATION RULES TO RESPECT



Enforce the 2m distance between each person on the site.



Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.



Use an alcohol-based disinfectant if you do not have access to soap and water.



Observe proper hygiene rules when you cough or sneeze; cover your nose and mouth with your arm or elbow in order to reduce the spread of germs.



If you use tissue paper, discard it as soon as possible and wash your hands afterwards.



If you are sick, please stay home. Call 1 877-644-4545 and follow the instructions given to you.



Avoid direct contact with others through handshakes and prioritize practical alternatives.



Avoid sharing objects such as water bottles, etc.

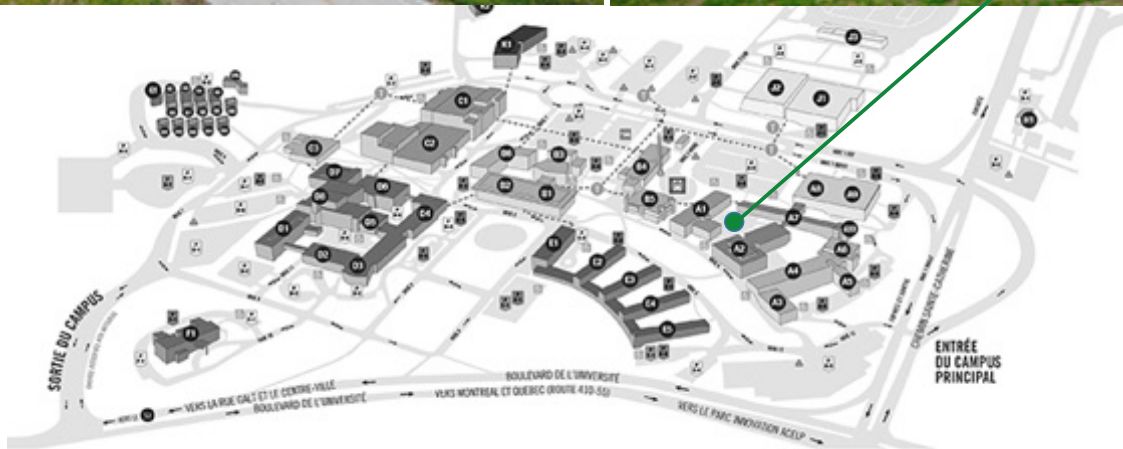
## CONCLUSION

The choice of implementing outdoor classes in the context of Covid-19 at Sherbrooke University aims to increase in-person educational activities in order to favor perseverance and success for all of our students. As we are publishing this guide, and while all the steps have not been completed, our intention is to share our process with other higher education establishments.

Beyond the practical aspect of outdoor classes, Sherbrooke University wishes that these sites be used while achieving the full potential of outdoor learning. Over the course of the next few weeks, our team will develop a pedagogical guide specifically for teachers. Within the next few months we will also develop outdoor learning areas that will be able to be implemented permanently onto our campus. Without a doubt, outdoor classes at Sherbrooke University will become an important legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic.

# OUTDOOR CLASS

## L'ÉDUCATIVE



CAMPUS PRINCIPAL



Type of class  
under a heated tent



Furniture required for the students  
tables and chairs of varying heights



Suggested period of use  
the whole session



Wifi  
 yes    no    Précision: \_\_\_\_\_



Student capacity: 45



Electrical outlet  
 yes    no    Précision: \_\_\_\_\_



Ideal pedagogical modalities  
lectures, collaborative work



Microphone and speakers  
yes     no    Précision: \_\_\_\_\_



Visual support  
2 whiteboards, 1 projector

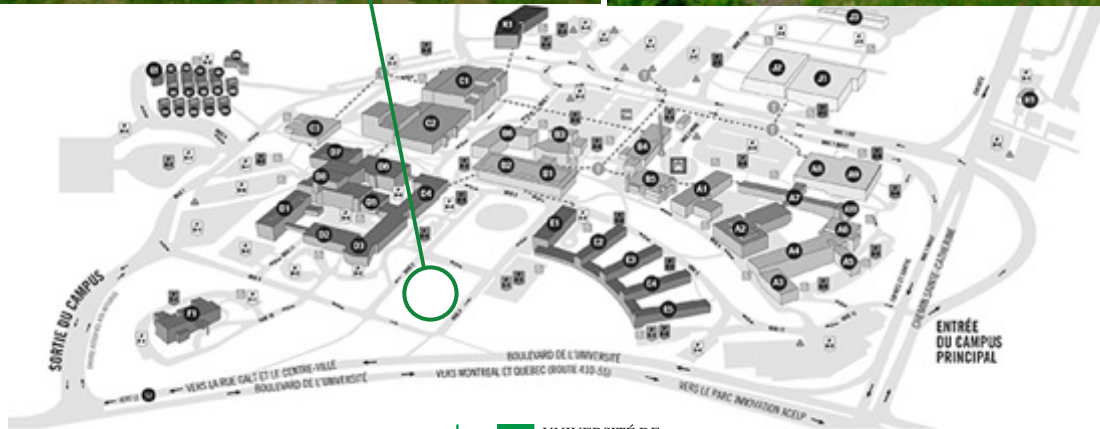


Furniture required for the teacher  
high table and chair

Other specifications:











# OUTDOOR CLASS

## L'EXPÉRIMENTALE



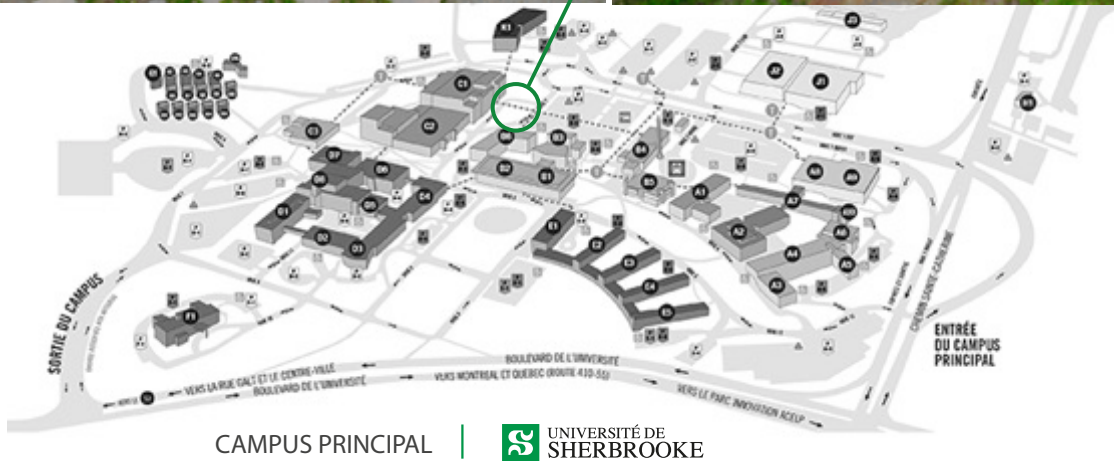
CAMPUS PRINCIPAL













- 
**Type of class**  
 without an organized layout
  - 
**Suggested period of use**  
 September and October
  - 
**Student capacity:** 45
  - 
**Ideal pedagogical modalities**  
 collaborative work, active ped.
  - 
**Visual support**  
 1 whiteboard
  - 
**Furniture required for the teacher**  
 picnic table and parasol
  - 
**Furniture required for the students**  
 none
  - 
**Wifi**  
 yes  no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
  - 
**Electrical outlet**  
 yes  no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
  - 
**Microphone and speakers**  
 yes no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other specifications:**  
 Harder accessibility in the lawn.

# OUTDOOR CLASS

## L'INGÉNIEUSE

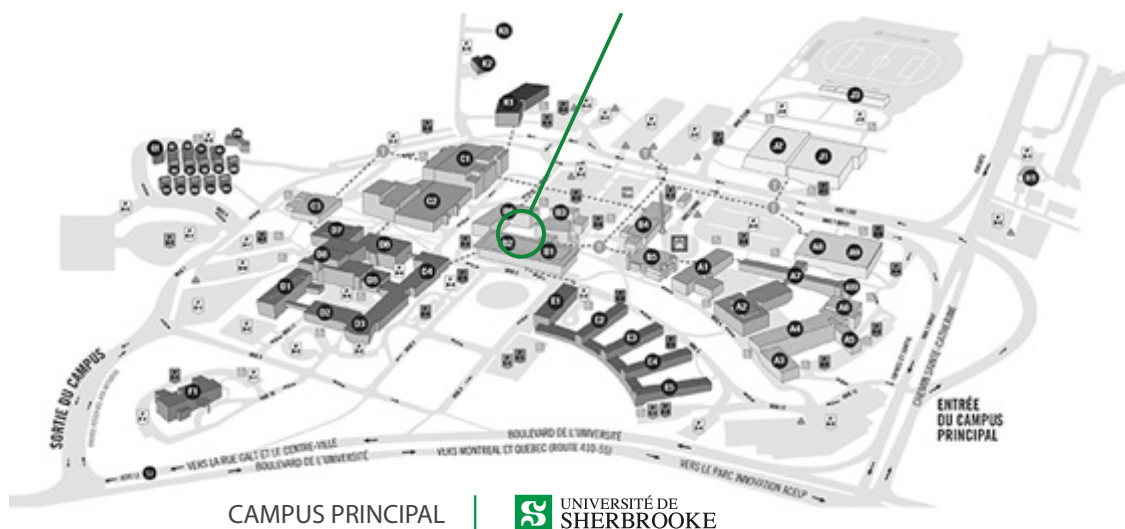


- 
**Type of class**  
 with an organized layout
- 
**Suggested period of use**  
 September and October
- 
**Student capacity:** 24
- 
**Ideal pedagogical modalities**  
 lectures, collaborative work
- 
**Visual support**  
 1 whiteboard
- 
**Furniture required for the teacher**  
 high table and chair
- 
**Furniture required for the students**  
 rocks (1 student / 3 rocks)
- 
**Wifi**  
 yes  no  Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
- 
**Electrical outlet**  
 yes  no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
- 
**Microphone and speakers**  
 yes  no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_

Other specifications:

# OUTDOOR CLASS

## LA BADAWI



- Type of class**  
without an organized layout
  - Suggested period of use**  
September and October
  - Student capacity:** 25
  - Ideal pedagogical modalities**  
lectures, collaborative work
  - Visual support**  
1 whiteboard
  - Furniture required for the teacher**  
picnic table and parasol
  - Furniture required for the students**  
none
  - Wifi**  
 yes    no    Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Electrical outlet**  
 yes    no    Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Microphone and speakers**  
yes     no    Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other specifications:**  
The students are seated in an incline.











# OUTDOOR CLASS

## LA BALCONNIÈRE



CAMPUS PRINCIPAL



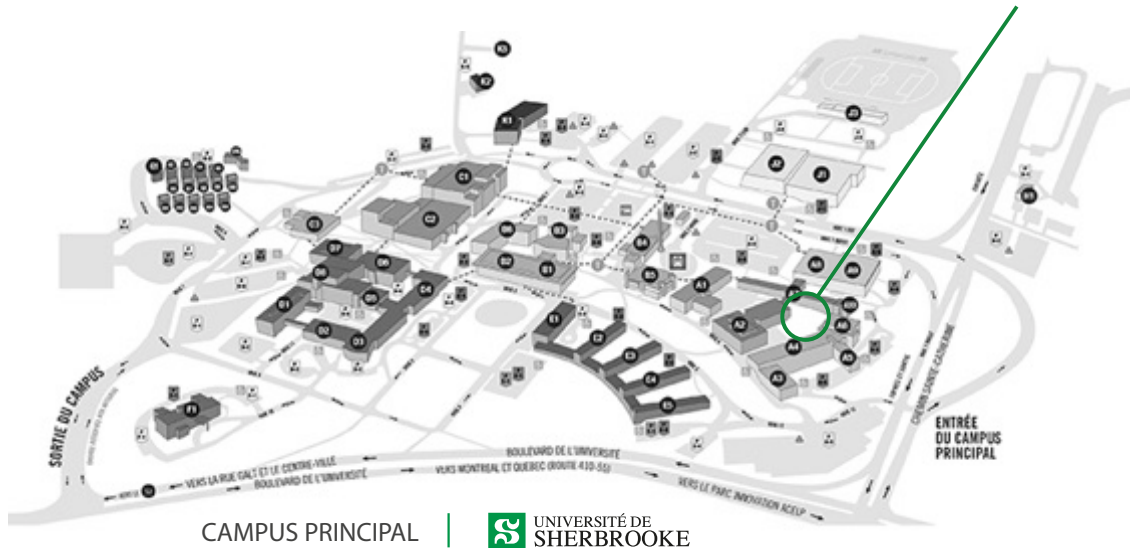
- 
**Type of class**  
 with an organized layout
- 
**Suggested period of use**  
 September and October
- 
**Student capacity:** 16
- 
**Ideal pedagogical modalities**  
 lectures, collaborative work
- 
**Visual support**  
 1 whiteboard
- 
**Furniture required for the teacher**  
 high table and chair
- 
**Furniture required for the students**  
 tables and chairs of varying heights
- 
**Wifi**  
 yes    no    Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
- 
**Electrical outlet**  
 yes    no    Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
- 
**Microphone and speakers**  
 yes     no    Precision: \_\_\_\_\_











### Other specifications:

Only one half is used (on the right in the photos).  
 Possibility to install a protective canvas as a roof.

# OUTDOOR CLASS

## LA BRINDILLE



- 
**Type of class**  
 without an organized layout
  - 
**Suggested period of use**  
 September and October
  - 
**Student capacity:** 40
  - 
**Ideal pedagogical modalities**  
 lectures, collaborative work
  - 
**Visual support**  
 1 whiteboard
  - 
**Furniture required for the teacher**  
 picnic table and parasol
  - 
**Furniture required for the students**  
 none
  - 
**Wifi**  
 yes    no    Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
  - 
**Electrical outlet**  
 yes     no    Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
  - 
**Microphone and speakers**  
 yes     no    Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other specifications:**  
 The students are seated in an incline.  
 Priority booking for the university kindergarten.  
 Difficult access in the lawn.

# OUTDOOR CLASS

## LA COUVENTINE



SŒURS DE  
LA STE-FAMILLE  
(rue Galt Ouest)

CAMPUS PRINCIPAL

UNIVERSITÉ DE  
SHERBROOKE



**Type of class**  
covered



**Suggested period of use**  
September and October



**Student capacity:** 32



**Ideal pedagogical modalities**  
lectures, collaborative work, active ped.



**Visual support**  
2 whiteboards, 1 projector



**Furniture for the teacher**  
high table and chair



**Furniture for the students**  
tables and chairs of varying heights



**Wifi**  
yes  no Precision: Possibility to deploy.



**Electrical outlet**  
 yes no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_



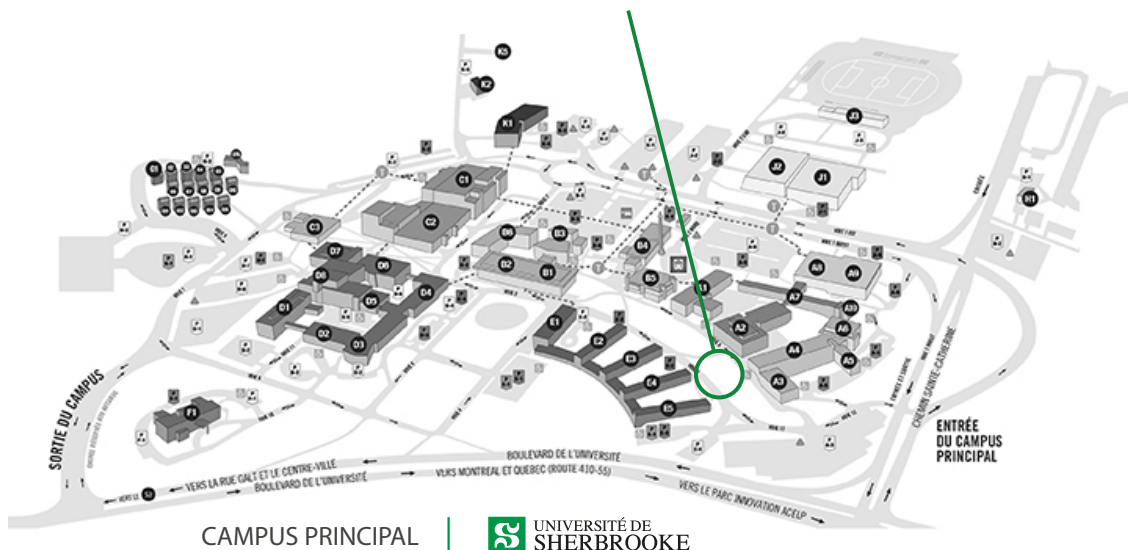
**Microphone and speakers**  
yes  no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_

**Other specifications:**



# OUTDOOR CLASS

## LA CRÉATIVE



CAMPUS PRINCIPAL

UNIVERSITÉ DE SHERBROOKE



**Type of class**  
with an organized layout



**Furniture for the students**  
rocks (1 student / 3 rocks)



**Suggested period of use**  
September and October



**Wifi**  
yes  no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_

**Student capacity:** 20



**Electrical outlet**  
 yes no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_



**Ideal pedagogical modalities**  
lectures, collaborative work



**Microphone and speakers**  
 yes no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_



**Visual support**  
1 whiteboard

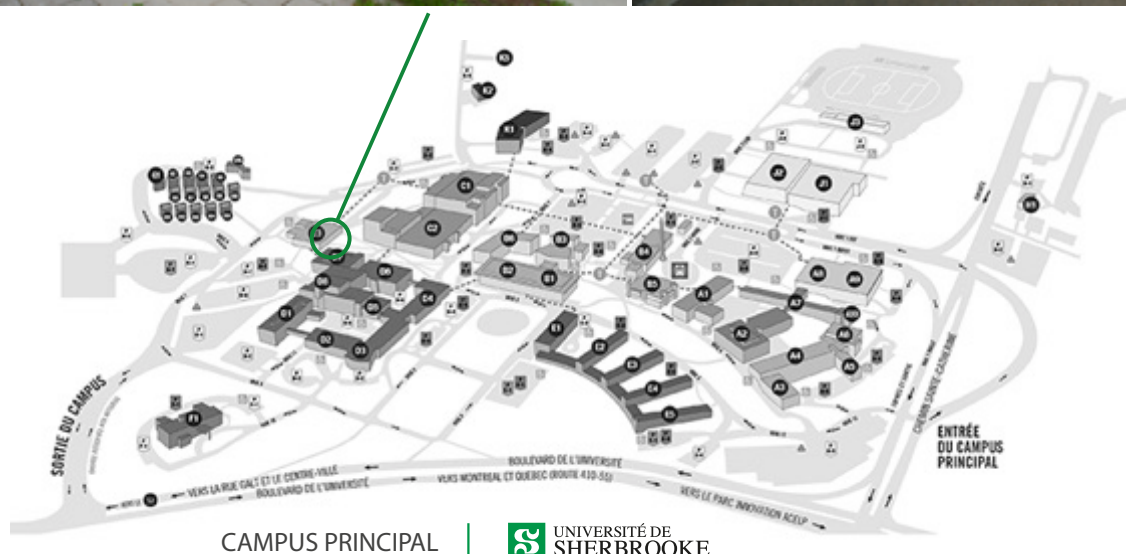












**Furniture required for the teacher**  
picnic table and parasol

**Other specifications:**

# OUTDOOR CLASS

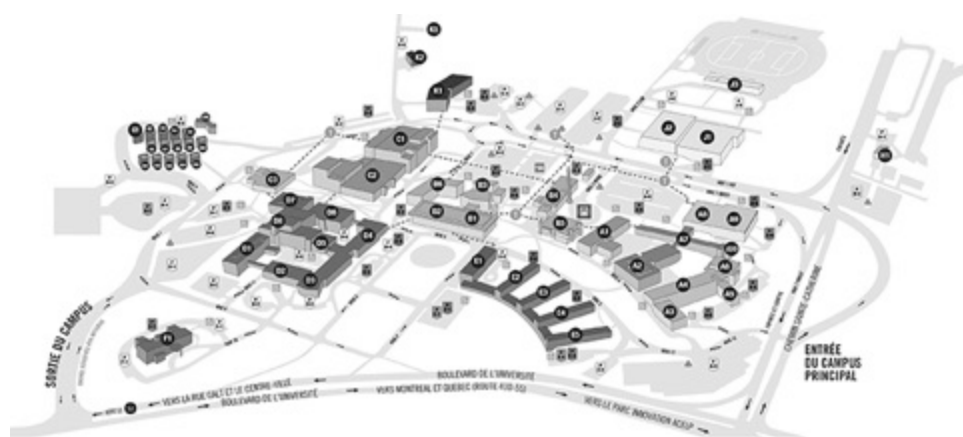
## LA MUSICIENNE



- 
**Type of class**  
 covered
  - 
**Suggested period of use**  
 September and October
  - 
**Student capacity:** 27
  - 
**Ideal pedagogical modalities**  
 lectures, collaborative work
  - 
**Visual support**  
 2 whiteboards, 1 projector
  - 
**Furniture for the teacher**  
 high table and chair
  - 
**Furniture for the students**  
 tables and chairs of varying heights
  - 
**Wifi**  
 yes    no    Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
  - 
**Electrical outlet**  
 yes     no    Precision: Possibility of electrical extensions.
  - 
**Microphone and speakers**  
 yes    no    Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other specifications:**

# OUTDOOR CLASS

## LA VOLTIGEUSE



CAMPUS PRINCIPAL | UNIVERSITÉ DE SHERBROOKE



**Type of class**  
without an organized layout



**Furniture for the students**  
none



**Suggested period of use**  
September and October



**Wifi**  
yes  no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_



**Students capacity:** 60



**Electrical outlet**  
yes  no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_



**Ideal pedagogical modalities**  
collaborative work, active ped.



**Microphone and speakers**  
 yes  no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_



**Visual support**  
2 whiteboards



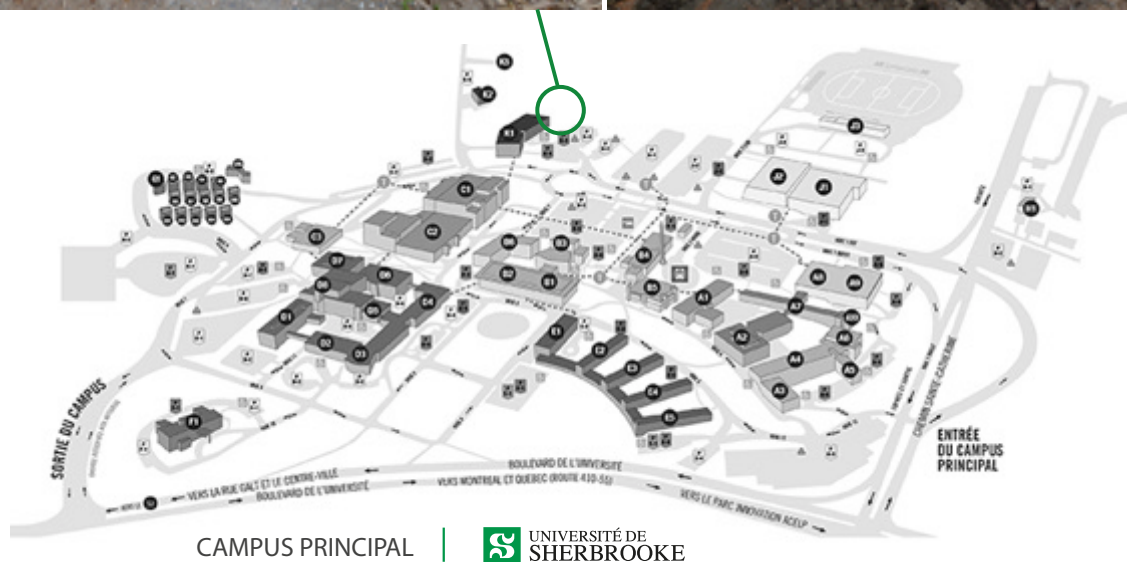
**Furniture for the teacher**  
picnic table and parasol











**Other specifications:**

Toilets are far.

# OUTDOOR CLASS

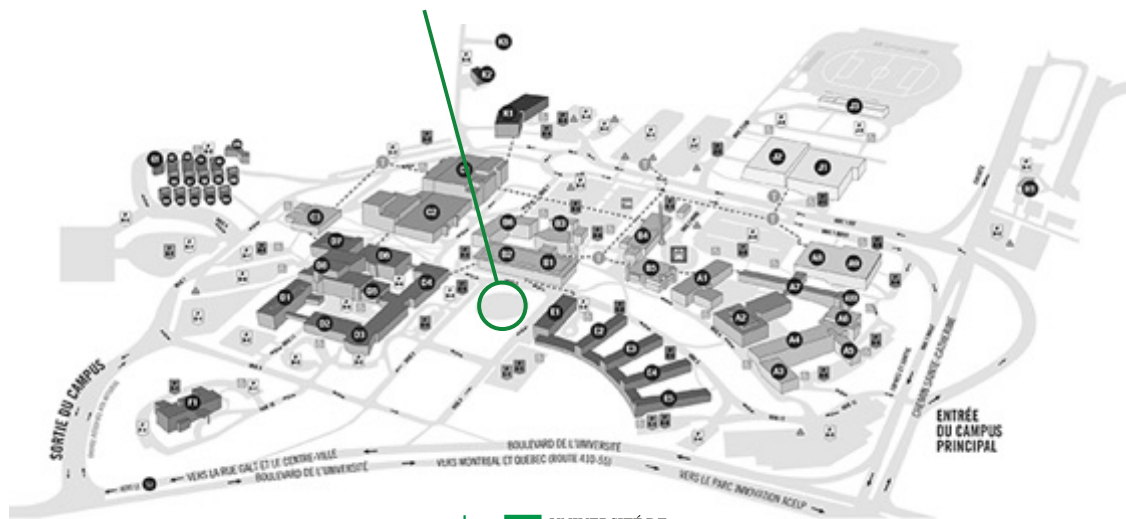
## LE BELVÉDÈRE



- 
**Type of class**  
 under a heated tent
  - 
**Suggested period of use**  
 the whole session
  - 
**Student capacity:** 45
  - 
**Ideal pedagogical modalities**  
 lectures, collaborative work
  - 
**Visual support**  
 2 whiteboards, 1 projector
  - 
**Furniture for the teacher**  
 high table and chair
  - 
**Furniture for the students**  
 tables and chairs of varying heights
  - 
**Wifi**  
 yes  no Precision: To be deployed.
  - 
**Electrical outlet**  
 yes  no Precision: To be deployed.
  - 
**Microphone and speakers**  
 yes no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other specifications:**

# OUTDOOR CLASS

## LE THÉÂTRE



CAMPUS PRINCIPAL



**Type of class**  
with an organized layout



**Furniture for the students**  
rocks (1 student / 3 rocks)



**Suggested period of use**  
September and October



**Wifi**  
yes  no Precision: Possibility to deploy.



**Student capacity:** 100



**Electrical outlet**  
 yes no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_



**Ideal pedagogical modalities**  
lectures, collaborative work



**Microphone and speakers**  
 yes no Precision: \_\_\_\_\_



**Visual support**  
1 whiteboard



**Furniture for the teacher**  
picnic table and parasol

**Other specifications:**