

McGill University

Semester 2 2017.

Bachelor of Commerce (Management) / Science (Ecology)

FIRSTLY, before I even begin, I would like to reiterate that your exchange experience might be the best and most life-changing thing you ever take part in. It genuinely was for me, and I've made life-long friends (both things of which I didn't think was possible before I left). Maybe this is expensive for you, maybe it's not, but either way, you will look back and not regret it in the slightest. Anyone who reads this is welcome to contact me if they ever want advice or to discuss what it's like 😊

McGill Itself:

Starting during their first semester means I attended all their 'Frosh' (O-week) and welcoming events for new students. McGill is a hard working, but respectful university and highly regarded among Canada and worldwide (top 40 best in the world!). Lectures were well structured, professors were organised and I noticed a difference in the level of education you will receive while there. This is a university that will make you work hard, but only because they genuinely recognise you as being capable! As an Otago commerce student, this was a welcome difference for me as I've always found the attitude towards commerce students a little degrading in New Zealand.

McGill has a great range of papers, was overall accommodating to exchange students and is actually 40% international students anyway! So there's no shortage of people who are in the exchange boat, or have come from long distances to be there for the first time. It has 40,000 students but the downtown (main) campus doesn't feel that big and is smaller than Otago campus.

Lectures are 1 hour 15mins long, but you get used to it quickly, especially if you have good professors who teach well. Lectures are more engaging than Otago, with discussion and questions far more highly encouraged and carried out during lectures. Most classes require attendance which makes up 5-10% of your grade.

It's highly regarded and competitive, and you'll notice all the talk about how competitive it is. This wasn't a problem for me because I like a slightly competitive environment, but if you don't- then don't let this worry you at all! Especially as an exchange student, you are there to enjoy the overall experience and take up every opportunity (and boy do they come thick and fast!)

Full time study is 4-5 papers, and I recommend you take only 4 (even though this will only credit to 3 papers at Otago). In the Management faculty, the majority of your courses must come from Management. For example, you can't take 2 management and 2 outside management. It would need to be 3 to 1 or 3 to 2 etc. McGill students are used to the workload of 5 papers, which is higher than Otago, so I recommend sticking to only 4 papers if you can, although I had many exchange friends who took the 5 (but this was also normal at their respective universities).

Roughly speaking, 100 level McGill = 100 Otago, 200-300 McGill = 200 Otago and 300-400 McGill = 300 Otago. They have less of a concept of levels as Otago however, so just try to find papers that cross over with the same information as that taught at Otago. Like Otago, there is a 2 week period to add/drop/change papers (which they call 'courses' specifically. 'Paper' refers to a big final assignment).

In the Management Faculty, you can almost guarantee group work, but I found students to be harder working on average and this carried through into the group work as well. Students tended to be more willing to get things started and take initiative to contact each other. If I'm 100% honest, I definitely felt the international presence. Meeting new perspectives and ideas actually did make a difference to the learning environment and I think I've come away better at working as a team, time management and more employable general skills. The management faculty has a special building which you will come to know as home, called Bronfman. You could literally live here as you can study here, will have your management lectures here, there's food, vending machines, 24 hour access with your ID card (exclusive to Management students) and it's kept at a constant roughly 20 degrees. All grades are scaled here, so the average isn't allowed to be higher than 75%, which may seem daunting, but everyone is in the same boat and this can also be in your favour sometimes!

As for exams, there's barely any gap between lectures finishing and the exam period starting. For example, final lectures on the 7th (mainly review lecs) and first exams start the 8th. They tend to finish about Dec 21st ish. Remember flights are expensive at that time of year so plan leaving well in advance to take advantage of those! I got lucky and finished by December 13th, taking 2 100% internal papers and only 2 final exams, so I had a week before I left the country- I DEFINITELY recommend leaving yourself AT LEAST a week between your final exam and leaving! I made the best friends of my life on exchange and one of the frequently made mistakes/regrets was not allowing enough time to say goodbye to everyone. You won't regret staying a few days longer to catch up with friends and visit the city.

Minerva:

Minerva is like McGill evison, except a whole lot worse and confusing. This said, once you learn the ropes and what all the abbreviations mean, registering for your courses is not that difficult. Courses fill up fast and are limited to the number of students they can take, so you need to be planning papers well in advance and if you don't have back-up papers, you need to re-consider McGill because there's no guarantee you will get the papers you want. Luckily however, you can email the Faculty and they tend to be very understanding and try to accommodate you as best as possible. Management and Environment Faculties both really helped me out here! Definitely get at least 8 papers signed off though before you leave New Zealand.

Quick selfie in the exam room 10 minutes before final exam? No problem.



Accommodation:

Biggest tip: DO NOT, I REPEAT DO NOT, use the McGill Exchange residences. While I did meet the most amazing friends here, this residence is not well managed and you are not provided ANYTHING- so everything, including pots, pans, microwave, kettle, cutlery, bedding etc, is all purchased by you when you arrive. If you arrive after shops have closed in the evening, you'll be sleeping in your clothes on your first night of stay- the least welcoming place I've ever been to! Many of my friends had to move, or tried to move apartments, at least twice during the semester, one of which had a dead rat in her apartment on arrival! I can't stress enough that Montreal has excellent flats available for half the price I was paying for this as well, with more included utilities etc. The location is brilliant, but if you're happy to walk another 15 mins, then you'll find much better places elsewhere.

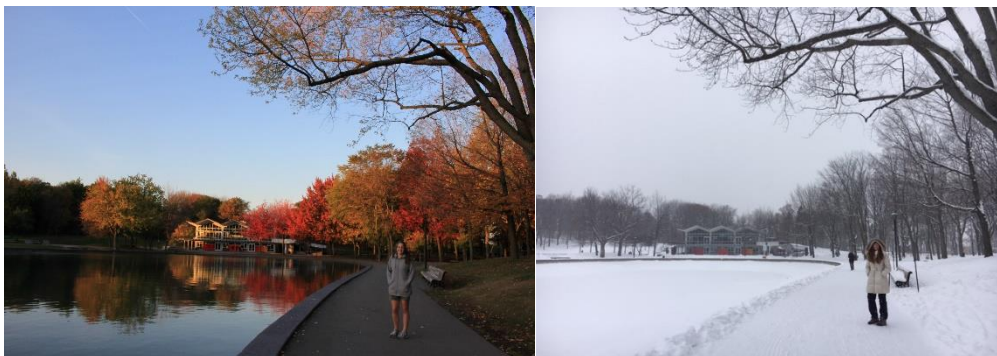
Some friends of mine stayed at a place called Evo, which is excellent and well worth spending the extra time for. It means walking 15-20 mins to Uni, but includes a pool, access to TV rooms, study rooms and a gym all in the same building. I only heard good things from those who stayed there.

There are plenty of other private places too, otherwise find a flat on Kijiji.com, which is where most people look for flats. There are plenty available, for anything between \$110 and \$200 per week on average. Montreal talks about flats in payment per month, not per week like here, so keep this in mind.

Otherwise, don't be worried about heating- almost everywhere is centrally heated and kept at a steady 20 degrees. You will often find yourself happy to wear shorts and t shirt inside, even if it's a solid -20 outside !

Montreal !

Weather: Montreal is an incredible place to experience the seasons! Up to 30 degrees in summer, August, which drops to -20 by mid December. By early December in 2017, it was pretty much -15 everyday, which was apparently a warm year! It will also be fully covered in permanent snow by this time, which will stay until after February ! The seasons are incredible to watch and there are some amazing parks I definitely recommend visiting to see the BRIGHT orange and red trees!



Beaver Lake, Autumn vs Winter (one of my favourite comparisons!)

Parks: Montreal has some great parks- make the most of these in summer, including the 'Tam Tams', which is a public drumming event run every Sunday in summer. A lot of fun to watch everyone

drumming away on anything they wish, anyone can join in the drumming circle, and there's a little market that people sell all sorts of things as. Park up with a picnic and make the most of it.

Mont Royal is the main park in Montreal, located RIGHT beside McGill. It has plenty of trails to explore that could take a few hours to get around, but it's as quick as 15 minutes to the lookout over the city if you take the stairs- up to you. Beaver lake will become a skate rink in Jan/Feb, while a smaller one opens in December at the same location, and Mont Royal trails are used for cross country skiing as well, which is well worth a try for a few hours at least! The view over the city is awesome- and be sure to go up before daylight and watch the sun rise! We did this a number of times!



Food: Poutine is the classic must try (like fries with cheese curd and gravy), and you must try at various places. I tried some good ones and some bad ones, so always give it a second taste. There are enough cafes in Montreal to try a new one everyday for your whole time there, and my friends and I frequently went Café hopping- almost all have free wifi and students studying in cafes is a huge culture over there so don't be afraid to pull up your books, settle in with a coffee and go hard for as many hours as you like!

My favourites:

- Second Cup Café
- Anticafé (per per hour, as much food & coffee as you want)
- Tim Hortons on Du Parc Avenue
- Van-Houtte Café
- ALSO, not for study but go to Super Sandwich, \$3 subs including tax/tip is the best value anywhere!

Tim Hortons is the classic Canadian coffee chain, which sells cheap, terrible quality but still delicious for under \$2 a cup. For coffee addicts who don't want to be spending \$5-6 NZ (after tax, tip & exchange rate) per cup, this is the place to go.

Speaking of this, taxes are not included in prices (15% in Quebec) and tipping 15% is also expected almost everywhere you go and comes up automatically on EFTPOS machines. Waitresses and cafes DO notice and may get annoyed at students who ignore the tipping- they know you know you're supposed to, so just do it- it's their income after all.

Also, Provigo, Metro and Jean-Coutre are sort of the main supermarket chains. Groceries are not TOO much more expensive than in NZ, and for this reason there are some good places to eat out for cheap. If you've budgeted for food, double your budget- I ended up eating out a lot more than anticipated because once you make friends, you're always looking to go out, try things and keep

yourself active and so you may well buy a lot more than you think! I had planned to avoid buying out because I didn't think I would and I wanted to put my money towards experiences, but once I made good friends, we went out often, so definitely make room for buying meals!

Events: Montreal is the Dunedin of Canada I've heard some people say- there's always events going on, both through McGill (seriously there's something for everyone every week), as well as concerts, talks from famous people (Muhammad Yunus and Hillary Clinton as examples), festivals for poutine, music, fashion and anything else you could think of.

Visit Old Port and Old Montreal. Summer has PLENTY of markets going frequently so make the most of them- once the cold hits the only markets that take place are in December for Christmas (which are amazing and almost must be visited!).

There are so many museums, the gardens, the biosphere/dome and many great places to visit as well, so just keep an eye out. McGill often provides an 'international passport' which will give you free access to some of these, and student discounts are common as well. There are several major sized universities in Montreal so students are everywhere.

Whatever you do- don't do what I did and arrive and say "I've got 4 months! I can do this later!" because I didn't even end up visiting a number of places I'd planned to visit since the day I arrived!

Phone plans: ARE EXPENSIVE AS HECK. I started off paying \$60NZ after the exchange rate etc per month, and by November I cancelled my plan entirely. People don't really text much, WhatsApp is the big thing and WiFi is everywhere, so I didn't have any plan at all and didn't need one. That said- I've never been a huge data or text user anyway, which could make the difference, but I had several friends who did the same thing because it's just so expensive! Shop around and make sure your plan is from Quebec itself, which has different pricing to other parts of Canada, even on the same provider. Fido is the most common provider for exchange students as many others require a study permit or CAQ that you won't have if you're only a single semester exchange student.

Travel:

Flights: If you're on the ball, make the most of decent flights! Friends of mine scored \$300CAD return flights to Iceland!! I scored them for \$340CAD, so about \$400NZ, but that's similar to what Air NZ would charge from one end of NZ to the other anyway, and when else would I have this opportunity?!



A few snaps from Iceland > my description is essentially: Iceland is a landscape that shouldn't exist, but somehow does.

great city to walk around it and visit as a tourist, and you MUST combine a trip like that with Niagara Falls of course!

Actually, McGill, Concordia and other universities often provide extra cheap travel opportunities to students. For \$120 we spent 2-3 days in Quebec city, everything covered except food! Keep an eye out for these- some go to the USA, Toronto and other places for as little as \$100 for 3-4 days !! It's the best way to make every penny count!

I didn't go to the west side of Canada at all, but if I'd had the money I would have. If you're nervous about travelling alone, have some spare cash and still want to see Canada, I recommend taking a Contiki or other guided tour. I did a 9 day tour of the eastern side of Canada, which took us to about 4 different cities as well as remote places I wouldn't have been able to see, got a history lesson, decent accommodation and made organising super simple and done for me. I also made a good group of friends, and most of them are also travelling alone, so you won't be singled out at all 😊

If you use TourRadar.com, they tend to be happy to negotiate prices as well, and my 9 day tour cost about \$160 per day, but there are plenty of cheaper options as well! Also, you get credit from each tour purchase that can be used towards future tours- I didn't think I'd need it but it turns out I ended up using my credit for another tour later on! I do recommend this website!

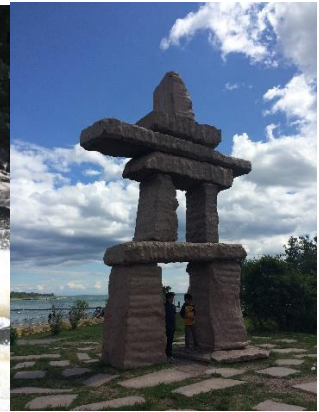
tourradar™

Booking cars: BEWARE that most websites DO NOT include the proper pricing and if it seems like an awesome deal, call up the company and check! We thought we paid \$120 for a car for 3 days and ended up paying \$300 thanks to hidden fee's like underage driver, extra driver etc that was not advertised as costing any extra on the website. I had a feeling from the start it sounded too good, but we booked anyway and I was right. Trust your gut!

GO ON EXCHANGE!

What else to say... on the whole, I cannot recommend McGill or any exchange opportunity enough. I genuinely believe it opens your mind, gives you confidence, pushes you in ways you don't expect and you come back a changed person. There are so many aspects of myself that have come back improved from the experience, and not to mention I now have free accommodation with many friends across the world! Take this all from a person who was always sceptical of people saying "it's the best time of your life" – I always thought it must be good, but talked up, and I was the one who was wrong, so if you're thinking about going- absolutely go- even if you have to make some sacrifices to go, you will not regret having gone and tried. You may regret having never tried, or more importantly, having not pushed yourself to grow. I'm already planning the next trip!!!

More pics from my trip below !



DISCOVER by campus life and engagement
McGill
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Friends tip: Before I left, I didn't think you could make genuinely good friends in the space of 4 months. Turns out, you can 😊