



## My Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

<b>Host University</b>	McGill University, Montreal, Canada
<b>Semester &amp; Year of Exchange</b>	Otago Semester 2/McGill Fall Semester, 2023
<b>Otago degree(s)</b>	Master of Science in human nutrition
<b>Major(s)</b>	-

### Academics/ course load

*Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?*

<b>Course title</b>	<b>Language of instruction</b>	<b>Otago equivalent</b>
NUTR501 – Nutrition and Behaviour	English	Some similarities to HUNT341, though more advanced
NUTR511 – Nutrition in the Majority World	English	400-level HUNT
NUTR512 – Herbs, Foods, and Phytochemicals	English	400-level HUNT
NUTR641 – Advanced Global Food Security	English	400-level HUNT

Total Otago credits gained:  54 points  72 points  108 points  60 points (Otago 400 level)

*Any comments about these papers?*

I really enjoyed the courses I took at McGill. Three of the four were 500 level, which is equivalent to 400 level at Otago. They're classed as both undergrad and postgrad, so I am counting them towards my postgrad, but I didn't find them too difficult and think they could be counted towards undergrad.

NUTR501 had some similarities to HUNT341. It covered lots of the same content in terms of theoretical models, but also had some really interesting guest lectures. The teaching staff marked pretty easily; I got really good grades on assignments that I didn't spend lots of time on.

I enjoyed NUTR511, it discussed some concepts that were also covered in HUNT346, such as the double burden of malnutrition and the nutrition transition, however I think HUNT346 may have changed a bit since I took it. It was a small class and had lots of group discussions and things which I enjoyed.

NUTR512 had field trips and focused a lot on plant identification, it was quite different from HUNT papers I have taken at Otago. In some ways it was interesting, the field trips were quite cool and the lecturer shared lots of stories and interesting anecdotes, but there was also quite a lot of lecture time just reading off the slides, and a couple of quizzes and the final exam were heavy on memorisation. It also had more biochemistry than I anticipated. I did enjoy it, and I think it would be an interesting paper to learn about Canadian plants and medicinal herbs and things even if you're not studying nutrition.

NUTR641 also good, it was a small class which I enjoyed. The content was interesting, I feel like while I learnt little bits about food insecurity at Otago, it is a part of nutrition I am interested in, and I liked having a whole paper dedicated to it. Speaking to other students, I think it is quite similar to the undergrad global food security paper, so if you're not postgrad and interested in food security, that is probably a good option too!

Three out of my four classes were one lecture a week for three hours. They would have a break in the middle, but they still got quite long. Snacks are a good idea, especially if they go from 11:30 am to 2:30 pm! My fourth class was twice a week for an hour and a half, still decently long but slightly more bearable. I also didn't have any labs or practical classes, other than NUTR512 field trips in the lecture timeslot a couple of times.



Kind of a view of the city from the top of Mont Royal with my flatmates

*How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?*

I found the courses quite easy and felt like my workload was not very high; I managed to get decent grades while still making the most of my time on exchange and participating in lots of extracurricular activities and weekends away and the like. However, some of my friends on exchange seemed to be spending a lot more time studying just to pass, so it might just be that the nutrition courses are less intensive. I also managed to sort my schedule so that I didn't have classes on Fridays, which made it easier if I wanted to go away for a few days.

A lot of my course work seemed to be marked quite easily, it wasn't uncommon to get 100% on an assignment. Even if it was far from perfect, as long as you had all the required information, you'd get a good mark. However, one course (NUTR501) was kind of the opposite, the written work was all marked quite toughly. The lecturers also didn't seem to provide marking rubrics for assignments, I'm not sure if this is just a

nutrition thing or a wider McGill thing, but sometimes the assignment instructions were quite vague, though there was always opportunity to ask questions for clarification.



Fairmount Bagels, one of two (along with St Viateur) classic Montreal bagel shops

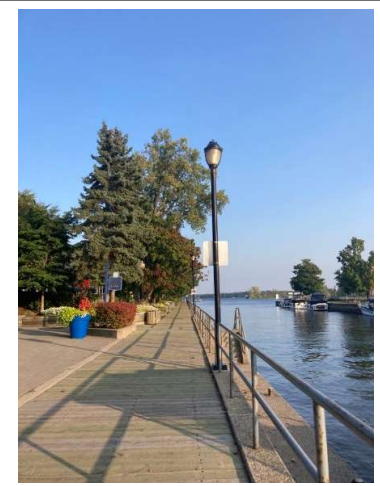
My Courses is the equivalent of Blackboard, where you find lecture notes and updates from lecturers and things like that, as well as where some assignments are submitted. Minerva is like eVision but worse, it's a bit of a nightmare to navigate with a million different menus, but you get there eventually. Just make sure to give yourself some time to figure it out beforehand if it's something that might have time pressure like course selection.

The information on the McGill website is generally not up to date. I had my papers picked out but then they were updated a month or so out from course selection and some of those that I was interested in were not offered, so I had to do some rearranging. Just make sure you double check!

Uni seemed a bit more formal, the lecturers were often referred to as Dr Smith or Professor Blogs, rather than just their first name, though some of them were happy for you to use their first name.

### **Mac**

As a nutrition student, I was at the Macdonald Campus in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, rather than the main campus downtown. Mac is home to the Faculty of Agriculture and Environmental Science. I really loved Mac and think it was better than downtown! It's quite small so everyone knows everyone, and there's a really cool community. It's also super pretty with lots of trees and things, it's right on the water so in the summer I could swim and things. I lived downtown and got the free shuttle 40 minutes each way most days, which was nice down time and a great opportunity to make friends. St Anne is super cute, but it gets quite quiet in the winter and if you're only at McGill for a semester, living downtown while studying at Mac is the best of both worlds. And if you're not studying a Mac-based course, I'd recommend taking a paper down there because it's just great!



The St Anne Boardwalk, across the road from Mac Campus

## Accommodation

*What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?*

I lived in an apartment on the edge of the Plateau, close to the Berri-UQAM metro station and about a 20-minute walk from McGill. I found the apartment on Facebook, there are a few different pages (McGill Off-campus Housing, (UQAM, Concordia, McGill, HEC, UdeM) Off-Campus Housing, McGill University / Roommates & Furnished Apartments, etc.). I flatbed with three girls from France which was really nice and gave me a bit more of an opportunity to try and improve my French. The rent was CAD\$680/month which was pretty good. I initially looked for a sublet for the semester but couldn't find one so ended up with a full year lease (September to September) that I transferred when I left, which was pretty easy. My apartment also came mostly furnished, including with sheets and pillows for the bed which was helpful. I really enjoyed flatting; it felt a bit more like experiencing the city than if I'd stayed in the McGill residences. I had a few friends whose leases also began on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, which was a bit niggly, some managed to move in a week or so early but I ended up staying in an AirBnB for my first week or two in Montreal.

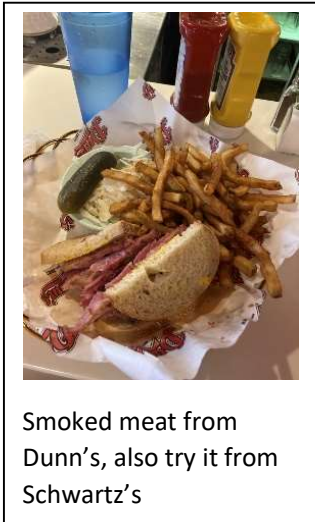
## Money matters

*Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visa, food, insurance*

In total, I think spent around NZD\$15,000 (CAD\$12,000 ish) on my exchange, including a few weeks travel before I arrived in Montreal and a month or so travelling after the semester ended. I

continued to get StudyLink Living Costs, as well as a small scholarship payment monthly, and some savings.

To get to Montreal, I flew directly from Auckland to New York City, which cost about NZD\$1000. To come home, I flew from Vancouver to Nadi in Fiji, via Los Angeles, I had a week in Fiji, and then flew from Nadi to Auckland. The total from Vancouver to Auckland was about NZD\$1300. I would 100% recommend booking a tropical holiday to reacclimate to summer after the Canadian winter.



Smoked meat from Dunn's, also try it from Schwartz's

Each month I spent between CAD\$150 and CAD\$200 on groceries, as well as around CAD\$200 or so on eating out. I think I could have made my food cheaper, but I was enjoying trying lots of Canadian foods, and Montreal has a very good food scene and I wanted to make the most of that, so I ate out multiple times a week, which I wouldn't normally do at home.

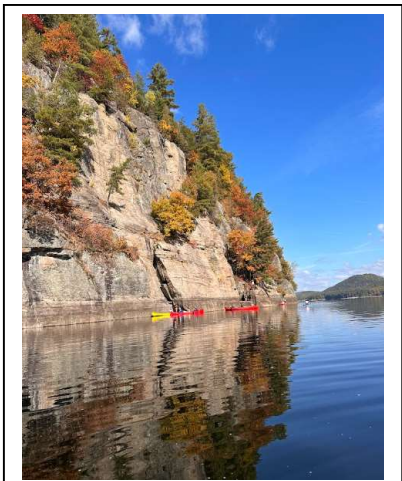
I budgeted about CAD\$50 a month for transport. From September to November, I had a Bixi membership, which is for bikes that are stationed around the city and you can ride, kind of like Lime Scooters. I also bought STM (public transport) tickets in 10-pass lots, it was slightly cheaper than buying them individually and worked well for me because I used it a few times a month but not enough to justify a monthly pass. But generally, I walked places, Montreal is a pretty walkable city which I really liked. And the McGill shuttle from the downtown campus to Mac (and back) is free with a McGill student ID.

I spent between CAD\$190 and CAD\$320 each month on 'activities,' which included everything from tickets to a Canadiens game (Go, Habs, go!), to accommodation on trips away. I think it was a good amount to put towards that sort of thing – I managed to have lots of fun and participate in lots of Canadian experiences. Montreal also has lots of festivals and free events, especially in the summer.

My rent, as mentioned earlier, was CAD\$680 a month, which is similar to Dunedin. I had friends who paid around CAD\$500 a month, but also knew people who paid over CAD\$1000 per month, so I was pretty happy with what I had.

Phone plans are generally quite expensive in Canada. I had an eSIM with Lucky, which meant I could leave my NZ SIM in my phone, which I found convenient for when I needed to use that number for verification and stuff. My phone plan was with Lucky, and was CAD\$15 a month (but actually CAD\$18 once they added tax) for 100 Canadian minutes, unlimited texts, and 250 mb data, which is similar to what I have in Aotearoa and find to be enough. I had a couple of friends with plans with Fizz that seemed to be quite good value for money.

And then about CAD\$50 per month on Hydro and Wi-Fi. Power in Montreal is called Hydro, it's all provided by Hydro-Quebec. In the winter, our apartment had a minimum of 15°C on the thermostats to stop the pipes freezing, so power bills went up a bit but were not too expensive.



A very cool canoeing/camping/rock climbing trip I went on with MOC

Tipping at restaurants is expected, I tended to tip 15% at restaurants and things. Sometimes the lowest option on the eftpos machine would be 18% but you can normally add your own. Tax is also not normally included in the price you are given, at the supermarket and at restaurants, so it is

added onto the bill. Also don't tip at fast food places or if you're taking away – only at sit down restaurants!

In terms of supermarkets, Segal's is a decently cheap grocery store on St Laurent. Some things seem a bit expensive but then they have insanely cheap specials on products. My flat was near a Super C which is a reasonably cheap grocery store. Others include Provigo, IGA, Metro, and Maxi. Some of



Looking back to the city from part of the vieux port during the first big snow storm

the grocery store chains have club cards and/or offer student discounts, but I never looked into them enough or sorted them out. The supermarkets have different own-brands, Segal's is independent so doesn't have one but I think Super C's was called Selection or something and I think Irresistibles was one at a different supermarket.

Dollarama is kind of like a \$2 shop but also sells literally everything, from cleaning products to stationery to clothes to food to plates and cups. It's kind of like The Warehouse, but on a smaller scale. Decathlon sells lots of sporting equipment relatively cheaply and decent quality.

Fruit and veges tend to have price per pound rather than per kilo, which makes them seem cheap, but they can be a bit expensive. Milk and bread were more expensive than in Aotearoa, at Super C or Dollarama sometimes they'd have two loaves of bread for \$6, but \$4 for a loaf is not unusual.

I didn't get a proper study permit because it was quite expensive, instead I just had an eTA, which was less than CAD\$10 and done quickly online before I left home. It meant I couldn't work, but I didn't really want to work, so it was fine for a one semester exchange.

In regard to insurance, I paid about NZD\$750 for the Student Safe insurance policy recommended by Otago's exchange office. In addition to this, McGill has compulsory international student health insurance (IHI), which is I think about CAD\$900 but as a single semester exchange student you can apply for a dispensation to get it lowered to around CAD\$300.

*What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)*

Initially I used Wise, an international money card thing, particularly while I was still travelling. Once I settled in Montreal, I decided to set up a local bank account with a debit card to make things easier. A few of the banks have student accounts and I thought CIBC looked good.

However, there was like a 2 week wait for an appointment, so one day at Mac there was a bus from BMO (Bank of Montreal) and I just went and got it sorted in like half an hour. It was pretty easy, and the account didn't have any fees or anything, and I just closed it when I left Canada. It was really helpful for paying other people in Canada, I think doing that with Wise had fees when it was free to e-transfer from my BMO account. I used Wise to move



Going for a swim while on a tramp in the Adirondacks in upstate New York over the reading break

money from my NZ account to my Canadian one, rather than internationally transferring it because it worked out cheaper.

A few restaurants and things only accept Canadian cards or cash, like the bagel places, so it's good to keep some cash on you especially if you don't set up a Canadian account.

## Visas & Insurance

*Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?*

I chose to just go on an eTA, it did mean I couldn't work if I had wanted to, but it was cheap and easy and perfect for me. It was sorted online through the Canadian government's website.

*Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?*

Yes, McGill has a compulsory health insurance plan for international students that is paid through Minerva. It's charged on an annual basis, but you can apply through Minerva to have it just for a semester.

## Extra-curricular/Social Activities

*What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?*

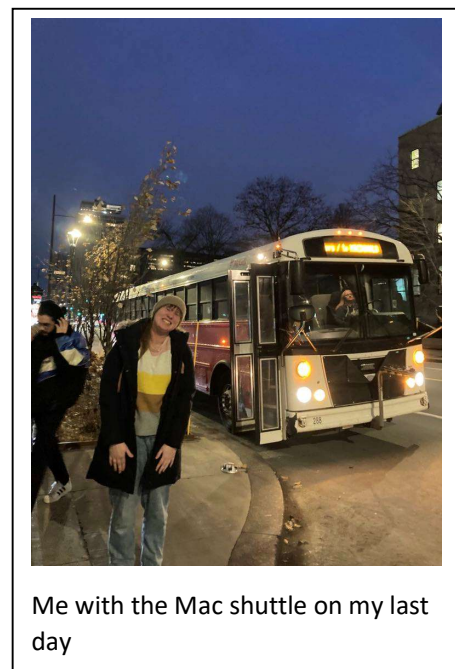
McGill has lots of different clubs and things that I got involved with, both at Mac and at the downtown campus. SSMU is the McGill version of OUSA. At Mac, I helped out at Happy Belly (I think Midnight Kitchen is a similar organisation downtown), where we cooked with leftover food from the supermarket and then it was served to students for lunch. I went on trips with both the McGill Outdoors Club (MOC) and MacMOC. MustBus is a really great club that organises buses and runs cheap day trips and longer trips in the break to places nearby, I went to Kingston and to Mont Tremblant, they also had trips to Quebec City and Ottawa and New York City and Boston and things. At Mac in the summer there is Paddle Mac, which isn't a club but they have paddleboards and kayaks that you can rent cheaply and go out on the lake. It's super nice on a sunny day but get down there before autumn because they close up. There were lots of other clubs and things too, but those are what come to mind.

MTL Blog and the Montreal Tourism page are good Instagram accounts to follow, advertising lots of things going on in Montreal. There are always events happening – festivals, concerts, outdoor movies, so much!

If you're at McGill in the fall semester, Frosh is like their version of O week. I wasn't planning on taking part (the faculty Frosh is mostly 18-year-olds walking around campus drinking), but I signed up at the last minute for Outdoors Frosh which was super great! It had a mix of both first year and exchange students and it was really cool to start getting involved in MOC.

*What was the university/ city like?*

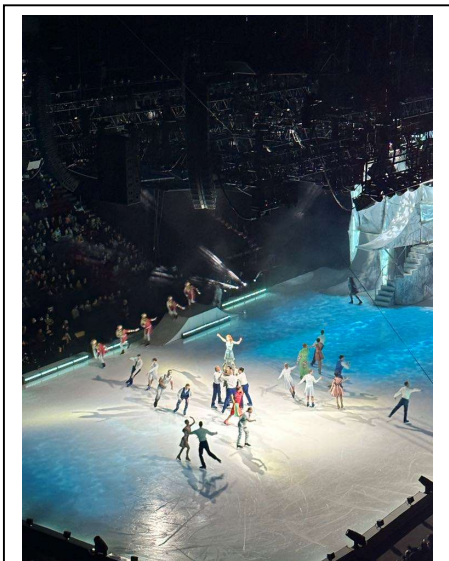
I liked McGill as a university, especially Mac. The downtown campus is really central to the city. Lots of the buildings have internal connections and tunnels so in winter it is easy to get around without having to go outside too much. Mac is really great, with fields and trees and lots of space, as well as having an ice-skating rink and pool and things (shared with John Abbott College, the CEGEP or high



Me with the Mac shuttle on my last day

school next door). While there was lots of support available at McGill, especially from lecturers, it definitely made me appreciate things about Otago. There isn't really a service like Ask Otago where you can get general help to answer questions and things, and IT help isn't available like at home either. While McGill does have lots of libraries, they don't have big open windows like Otago and can feel a bit enclosed at times, but some of them have discussion floors and things where it's okay to talk with your friends. Otago has short breaks compared to other universities in Aotearoa, but McGill made me appreciate them, we only had about five days (including the weekend) of 'reading week' that apparently they didn't have before the pandemic and the university wanted to get rid of. It just means you have to make the most of weekends!

Montreal is a really cool city, there was always so much going on and never a dull moment. The food scene is so good, I had a list of so many places to try and didn't make it to half of them. There are lots of events in summer, but also in winter too, and ice-skating rinks pop up everywhere. The mountain is right behind McGill and great for a little bit of exercise and to feel like you're out of the hustle and bustle a bit. It's such a multicultural and diverse place, you can always find a way to spend your time!



Cirque du Soleil originated in Quebec, so I thought where better to see it than Montreal?

*Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?*

Down near Mac, there's the Zoo Ecomuseum, with lots of Quebec wildlife that have been rescued and can't go back to the wild. It's really cool to see some of the local animals up close. Parc Omega is also a super fun to visit if you can get a group of friends together and hire a car.

The Plateau is an area of Montreal that I liked to wander through, lots of the houses are built in a classic Montreal style with external winding staircases and balconies. There are lots of cute cafes, pedestrianised streets, and little parks to get acquainted with.

I love food, and really enjoyed exploring some of Montreal's food markets, like Marche Atwater and Marche Jean-Talon, if I lived closer I would have got all my groceries there. I had what I think was the best ice cream of my life (bold claim, I know), from right near the Fairmount Bagels, there's also \$5 gnocchi next door which is a yum cheap dinner. I

also ate my weight in poutine, a dish of hot chips with cheese curds and gravy. La Banquise and Ma Poule Mouillée are two of the classics, McDonald's also does really good poutine, and if you're ever on a road trip and see places serving it on the side of the road (probably cash only), that's the really good stuff!

Visiting the vieux port/old port is also lots of fun, the North Americans will tell you it's European-y but the Europeans will disagree, but it is really pretty with lots of old buildings, both in summer and in the snow. The cathedral is a classic Montreal site, and there are lots of cute lanes and things.

There are also lots of concerts happening in Montreal, and you don't need to book flights to Auckland and accommodation, so I took advantage! I saw Hozier and The 1975 live, both of which



At the downtown campus before it got cold

were great, as well as lots of other little gigs and things (also hot tip: if you're going to a concert in Laval buy your return metro ticket at the Laval station when you arrive before the concert rather than waiting until after the show ends, it'll help you get back faster).

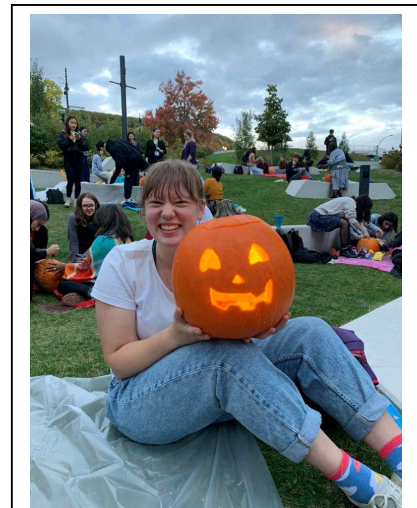
A fun Aotearoa connection to McGill is the Ernest Rutherford spent a number of years in McGill's physics department, including doing some of his Nobel Prize work. You can visit McGill's Physics Museum to learn a bit more and sit at his desk.

*Any tips for future students?*

My Involvement is a portal thing that has lots of events on it, that are both one-offs and regular things. I would look through it every so often and found out about a few different things, as well as sometimes when there are things like free hot apple cider on campus, or an international student event.

I took my raincoat and bought a big winter coat in Montreal, but having a lighter jacket like a puffer or something would have been good for lots of the autumn days where it wasn't quite cold enough for my winter coat. I also managed to avoid spending lots of money on winter boots, I just wore my tramping boots, but if you're there for the winter semester you would need to get some.

Regarding public transport, Montreal has buses and trains and the metro, all run by the STM. It's quite expensive (a \$3.75 flat rate) so I really only used it if I was going a decent way rather than a stop or two. You can buy an OPUS card for I think \$6, and load it up for trips, or go to the STM office at Berri-UQAM and get a student one for \$15. The student prices are only for the monthly pass, which I never ended up getting, as I only used a few trips a month. The more trips you buy, the cheaper it is (I think 10 trips is \$32 instead of \$37.50 if bought individually). With an OPUS card you get 120 minutes where you can transfer between bus and metro or between bus lines. The same Transit app as in Dunedin can be used for route planning etc. Poparide is an app used throughout Canada for carpooling/ride sharing. I used it to go to various places, including on a day trip to Ottawa and getting around a little between places in the Rockies.



Jack O Lantern carving with the International Student Office around Halloween

## Overall Experience

*Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!*

I really loved just living day to day life in another country, in such a big city, and in an environment where I could speak French (though it is definitely not necessary). Montreal is a really well-located city, I went on weekend trips to Ottawa, Quebec City, Toronto and Niagara Falls, and lots of other places. It was one of my favourite places I spent time in in Canada, it had a lot more vibrancy than some of the other cities. I had a great time on exchange and would definitely recommend Montreal and McGill.

You definitely have to put in some work to organise going on exchange, and it can be a bit confusing and frustrating, but once you arrive it is definitely worth it.