

## Final Report - IO



Canada, Montréal

McGill University

- 08/18 - 05/19

Liberal Arts and Sciences: Life Science (Neuroscience) - Bachelor - CAN-2018-SO123-m

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### Before Departure:

I had to choose to go to Canada one year in advance, when I usually don't plan that far ahead. Yet, even though the deadline came a bit sudden, my decision was long made. My aim was to be able to study in english, in order to take away some academic progress. Secondly, I was nonetheless interested in learning french. Hence, McGill as a renowned University in Montreal in the french speaking state Quebec was my preferred choice. This choice was also undermined by the high University ranking of McGill. In my decision making process, I eventually compared potential courses in my subject, city-atmosphere and university rankings. However, my interests extend to the stunning landscapes and nature all over Canada, so Montréal seemed a pretty good deal.



Because I stayed for a year, I had to apply for utterly complex certificates of immigration and a study permit. The forms are ordinarily complex but doable, yet, you are best advised to apply here way before time. The visa, on the other hand, is already included in the study permit.

### What to pack:

Pack warm, because Canada will be cold. - 20 °C is quite normal in winter and it will go down to - 30 °C. One quite useful tip to bring is a german multiple-outlet-strip, so you only need one adapter to charge various things. Any other essentials should be quite obvious such as passport, travel documents or hiking boots. That's why I'm briefly going to list what not to bring: Extensive variety of clothing, Camping equipment such as tent, snowshoes etc. (you'll be able to rent most things pretty cheap from McGill's Outdoor Club), anything you won't use on a daily basis and have to carry back home (Your suitcase will be even fuller when you leave there).

### Arrival:

As an international student, arriving in Montreal is usually pretty smooth and easy. Stepping out of the airplane, you can directly take an only-for-students short-cut to the immigration

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officers, who are typically really nice. Once through the security, McGill has its own information stand at the airport who help with any question. My brother and me arrived about two weeks ahead of time in order to travel a bit before University starts. At that time, there are plenty of introductory and welcoming events for every kind of student, in particular, the yearly great event of 'Frosh'. Frosh is the name of the first-year party- and bar-tour event. However, as an international student, you are welcome to participate. Yet, there are different kinds of Frosh. Hence, I took part in the 'Outdoor's Frosh', where we canoed on a huge lake for a weekend and slept on the shore in tents in small groups. This weekend was conclusively one of my most favourite events throughout the whole year, as we swam and paddled in the dark, made fire, went hiking and stole other group's paddles at night. A huge recommendation at this point.



### Surviving everyday life:

Life at McGill began for me around 9 am when I got up and headed out to study in one of the cosy cafés which can be found all over Montréal. My courses usually started in the afternoon, where I'd sit in a 500 student lecture hall, listening to some super interesting presentations. Inside the city, you get around pretty easily by metro, bus or city-bikes. Yet, I still recommend buying a cheap bike for the time one's there. One should just bear in mind, that in Quebec, taxes apply to almost everything you buy and are not included on any price tag. By the way, having a Canadian bank account makes a lot things easier like paying rent. And many banks offer free accounts to students with a study permit.

Finding a convenient place to live can be, however, quite difficult. I was lucky enough to find an apartment beforehand using Skype, even though I moved after the first semester. In general, it's easier to find something if you're already there and around August or April, because many students change places and look for new roommates or tenants.

Not necessarily for this issue but for any other upcoming questions, McGill University is keen to welcome a broad diversity of international students and has, therefore, a lot of advising services and webpages for any kind of help.



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### My Host University:

When I recount the adventures of my stay abroad, I haven't yet failed to recognise the quality of McGill as a University. The campus is beautiful, the services plentiful, and courses were extremely interesting. Known as Canada's best University, McGill is academically quite advanced, yet still open to change and bold research directions. Combining my interest in Psychology with Neuroscience was therefore rather easy to achieve. Of course, I can appreciate the University even more because I didn't have to pay the high amounts of tuition fees other have to pay to study there. As a result, courses are however super interesting and worth following. Professors were themselves motivated to teach and had a good time doing so, which made my the University experience really enjoyable. By the way, the participation in most McGill sports courses and the use of McGill's own swimming pool is free for all students.



### Quebec:

During my stay in Montreal, I also got to like the Quebec culture a lot. As I was improving my french skills, I got used to the Quebecois accent as well. French is, however, no requirement to live here, but definitely an advantage if you plan to integrate a bit into the local culture. Because I felt more comfortable studying in Cafés than in overly concentrated libraries (which are in no sense not worth seeing and studying in at McGill), I discovered beautiful, modern and cozy cafés all over the place. Even though, it took me a while to start ordering in french..

### Realising my Academic Goals:

#### a) General Impressions

To sit in a comfortable armchair while listening to some quality presentation on recent discoveries in some super interesting subjects. Even though this is not my only academic goals, McGill gets pretty close to realising it if you choose the right courses. I chose a combination of first and second year psychology courses as well as Neuroscience, Virology and French in the first semester. With a total of 5 courses, the workload was immense. Even though each course was interesting, I'd recommend to start with less. The second semester, I took indeed one course less and replaced a psychology course for a computer science course. This broad and optimal selection for me was only possible by contacting the faculties beforehand, an excellent advisory service for exchange students at McGill and the add/drop period for courses at every start of a semester.

Yet, because of this broad subject range, meeting new people and integrating into a social network proved quite difficult for me. Sitting in a lecture room with 500 other students, meeting the same students each time is pretty much impossible. Eventually, I found one really good friend and was

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happy that my brother happened to be in Montreal for the first semester as well.



Yet, I found some new friends through different, other events. One of my favourite one overall during my time in Canada was the first year get-together where I was allowed to participate. I chose the option to the 'Outdoor' version of the otherwise barhopping and drinking weekend. Hence, I spent a great weekend in canoes, camping at a lake-side and watching the reflection of stars in the pitch black water at night. I can only recommend this kind of event.

Further events involved the introductory events, such as information days or exchange-students get-together. Due to my workload in the first semester, I only managed to get a team and be the captain for an indoor-volleyball team.

During my second semester, however, I managed to visit some more interesting and special events, such as the Death-café or the Mental-Health-summit at McGill. First was really intense and eye-opening. The latter was a series of little workshops and presentations which gave great insights on the awareness and management of the topic.

Otherwise, I managed to regularly visit the McGill Salsa classes and a weekly Salsa-choreography team.

### **b) Content and Purpose**

Academically, I might have given the impression, that the courses were quite challenging and stressful. And indeed, they were. But for me, it was a great experience of realising how much one can learn in this short amount of time and how to live up to this great challenge. I was able to focus for the first time during my studies onto the subjects I want to further specialise in. Thus, I got a sense on the complexities of the brain, the difficult but important connection to psychology and even the potential connection to computer science. Hence, the sheer knowledge already gave me great insights on what direction I want to further pursue in my studies. Additionally, I made substantial progress speaking french, what will hopefully prove helpful in my future career options.



### **c) Criticism and Recommendations**

Personally, going abroad was a serious challenge. It was definitely not easy even though I only accentuated all the positive qualities of such a year abroad for your academic development so far. I didn't really have any fears going abroad as I'm used to travelling and even took a flight with my brother who stayed for a semester in Montreal as well. But leaving all of your friends, your parents and your girlfriend behind and starting new in a country where you don't speak the main language

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was an unexpected challenge. In my intermediate report I quoted a text I wrote for myself to cope with the situation and all the new experiences. However, I went abroad with the aim to challenge myself: To throw myself once more into cold water and to learn how to survive in a new environment. Henceforth, I did succeed in this attempt and learned a lot. Going abroad might be easy for some, it was definitely not for me. Yet, McGill as a University and Montreal as a City were the best support I could have asked for. Quebec and its people are welcoming and have their very own, fascinating culture despite considerable European influences.

So I actually do recommend coming to Montreal for a year abroad.



**My take-away-values:** I think figuring out some take-away-values of your past year itself is the real take-away-value here. Being able to point down some values that you came to realise during the past year means that you grew and learned. And that is the main aim.

I, for once, realised how much I still have to figure out and learn. Personally as well as academically. Growing aware of my own, valuable culture; Narrowing down my field of studies; Noticing you will find friends anywhere on this planet - are all things I did learn being abroad. Yet, each of these topics will grow so much more vast and interesting in the coming years. Thus, the real take-away-value here is to learn how much you don't know. And that is probably the result of any travelling you will still do in your life. Eventually making you a bit more humble and grateful for all the things you're missing when you're gone.