

Final Report

Preparation:

Personally I preferred going to a university in Canada to finally get to know this impressive country. Though I have never been to Canada before, I have always been interested this country: the spacious landscapes, the diversity of animals and the nature that differs so much from Germany. As I have grown up near a forest I have always loved going outside for a walk and going on hiking trips. In my opinion Canada offers numerous opportunities to do so.

Another important aspect that contributed to my interest in Canada was its history and connection to the French culture. My whole life I have had ties to France for various reasons, so I was especially interested in going to Montréal, because I could study Psychology in English and also speak French. Consequently, I could improve both of my favorite languages at the same time! In my opinion it was going to be a unique possibility to gain this experience.

After I decided on going to Canada I looked up the different exchange universities, the cities and the courses offered at each university. After comparing everything I decided that, according to my perception, McGill matches all of my interests.

The application process in general was very smooth - both the written application and the following interview. I was nervous before the interview but it was much better than I expected.

After receiving the letter of nomination for McGill I applied for my visa online. For one semester you only need an eTA (\$7 CAD) which is very easy and quick to get. Simultaneously I was looking for flights (e.g. on www.skyscanner.de) and quickly found a good offer for a one-way flight to Montréal. I preferred to buy a one-way ticket since I didn't know when exactly I wanted to go back home yet.

McGill requires you to purchase their own health insurance. Unfortunately it expires right after the exams so I also needed to purchase another insurance because I stayed in Canada to go travelling after the semester.

Looking for an apartment was easier than I expected. I didn't want to live by myself and since the student housing options seemed a bit expensive I started looking in different housing groups

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on Facebook in November (e.g. „International Roommates in Montreal – (UQAM, Concordia, McGill, HEC, UdeM)“, „McGill Off-campus Housing“, „McGill University Free and For Sale“). I messaged some people and it didn't take long until I found a room that I could sublet for four months. Most of the rooms were about 550-800 CAD in general, depending on size and location. I would recommend living in „McGill Ghetto“ (very close to the campus) or in „le Plateau“ (not right next to the campus but a pretty area with a lot of small shops, cafés and the famous murals). All of my friends were living in these two areas.

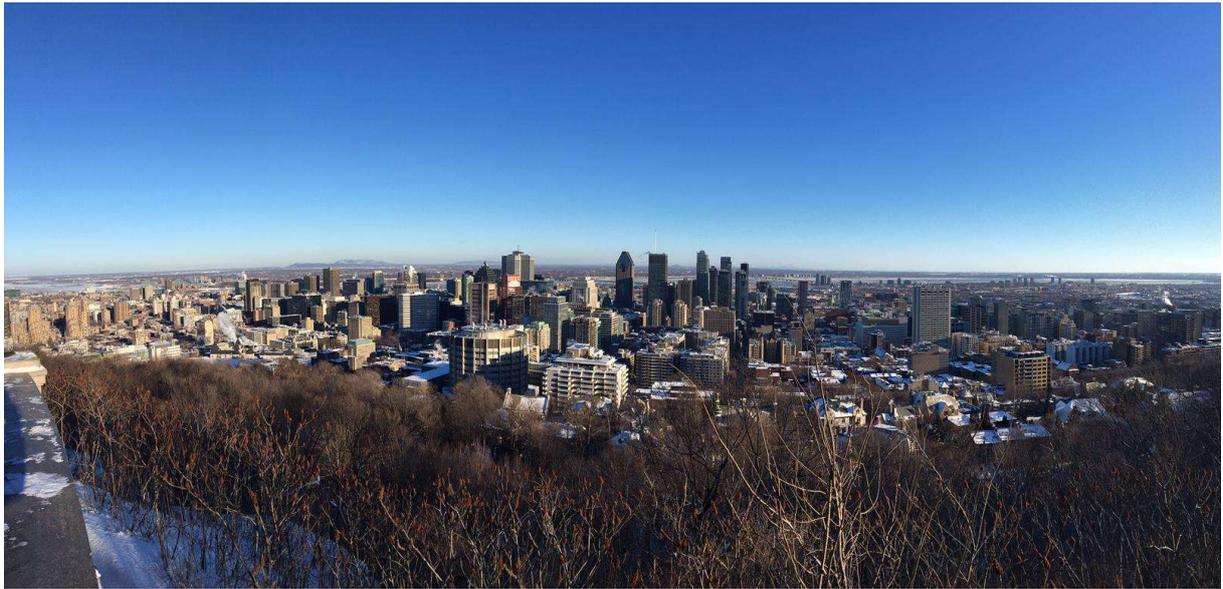
Every exchange student got many e-mails from the International Student Service at McGill with various helpful information in advance. On a few days before the semester started they organized some events for the exchange students to help us get to know each other (e.g. a brunch, food tours in the underground city, bowling,...). I really enjoyed going to these events and I got to know all of my friends during these first days.

Montréal & Canada:

Food is not very cheap in Canada, depending on what you buy you probably need at least 50-60 CAD to buy groceries every week. But there are also a lot of relatively cheap options to go out and grab a coffee (Tim Hortons!!!, Java U next to the campus,...) or food all over town. Definitely check out some of the cute little cafés - there are a lot of them and they are a good place to study with friends (e.g. Anti Café, La Dependance, Café chat L'heureux, Code & Café,...)!

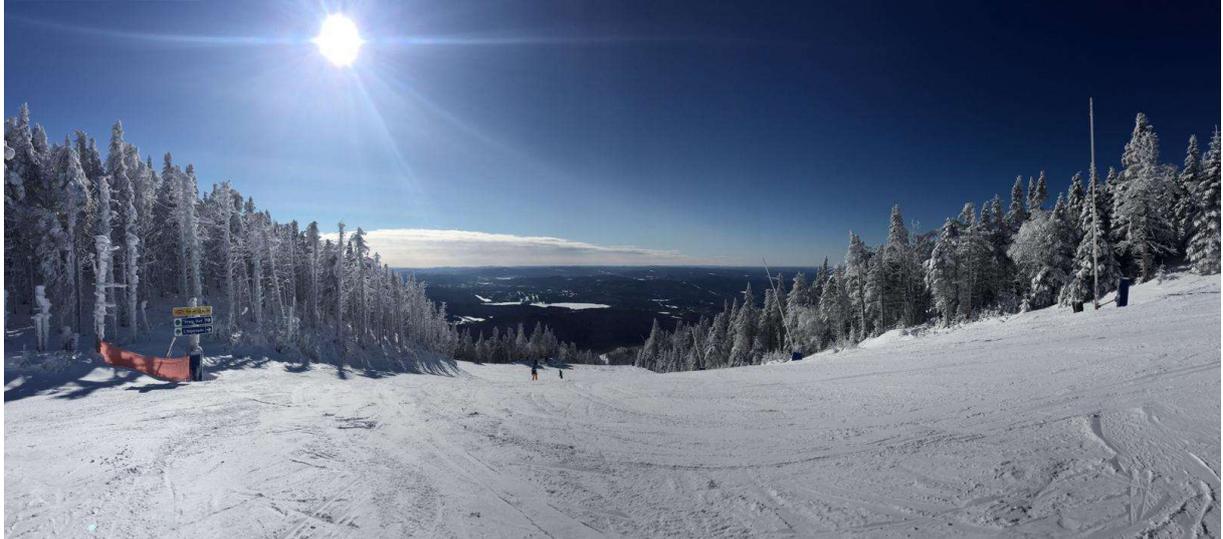
Montréal is a really pretty city! I really like the contrast of the modern skyscrapers and the old town right next to each other. There's a lot to do, a lot of different areas you can explore. There's also an underground city, which is basically a tunnel system that connects different shopping centres, commercial buildings and metro stations downtown. French was more preeminent in Montréal than I expected (I expected it to be about the same amount of French and English) but it was nice to have the opportunity to practice your French whenever you bought something. Québécois French is different than the French we learn at home and some words were hard to understand at the beginning, so I decided to go to some French lessons (offered by McGill, SSMU Mini Course, 5 CAD for 10 lessons).

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View from Mt. Royal

Not far from the city there are various places (national parks) where you can go hiking or skiing (e.g. Mt. Tremblant).



Besides, the famous cities Québec City and Ottawa are not far away, so you can easily go and explore these interesting cities on a day trip. In addition to that, Toronto and Niagra Falls are just a 5-6h drive away - a relatively short distance in Canada!

The winter in Montréal was very long and very very cold! It's harder than I thought to get used to such permanently low temperatures (-30 degrees on some days!). On some days it took

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forever to walk short distances outside because the pathways were so slippery! But on the other hand you can do a lot of fun winter activities like skiing, snow mobiling and dog sledding. And, of course, the city looks pretty in the snow!

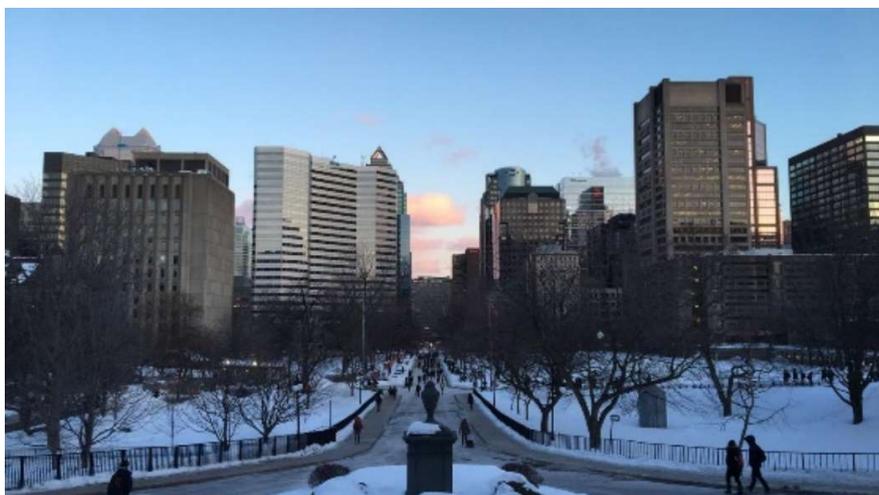


Canada is - as I imagined - a beautiful, stunning country! After the semester I went travelling with some friends in the western part of Canada for three weeks (Calgary, Badlands of Alberta, Banff National Park, Jasper National Park, Whistler, Vancouver, Vancouver Island). I would definitely recommend a trip like this to everyone!

Studying at McGill:



It's well known that McGill enjoys an excellent reputation. It really is a beautiful, big university that offers a great variety of interesting courses. Initially it was hard to decide which ones I want to take. Unfortunately a lot of them were restricted to exchange students. Eventually I decided to take the following four courses: Human Motivation, Social Psychology, Behavioral Neuroscience and Anthropology of Religion. All professors seemed motivated and competent. They encouraged the students to ask as many questions as possible and they always took enough time to answer personal questions after the lectures. Each professor has several TAs (teaching assistants) to whom you can go or write e-mails if you have any questions. They were really kind and always helpful. Besides, all of the fellow students I got to know were exceptionally friendly and helpful. So, as a student, I felt very supported at McGill all the time. When I felt lost, I knew that I would get help immediately.





campus views - with and without snow

I really enjoyed the variety of clubs and volunteering opportunities offered by McGill. As an extracurricular activity I participated in a program called „Homework Zone“ where we went to a school in an under-served neighborhood every Wednesday for two hours. As a mentor I worked with the same mentee every week and I both helped her with her homework and did „creative challenges“ that focused on building relationships and creativity. In addition to that, I participated in a program called „Spaghetti Nights“ where students go to the „Homework Zone“-schools to offer workshops for the parents (e.g. about healthy meals, bullying,...). Before the workshops, we had dinner with the families and during the workshops we looked after the children. It was a great, enriching experience and I really enjoyed having the opportunity to participate in both of these amazing programs!

If I'm being honest, studying at McGill was more stressful than I expected. In Freiburg we usually have one lecture per week and we write one exam in each course at the end of the semester (usually three or four exams). But at McGill I took four courses with two lectures each per week (so double the amount of information compared to Freiburg). For each course I had to read a lot of compulsory books/texts. And at McGill, you have to write Midterm exams and Finals so I wrote ten exams from the beginning of February until the end of April, which means there was basically never a time when I didn't have to study. At the beginning I was overwhelmed because of this huge amount of information I had to memorize during this time. Plus, the exams were hard. I definitely understand why McGill is called „Harvard of Canada“.

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It was helpful that McGill offered a lot of de-stress events during the exam seasons, like therapy dogs, free coffee/food, yoga classes,... And although I constantly felt stressed I did enjoy all of my courses. They were really interesting and in my opinion I learned a lot. Now that I managed to study and learn everything we talked about in the lectures, I'm really proud of myself that I did good in the exams.

Summary

Of course this semester abroad was very beneficial for me – both academically and personally. It helped me to enhance my English and French skills and offered me a lot of new, interesting information that I can use for my further studies. Besides, I got to make a lot of good friends around the world.

So to me, the exchange semester at McGill was a very enriching experience. It wasn't the first time for me being away from home in another country for several months, so I it didn't seem too challenging. But yet I became a bit more independent, and again, I learned the importance and value of true friendship and what „home“ could mean.

In a nutshell, I would definitely recommend doing a semester abroad to anyone! In my opinion it's a unique opportunity to gain experiences that you can't get anywhere else!