

2013-2014

University Attended: McGill University

FEEDBACK 1

INDUCTION/ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

Discover McGill is essentially an orientation week wherein you meet new students and receive information on pretty much everything McGill related. I'd recommend taking part in this as I still don't know some very basic information and I'm approaching my last week here...

Frosh is the Canadian equivalent of Fresher's Week. I did Carnival in January which is a very similar experience – needless to say the week's activities revolve around beer, and lots of it.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

It's pointless making general comparisons between the workload at McGill and at Manchester because it really depends on which courses you take. Some courses have been quite a heavy load (e.g. I took "Crime" as my elective in first semester and there was a midterm, final exam and a 6000 word research paper), and others are relatively light (e.g. "Gender and Work" involved just a midterm and a final, both multiple-choice). I would certainly recommend checking out some of the management-related courses offered by the Sociology department, such as "Gender and Work", "Sociology of Work and Industry" and "Technology and Society" if you enjoyed "People, Management and Change" at Manchester or have a keen interest in some of the broader, critical issues surrounding management and work.

The style of teaching again varies from course to course, but a notable constant is that many courses grade class participation (usually around worth 10%). I recommend tracking down any syllabi online before registering on a course to check the assessment methods.

There are a wide variety of courses offered by Desautels, and if you have any issues registering on a course (e.g. because of year restrictions, lack of pre-requisites or full courses) the academic advisors in the BCom office are very helpful in getting you registered. Don't worry too much if you aren't registered on everything you want before you get there, you can sort any issues out during the add-drop period if you make an appointment with an advisor.

MBS INTERNATIONAL TEAM

The MBS office has always been prompt and helpful in their responses to any queries that I've had. Sue, Andy and Anthony are always on hand to help with any personal or academic issues that you might have during the course of the exchange – just bear in mind the 5-hour time difference (the MBS office will be closed after 12pm EST).

HOST INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

I haven't really needed any assistance from the international student services at McGill, but they are open from 9-5 and their website contains a wealth of information for incoming exchange students.

INSURANCE, HEALTH COVER

Health insurance is mandatory and it costs around \$600 for the full year I think. After contacting McGill and providing proof of the Sun Life coverage provided by Manchester I was able to get this mandatory insurance waived as the Travel Insurance constituted similar coverage to that provided by the McGill plan. When you

request exemption like this the approval process takes a few weeks, and is by no means guaranteed (though even if you do fail to get exemption from the McGill plan, Student Finance England should reimburse you if you are eligible for the Travel Grant).

Thankfully I haven't needed to use any health services here, but there is a clinic on campus which I believe is free.

INFORMATION ON ANY ADDITIONAL COSTS AND FINANCIAL CERTIFICATION

There were no additional charges levied by McGill, and I don't recall having to provide any proof of financial support to the university, but it is required as part of the application for the Study Permit.

There are small administrative charges for the Study Permit and the CAQ, but these were able to be reclaimed via the Student Finance Travel Grant.

In terms of general living expenses I spend around the same here as in Manchester. Food and alcohol is relatively more expensive, but this is balanced out by lower costs elsewhere (e.g. 25 cigarettes: £5). If you don't already own a winter coat and a pair of good boots you will need to buy these or you will have a miserable winter! I picked up a pair of black Timberlands from Champs for around \$100 and they served me well.

Canadian mobile phone contracts are renowned as being among the most expensive in the world. The cheapest plan I found was with Fido for \$40/month, and the added bonus of Fido is that you can have a month-by-month contract without owning a credit card. Bring a phone from the UK and get it unlocked.

Student bank accounts are fairly easy to set up here, I'm with BMO and pay a small monthly fee but look around the other major banks (TD, Scotiabank, Banque National) as they may have free student accounts. Credit/debit cards work differently here than in the UK. Debit cards here are not powered by Visa/Mastercard so do not enable you to buy a lot of things online. If you want to buy things online you will need to use your UK debit card, or you can set up a credit card here (assuming you don't have a Canadian credit history the bank will withhold an amount equivalent to the credit limit as collateral). Also try to choose a bank with an ATM nearby school and your accommodation as withdrawing money from other ATMs costs \$2-3.

ACCOMMODATION

Contrary to the previous feedback forms I do *not* recommend staying at Varsity 515 (515 St. Catherine). I stayed there during the first semester and hated it. The apartments are nicely finished and spacious, but the rent is extortionate and it couldn't be further from the real McGill experience (the building is mainly full of exchange students). Living downtown is good for getting to school (5 min walk), but you feel a bit isolated from the real Montreal, and I personally didn't value being within walking distance of H&M, and a half-hour walk from a decent bar...

I would look at McGill housing listings or Craigslist for students looking for another roommate (a lot of people go on exchange to Africa / Europe as part of their degree, or graduate at different times to their friends) so there are a lot of people looking for another roommate. I got lucky and my friends here introduced me to some really nice guys who needed a new roommate for a semester. I paid \$749 a month at Varsity 515, now I pay \$575.

I live in the Plateau, just off St. Laurent which is around a 20 minute walk from campus. I really recommend living here – a plethora of nice bars, cafes, shops and restaurants (most notably Romados for the best Portuguese chicken I've ever had, and Schwartz's for the world-famous smoked meat sandwiches). There are a load of students living in the Plateau and it tends to be third- and fourth-year students who live here which is nice. Other nice areas (with even cheaper rent) include the Mile-End (a bit further north than the plateau, bit quieter – think Didsbury) and St-Henri.

515 is without doubt an easy way to sort accommodation, so if you are risk-averse it is a perfectly acceptable accommodation, but don't be swayed by the promise of an on-site gym and cinema – the McGill gym is leagues better, and nobody really uses the communal areas.

DESTINATION INFORMATION AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

I have absolutely loved my time in Montreal, it is a curious blend of North American and French culture. Don't be put off by the ubiquity of French, or the politics surrounding bilingualism in Quebec; I couldn't speak a word of French when I arrived and I have had no problems in the main.

Montreal is ideally situated for travel to New York, Toronto, Niagara Falls, Quebec City and Boston. There are also decent ski slopes in Mont-Tremblant and Jay Peak (Vermont). Megabus and Greyhound are often the best and cheapest ways to get to these places, but for trips to Toronto or Quebec I would recommend trying Via Rail.

I went to Cuba with a few of my friends during March reading week (\$700 all-inclusive + flights) and I would definitely recommend visiting if you get the chance. If you are looking to fly to somewhere in the states I would recommend crossing the border on the bus and flying from Burlington or another nearby US airport to save some serious money.

In terms of travel within Montreal, the metro is very efficient and covers the main areas that you would want to visit. I've spent most of my time here between McGill campus and the Mile End, and have rarely needed to use public transport. I bought a cheap bike off Craigslist when I arrived and got decent use out of it until December (I sold it for a slight profit on Craigslist).

I heard horror stories about the cold weather in Montreal but you really do get used to it. January and February are the worst months (lows of around -25) but if you dress appropriately it is certainly manageable! It's all relative anyway, after months at -20 when it gets back above 10 degrees in March you feel like you're in the south of Spain.

DESCRIBE IN ONE SENTENCE YOUR YEAR ABROAD

One of the best experiences I've ever had, I am itching to get back to visit friends next year!