EXCHANGE TO
L’UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL

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Université de Montréal, Canada, Science politique, Fall 2016 and Spring 2017
Preparation for exchange

Looking back at my preparation for exchange, it would have been nice to familiarise oneself with Montréal’s transit map. Montréal’s Métro system is a big one, which can often be quite confusing sometimes. However, once you take it enough, the system is convenient, and distances between each station is on average much shorter than the Skytrain, which makes it easier to get from Point A to Point B with minimal walking (especially for people like me who wishes there were electric walkways on every street).

Packing is something to take seriously when planning to go to Montréal. The weather can be quite shocking for us Vancouverites who enjoy the luxury of a moderate climate. Montréal tends to get quite hot in the summer and very cold in the winter. So, be sure to pack outfits for all seasons if you plan on doing multiple semesters in Montréal like I did. Your winter jacket will be your best friend when the temperature hits -20 or below during winter. I strongly recommend winter boots and other winter gear as well.

View from my room before and during a snow storm

Other pre-trip things to take care of is financing and accommodation. Finance-wise, it is very important to plan out your budget ahead of time to make sure you have the means to survive. What is good, however, is that because you are still in Canada, your Canadian bank account and credit cards are usable. In terms of accommodation, I recommend hunting for a place to live before you arrive. I stayed in a private student residence in Downtown Montréal called evo, which was about a 30-minute transit ride to UdeM. The good side to that is you get to live downtown, which is a much more fun and vibrant place than where the campus is located. However, the costs will obviously be much higher than living in a student residence on campus. It all depends on your budget and where you want to live. Find a place that fits your budget and your needs.
During exchange

I arrived a week before school officially started and was not able to move into my place yet because the lease started on the 1st of September, so I had to stay in a hotel room until my lease began. Orientation was quick. All exchange students were invited to attend a course selection session. I didn’t like the way the session was set up since all course selection and changes had to be done through a counsellor and we were not allowed to make changes to courses online. That would be one thing that I found the most frustrating. Some of my friends that I met at the orientation were sent from department to department to simply sign up for a French course. The bureaucracy is something that I would change.

Aside from that, the campus is pleasant. I didn’t spend much time there other than attending classes, but I found the students to be quite nice and helpful, especially on the first day when you are unsure where your class is located. Classes were a decent size. I am in the French Cohort Program, so most of my classes do not exceed about 20 people. It was nice to sit in a more normal class setup for a change. The structure of the courses is similar to what you would find at SFU. Most of my courses were evaluated by papers, midterms and final exams, just as you would expect in a class at SFU.

As I had mentioned, I chose to live off campus at evo Montréal since it would be more fun downtown and I would have better access to shopping, tourist districts and a better nightlife. I made most of my friends from where I live since it was a student residence and it is easier to coordinate plans with people who live in the same building as you. Although, since the place I lived in is closer to McGill and Concordia, most of my friends went to those universities. The building itself was great, it had a pool, a gym, a library, a games room, multiple theatre rooms and a laundry facility. The rent, however, was quite high, depending on which type of
room you choose. In my opinion, it is worth the extra money you pay since you get a better experience.

There are a lot of cool places downtown to visit. Winter is a great time to explore if you are ready to brave the cold, although snowstorms can be quite brutal. There is a Christmas market located at Place des Arts around Christmas time with food trucks and other fun displays for spectators to enjoy. Not to mention, I got to witness the internationally mocked Christmas tree that was on display that year. Winter is the time to enjoy all the fun activities planned throughout the city.

*The infamous Christmas tree that went viral*

If you feel confident enough to conquer Québec drivers and traffic, a road trip to Québec City is also a fun activity to plan with a few friends. Although, I do recommend finding other means of transport if you don’t have much experience driving in the snow, especially during a snowstorm. Not to sound like a driver’s ed book, but I was driving in a snowstorm and I found the road visibility to be low and more control of the car was needed especially when manoeuvring through tighter traffic. The trip itself to the city, however, I strongly encourage.

*A few battle scars from driving through a snowstorm*
Reflection after exchange

My exchange to Montréal is definitely an unforgettable one. It was difficult living on my own at first, but after the first month, you begin to adjust and it’s great. My advice to other students who wish to embark in this journey is to not be afraid to explore. Take advantage of the opportunity and the independence to learn about life, yourself and partake in activities that are outside your comfort zone. Montréal is an open city with very friendly and fun loving people who always have suggestions on good places to dine, what activities to take part in and cool parts of the city that only locals know about. Don’t be afraid to explore, learn and have fun! Et bien sûr, une connaissance de la langue française est fortement recommandée...

Au revoir!