Welcoming Guide for New Students

2018

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1 All about CAOS

All graduate students and PostDocs, diploma students, Trainees and Research Assistants in the Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences (AOS) department at McGill University are represented and given a voice by the Council of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences (CAOS). As an officially recognized, autonomous student group of the PGSS of McGill University, the CAOS acts as a liaison with the association of all graduate students and postdoctoral fellows at McGill.

Through the council executive members, it advocates for students in student-related academic and administrative issues, works to improve students working conditions and addresses problems and difficulties. It supports students throughout their academic life in the AOS department and strives to improve students life.

To this end, CAOS organizes activities such as yearly summer barbecues and Holiday parties, game nights throughout the year and weekly happy-hour get2gether and coffee times. Furthermore, it promotes events like the departmental seminar series and Post-Graduate Students Society (PGSS) courses and invitations among its members. Event details, information about conferences or scholarships and many other news-worthy announcements are posted on the CAOS web page (http://web.meteo.mcgill.ca/caos/). Additionally, CAOS is active on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/CAOSMcGill/), Instagram (caosmcgill), and twitter (@CAOSMcGill).

The current executive members are happy to assist all new students in case of questions or concerns.

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<td>Natalie Gervasi</td>
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2 Getting Started

2.1 Pre-Arrival

2.1.1 The International Buddy Program at McGill University

In order to help you to transition to your life in Montreal at your studies at McGill, the Buddy Program pairs new international students with returning international and domestic students. These volunteers provide a friendly face and a helping hand. They can also offer linguistic support, cultural guidance and information about life at McGill. To sign up follow this link: https://www.issbuddy.ca/

2.1.2 Accueil Plus

If you arrive at Montreal’s Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport between Tuesday, August 7th to Friday, September 7th, you can sign up pre-arrival for Accueil Plus (Welcome Plus), an airport reception service, to be welcomed by local students who will provide you with information and guidance and give you the opportunity to call home let your family know you have arrived. You can sign up here: https://www.accueilplus.ca/inscription/?lang=en
2.2 Housing

Graduate students of the AOS department live in many different neighborhoods across Montreal. Most if not all students live off campus since the McGill Graduate Housing is, compared to off campus living arrangements, quite expensive. Some of the most preferred neighborhoods are located on the map in figure 1.

Figure 1: Neighborhoods and metro lines in Montreal.
The McGill ghetto is the neighborhood closest to McGill just east of the downtown campus. Due to the proximity to downtown and the downtown campus, rent can be expensive compared to other neighborhoods. A studio can cost $800-$900 per month. English is the dominant language spoken in this neighborhood. The picture 2 represents a typical street in the ghetto.

![Figure 2: Snapshot of McGill Ghetto.](image1)

Other very popular neighborhoods are the Plateau and Mile End. It is a trendy place to live with an active night life and great restaurant and bar options. Affordable rooms in shared apartments can be found with a bit of luck ($450-$550 per month). The neighborhood is popular with students.

![Figure 3: The Plateau neighborhood is famous for its culture and night life.](image2)
and young people from France and other french-speaking countries and you will hear predominately French on the street and in stores (see picture 3).

Even further north east lays the Rosemont neighborhood. In this ethnically diverse neighborhood is one of the most attractive borough in Montreal (see picture 4). The Jean-Talon Market, Little Italy and the Botanical Garden are all in this neighborhood. For a studio you have to budget about $600-$700 and a 2 1/2 about $750-$850 per month. Living in Rosemont is ideal if you like to improve your French since the neighborhood is predominately francophone.

![Figure 4: The Rosemont neighborhood is ethnically diverse and predominately francophone.](image)

West of McGill, the town of Westmount is one of the most expensive neighborhoods in Montreal. But especially in its lower part, it offers some affordable housing options. Westmount’s residents are predominantly bilingual with more then half of the residents speaking English as their mother tongue (see picture 5).

Even further towards the West is the Côte-des-Neiges/Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG) neighborhood. With more than 70 different nationalities present, it is an ethnically diverse neighborhood. Due to the presence of UdeM and Concordia’s Loyola campus, many students live in this borough. McGill can easily be reach by public transportation or by bike. This residential neighborhood offers some great housing options in the range of $500-$600 per month for a 1 1/2. Sherbrooke Street,
Figure 5: The town of Westmount is relatively expensive but affordable places can be found.

Monkland Avenue and Victoria Street offer bars and restaurants (see picture 6).

Figure 6: In the Côte-des-Neiges/Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG) neighborhood you can find many old Victorian houses.

Across the Lachine canal is the Verdun neighborhood. It is an up-and-coming neighborhood with some affordable apartments. It is not out of the ordinary to find a 3 1/2 or 4 1/2 for $700 per month. Located directly at the St. Lawrence River, Verdun combines short commutes to university
with relaxing in your free time.

Figure 7: The Verdun borough is a very convenient place to live if you work downtown.

Apartments, studios, room- and flatmates can be found on craigslist or kijiji. Additionally, there are two Facebook groups - McGill housing and International Roommates in Montreal - (UQAM, Concordia, McGill, HEC, UdeM) - that might help to find the perfect place to live. Graduate students in the AOS department sometimes arrange an apartment or room from afar and sometimes wait until they have arrived in Montreal and then look for living arrangements.

Note that according to the law, the landlord cannot demand advance payment of more than the first term of rent (one month’s rent). Unfortunately, it is still quite common to be asked to do so, especially for international students. It is encouraged to understand your rights before signing the lease by checking the website of the Régie du logement for detailed regulations of house renting: [https://www.rdl.gouv.qc.ca/en/being-a-lessee/rights-and-obligations-of-the-lessee](https://www.rdl.gouv.qc.ca/en/being-a-lessee/rights-and-obligations-of-the-lessee)
2.3 Getting around in Montral

2.3.1 Bixi

Bixi is Montreal’s public bike system that is accessible to everyone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, three seasons of the year, from April to November. Take one at any one of 540 Bixi stations and then leave it at any other one when you arrive at your destination.

To use it, go to the pay station (station map can be found here: https://secure.bixi.com/map/), choose the bike icon, buy your day pass, one-way trip ($2.95 for 30 mins or less), or 10 one way package, then read and accept the user contract. You can pay with a credit card, but a $100 deposit will be placed on your credit card for maximum of 10 days. For one-way trips, you can also pay with an OPUS card, which does not require security deposit. But you must first create an online account using the subscription form. For frequent usages, you can subscribe a one-year, 90-day or 30-day membership online for a reasonable price. Click on the link below to find the deal that is suitable for you: https://montreal.bixi.com/en/pricing.

Note that Bixi was intended for short trips. Additional fees start after the allocated trip period (30 and 45 mins for short-term access and one-year membership users, respectively). For the detailed instruction of how Bixi works, please see: https://www.bixi.com/en/how-it-works

McGill students can obtain a 10% discount toward annual memberships by following the instructions on the website: https://www.mcgill.ca/transport/cycling/bixi

2.3.2 Public transportation

STM Montreal networks include metro, bus and shared taxibus. Transit fare for one-trip (bus and/or metro) is $3.25. Tickets can be brought at metro station or pay in exact amount of change on the bus. For the 747 bus line between the Montreal-Trudeau airport and downtown Montreal, you have to get the daily pass for $10.

Generally, people would purchase an OPUS card (for $6), a smart card on which you can charge
all STM transit fares (one trip, ten trips, weekly pass, monthly pass...). Regular OPUS card can be bought from fare collectors or vending machines in metro stations. All students at McGill are entitled to the reduced fare for monthly pass for $51 and 4-month pass for $199. To obtain this, you must apply for a student OPUS card. It costs $15 and can be done in person once a year at, for example, the metro station Berri-UQAM or through Minerva in the student menu. You can access the web interface to McGill’s central information system by following this link: [https://horizon.mcgill.ca/pban1/twbkwbis.P_WWWLogin](https://horizon.mcgill.ca/pban1/twbkwbis.P_WWWLogin). If you like to go through Minerva, please be aware that they will use the picture from your student ID. Make sure that you first get your student ID and then your student OPUS card.

### 2.4 Places to Eat around McGill

Around McGill, there are several inexpensive places to grab a small snack or have a full meal. Places on campus are convenient (especially in winter since for several you do not have to leave the building):

- **Soupe Café** (Burnside Hall basement)
- **Dispatch Café** (McConnell Engineering Building)
- **E-Café** (McConnell Engineering Building)
- **Subway** (Arts Building)
- **Première Moisson** (Redpath Library)
- **Thomson House Restaurant** (Thomson House)

Off-campus, numerous restaurants and coffee shops offer various cuisines:

- **Pizzeria Bros** (pizza and salads)
- **McGill Pizza** (pizza and breakfast all day)
- **Pannizza** (pizza and paninis)
- Lola Rosa (Vegetarian)
- Kantapia (Korean)
- Opiano (Korean)
- Japote (Japanese)
- Le MajesThé (Chinese)
- Bash (Lebanese)
- Sandouchon (Peruvian)
- Dunn’s Famous (Smoke Meat)
- Thai express
- Ô Claf (sandwiches)
- Falafel Avenue
- Vua (Asian & Western sandwiches, salads, sushi)
- Super Sandwich
- Hinnawi Bros bagel and Coffee
- Subway
- Tim Hortons
- Second Cup Cafe
- Starbucks

Also, keep an eye on the Facebook groups Cheap Food on Campus and Free food on Campus and in Montreal.
2.5 Once You Arrive

For all students:

- Obtain your McGill student ID card at Service Point (3415 McTavish Street). Remember to bring your given student ID number.

- Visit AOS Administrative & Student Affairs Coordinator, Manuela Franzo-Whitnell, to get the required documents signed at Burnside Hall 945 at McGill.

- Finalize your courses schedule by the end of the Add/Drop Period. Please keep in mind that you have to register for the subject 'REGN - Registration' and then course 'RCGR - Confirm Grad Reg' for every term that you are studying at McGill.

For international students:

- To work or study for your graduate degree, you have to have a Social Insurance Number (SIN). You can either apply in-person at the closest Service Canada Centre all the time or at Office for Students with Disabilities at a few selected dates (https://www.mcgill.ca/internationalstudents/once-here/orientation). In either case you will need your original study permit, passport and a form from AOS (which you can obtain from AOS Administrative & Student Affairs Coordinator) on-hand. As an international student you will be given a temporary Social Insurance Number starting with a 9.

- For international students the McGill International Health Insurance Plan is mandatory. Before the health insurance card can be picked up at the Service Point, you have to be registered for at least one course and must activate the coverage on Minerva (https://www.mcgill.ca/internationalstudents/health).

- Open a bank account. To do so, you will need maximal two forms of ID depending of the bank. There are many bank choices within walking distance from McGill downtown campus, e.g., TD Bank, CIBC, Bank of Montreal, Scotiabank, National Bank of Canada, Royal Bank of Canada, ING Direct...etc. Different banks have different offers for students and might have different requirements, so it’s better to check first to make an informed decision on the
one that works best for your needs.

- Get a cell phone plan. Cell phone companies include Bell, Fido, Koodo, TELUS, Virgin Mobile and Rogers. You can check online first to find the best phone plan for you, and most of the companies have booths in downtown where you can just go and get your Canada phone number activated. Generally, you can get a better deal if you already have a cell phone.

3 Useful Resources

3.1 Grad Student Services

The Post-Graduate Students’ Society, or PGSS, organizes lots of services and activities for grad students. You can check out their website at https://pgss.mcgill.ca for further information. They also run Thomson House (3650 McTavish above Doctor Penfield), which houses a bar, restaurant, and lounges. Also, check out their handbook at https://pgss.mcgill.ca/en/pgss-online-handbook.

There’s also the Committee for Member Support (CMS), a confidential referral and peer support service for grad students and post-docs who feel their civil, academic or human rights have been violated. (https://pgss.mcgill.ca/en/student-support)

3.2 AOS Department

The web page of the AOS Department offers some important information about your studies and the organizational structure of the department. Check it out under: https://www.mcgill.ca/meteo/graduate

3.3 Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS)

GPS works towards academic excellence for graduate and postdoctoral education at McGill. Its goal is to ensure that students have all the tools and info they need to make their experience and
studies at McGill a success. Explore their site to find details about funding opportunities, thesis
guidelines, supervision, etc: https://mcgill.ca/gps/.

3.4 International Student Services

You have probably been contacted by the International Student Services (ISS). If not, visit their
website and office for more info and hints for your new life in Montreal: http://www.mcgill.ca/inter
nationalstudents

3.5 McGill International Students Network

MISN provides a great opportunity for people of diverse backgrounds (especially those new to
Montreal) to meet each other. Services include a drop-in centre (Brown building, basement),
social events and information on international student issues. The MISN also offers roughly 10
language classes (www.misn.ca).