

UNDER THE WEATHER
Final report and Closing Remarks

A Reflection on Under the Weather
By Irene Dambriunas
Project Coordinator of Under The Weather

For the past 13 months, I have been the coordinator of Under The Weather: Climate Change Research and Justice, a monthly lecture series funded by the McGill Sustainability Projects Fund in partnership with CKUT 90.3 FM. In this exit report, I will explain what the lecture series accomplished, what lessons were learned, and what could be changed or conducted differently for next time, should a similar project ever emerge.

I feel like it is important to preface this report with a note on the fact that I had had little to no experience in event planning prior to this position. Both the CKUT hiring committee and I acknowledged that this would be a high learning curve for me, and something that I would definitely need to hit the ground running in terms of executing.

To start, I will explain more specifically Under The Weather's initial endeavors, as described in the SPF grant application. The original structure of Under The Weather was intended to be a monthly lecture series, taking place on the second Thursday of every month at 7 pm, so that the lecture could be aired during the CKUT radio show Grey Matters. The idea was that each semester would feature three grassroots climate justice organizers or McGill professors, and one feature speaker that would require a larger lecture space and a larger honorarium- speakers such as Naomi Klein, Bill McKibben, or David Suzuki. During the academic year (from September through April), the lectures would take place on campus, and during the summer months, the lectures would be hosted in spaces in the Montreal community that supported sustainable initiatives. Overall, the main structure of Under The Weather did not change, but certain limitations were realized along the way, which led to some adjustments.

For the most part, Under The Weather was able to take place on the second Thursday of each month, but a few exceptions were made. The slated time for December's Under The Weather fell right in the middle of McGill's exam period, so it made more sense to create an in-studio edition and podcast for that show, since a majority of the audience was unable to attend in person. This was demonstrated more so in April, when we did host an Under The Weather on campus and only four people



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attended. The content of the lecture was very informative and fascinating, and it was still uploaded as a podcast, but it was unfortunate to have such a small turnout in the room itself. If there were to be a future lecture series like this on campus, I would strongly suggest that the organizers be mindful of the time of year and feasibility of expecting a strong student turnout during exam time.

Under the Weather was also slated to occur in the second week of March; however, conflict arose with the week prior to the event being McGill's reading week. Overall, the process of booking rooms at McGill was a rather tedious and extensive process (I elaborate more on this in the next paragraph), but around the time of March, communicating with various building and faculty management was particularly difficult, resulting in a rejected room-booking request one week before the event. The speaker for the event had confirmed already, but due to the lack of a lecture space, the event had to be cancelled. However, since Under The Weather still had the open time-slot on CKUT's airwaves, it was decided that we would still produce an hour of in-studio content, to make the podcast consistent. This one-hour in-studio proved to be an important edition to the Under The Weather podcast roster, as we focused on urban sustainability and interviewed McGill professors who focus on this in their research. CKUT programmer and MSE student Melissa Fundira sat down for a pre-recorded interview with Professor Kevin Manaugh, and we interviewed Marie-Eve Isabel and Julia Freeman of the MUSE program live.

As I mentioned before, booking lecture-spaces at McGill was a learning experience, and one that I have many recommendations for. I'd like to thank Eliza Dee McCoy from the event bookings department at McGill. Although requesting lecture spaces was a tedious and convoluted process, she was always easy to communicate with, very quickly to follow-up, and did what she could to make the process as straightforward as possible. In terms of any projects planning to book spaces on campus, I would strongly suggest making all of the expected booking requests at the beginning of the year, before spaces fill up.

When the project was first approved, the initial idea was to bring in one featured speaker per academic term. A featured speaker would include a better-known climate justice organizer or researcher, someone like David Suzuki, Bill McKibben, Naomi Klein, or Vandana Shiva. In the original budget, \$5000 was allotted as the featured speaker honorarium per term. It soon became apparent that some of these speakers would not agree to give a lecture for less than \$10,000. More importantly, this concept of a featured



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speaker effectively goes against the mandate of CKUT, which constantly prioritizes the voices of grassroots organizers.

After Charity Hicks came to Montreal to speak for Under The Weather, I was blown away by the power of grassroots initiatives, and racked my brain to figure out how to bring in more grassroots organizers from all over Canada and the United States. An important thing to note about these “climate change celebrities” is that when they do decide to go on a speaking tour that passes through Montreal, McGill will find a way to have them lecture here. When Under The Weather first started, Al Gore gave a free lecture in Pollack Hall. Over the past few years that I have been a student at McGill, David Suzuki has spoken three times. And now, as Under The Weather has officially wrapped up, Bill McKibben gave a free talk at Concordia, and there are rumors that Naomi Klein will soon be going on a book tour. These speakers are not actually missing out on an opportunity to present in Montreal should Under The Weather not invite them.

The SPF also had made recommendations upon approval of Under The Weather to seek out speakers that would require a smaller honorarium, or collaborating with McGill-based research institutes to gain extra funding for these speakers. By proposing a budget line amendment to only bring in grassroots organizers, thus minimizing the honorarium line and adding to the travel line, Under The Weather took on the SPF’s recommendations into consideration, as well as adhering to CKUT’s mandate of bring voices to McGill and the Montreal communities that are underrepresented.

A major component of organizing Under The Weather was finding co-presenters to help promote, sometimes fund, and provide volunteers for each event. Collaborating with other organizations not only helped to promote the events on a wider scale, but it also made each visiting speakers’ time in Montreal more worthwhile, as it enabled the speakers to form partnerships and start future projects and collaborations within Montreal. For example, when Charity Hicks came to Montreal for her talk, she also partnered with Justice Alimentaire Pour Montreal to speak at a conference they were having that same week. She also introduced “Reflection Fridays” to the Montreal climate justice organizing community, a weekly gathering that she hosted back in Detroit to give organizers the space to unpack and assess the difficulties surrounding their initiatives. When Mel Bazil of the Unist’ot’en Camp came to Montreal in May for Under The Weather, he also gave a workshop at the Anarchist Bookfair, met with members of No One Is Illegal, and visited Kahnasatake and Tyandanaiga to meet with fellow indigenous organizers to share perspectives and ideas. And lastly, for the final edition of Under The Weather in August, a panel was hosted with Reclaim Turtle Island as a co-presenter to break down



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environmental violence and its relation to indigenous feminisms and harm reduction. Panelists were brought in from Edmonton, Albuquerque, and from right here in Montreal to discuss how these issues relate to their own communities. These panelists had not met each other prior to the event, and the evening allowed them to form partnerships amongst each other for future community organizing.

I will now go into some of the more difficult experiences in coordinating Under The Weather. A major component of organizing each event was promotions. Facebook events, posters, and CKUT webpage features were created for each lecture to encourage people to attend or tune in. Another more complex component was reaching out to various McGill departments and organizations via listservs. Listservs are a very helpful tool for outreach, as many different groups have a weekly or monthly newsletter sent out en masse via email. However, this was also the most difficult task to manage in terms of event promotions, and it is something I would recommend re-working for any future projects. Each listserv has its own timeline for release (some are weekly, some monthly, etc) and require specific deadlines for postings to go into the listserv. I recommend for any future project that requires event planning to organize a sort of "listserv list" containing the contact information and times of release for each listserv. Unfortunately, during Under The Weather, event postings did not always make it onto as many listservs as was intended due to the timings of many listservs. Having a centralized source for this information can make the job much easier.

On a side note, I should also mention that communicating with Shannon Scott of the McGill School of Environment, probably our most crucial listserv to have a presence in at McGill, was not always the easiest to communicate with in terms of getting Under The Weather events circulated. These miscommunications were unfortunate and I hope that future lines of communication with Shannon are more open in the future.

The original grant proposal for Under The Weather specified that this project would be a yearlong monthly lecture series, set to continue in the summer months. As mentioned before, while it was hosted on campus during the academic year, in the summer months we moved the series out into community spaces. In the month of May, this proved to be a fairly easy task, as many students were still in the city, and we were able to collaborate with the Anarchist Bookfair to expand the scope of the event. However, the feasibility of hosting a lecture series in the months of June and July were significantly put to the test.



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I strongly advise for any future lecture series proposed to the SPF that it not continue through the summer months, with May and August being the exceptions. Although the lecture series was intended for all members of the community and not just students, the fact of the matter is that lectures are still very much an academically rooted event structure. A major setback in organizing Under The Weather during the summer months was that the speakers intended for these events were very hard to reach and follow-up with. During the summer, professors go on vacation or focus on their own research, and community organizers use this time to organize direct actions. Along with the difficulty of finding potential speakers, promoting the events became difficult as many listservs were inactive during the summer months, and attendance for the July edition of Under The Weather was stiflingly low.

Overall, Under The Weather had a tremendous impact on the McGill and Montreal communities. This lecture series saw so many major turning points in the climate justice movement in action, and these lectures brought the issues to a more accessible platform. This series was able to bring in speakers on issues from distant areas as well as highlighting local climate justice issues pertaining to local communities right here in Montreal.

I should mention here that the impact metric has been filled out to the best of my knowledge as the coordinator of the Under The Weather project. Where applicable, I gave as precise a number as possible. However, there are certain impacts assessed in the spreadsheet that are difficult for a single person to calculate and know for sure. For example, the row entitled "Number of friendships formed" depicts the friendships that *I know of* forming at each event, but I was only a single person at each event. I hope that the impact metric gives the Sustainability Projects Fund a good idea of the effect Under The Weather had on the McGill and Montreal communities, while bearing in mind that some numbers do have an element of uncertainty.

I would like to now take this time to thank Jameson Jones-Doyle, Liliith Wyatt, Kim McGrath, Eva Poon, and Keelin from the McGill Office of Sustainability for their endless support and assistance in making Under The Weather happen. I would also love to thank the staff of CKUT for their constant support during the project. This project would not be the success that it was and still is without the people mentioned above. I would also like to thank all of the Under The Weather speakers for taking the time to prepare a lecture and enlighten a group of listeners and attendants. Many of these speakers changed the way that I now see the world, and I would not have had the opportunity to get to know such fantastic people if it weren't for this project.



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Closing Remarks

By Nicole Ebert

Funding & Outreach Coordinator at Radio CKUT

An important part of the Project Coordinator's initiative in the summer was preparing another funding application for the Sustainability Projects Fund for an additional lecture series on-campus that would focus on Food Justice and issues surround food (Application 14-254 On Your Plate). Irene and I met regularly with Kim McGrath to modify the application; but in the end it was rejected. Of the feedback we received this stood out:

“The impact on campus and its sustainability is judged not to be significant enough, among others from the results of the first radio show that was funded by the SPF (SP0110 Under the Weather). From these results, the impact of a radio show in widely communicating sustainability-related ideas on campus to McGill students, faculty, and staff remains to be demonstrated.”

Irene and I were quite disappointed, as we had hoped to continue this event-lecture series and further develop our presence and relationship with McGill University. Through an analysis of our Impact Metrics from the project, I feel that it solidifies the importance and impact that “a radio show” has – and I question if this statement regarding the importance of the series was under-estimated or too quickly denounced. In particular because the project was much more than a radio show...

To this date, the Under the Weather podcasts have received over 1000 downloads and listens, there was over 400 people that attended these events, and over 25 other community groups and environmental groups participated in the series, either as speakers or co-presenters.

In terms of recommendations to the SFP Team, it was disappointing that the Sustainability Funds Project interprets Sustainability in the broad sense of requiring projects to garner their own sustainability and to date, has a preference to prioritizing projects that request seed-funding. In the culture of austerity that has ripped across the Quebec and Canadian economical landscape there have been unparalleled funding cuts to all sorts of incredible initiative. Sustainability should not require a financial sustainability, because the reality of our economic system is that more and more community groups, student groups working to build awareness, campaign to inform the public and incite direct action environmental groups working on grassroots initiatives are the groups that suffer most from those funding cuts. I recommend that SPF take the broader affects of austerity into mind when considering the term sustainability and prioritize funding groups that are directly affected by austerity measures.



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That being said, on a personal level, the impact of Under The Weather went beyond physical and material evaluations and was extremely emotional and person to both Irene and I. Listening to these courageous individuals speak and being implicated in this process was met with incredible amounts of joy, to the points of at times being on the brink of tears – and we acknowledge that this work would not have been possible without the overwhelming financial support of the Sustainability Funds Projects, and of course, many thanks must be extended to Kim McGrath, Jameson Jones-Doyle and Lillith Wyatt for their support, feedback and guidance through the preparation of the funding application for On Your Plate and throughout Under The Weather.

CKUT hopes to be able to collaborate with the Sustainability Funds Office in the future, as this project had a lasting effect on staff involved, volunteers and to this date, the blog remains active as a sustainable resource for people to listen to the past events.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions or require more information.

Kindly,

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