

McGill Biology
Graduate Student Handbook
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Welcome

Welcome to the McGill Biology Department!

Over the next few years, you will have the opportunity to explore research questions and to generate new knowledge about how our planet, brains and cells work. You will become a member of a vibrant, interdisciplinary community that fosters curiosity, supports individual expression and personal growth, and promotes creativity and new ideas.

This handbook was compiled by the Graduate Experience Task Force (GETF) in 2021, with much of the research and writing by former Hargreaves lab member Josh Persi. The Fall 2021 BIOL 601 students also contributed further content as part of a course assignment. Ricciardi lab member Kennedy Zwarych helped with the updates for Fall 2023. We hope that it will help you to understand and navigate various aspects of your experience in the department, including degree milestones and funding. It is meant to be updated annually, but if you find obsolete information, please let us or the Graduate Program Director (see page 8) know. In addition, it is meant to be a “living document”, so your suggestions for improvement or inclusions are much appreciated.

Wishing you the best of luck in your degree and happy sciencing.

The 2022-2023 GETF

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Land Acknowledgement

McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous peoples whose presence marks this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

For more information about traditional territory and tips on how to make a land acknowledgement, visit our [Land Acknowledgement webpage](#).

Glossary of Terms

Acronym	Term	Description
AGSEM	<i>Association of Graduate Students Employed at McGill</i>	The labor union representing TAs and Invigilators at McGill.
BGSA	<i>Biology Graduate Students Association</i>	An organization for McGill Biology students under the Post-Graduate Student Association (PGSA) that organizes both social and academic events.
CEEB	<i>Conservation, Ecology, Evolution and Behavior</i>	One of three research streams within the Biology department.
CL&E	<i>Campus Life & Engagement</i>	Part of Student Services . Connects students to resources and opportunities at McGill, including orientation activities and programs and workshops.
DFW	<i>Differential Fee Waiver</i>	One type of international tuition and fee subsidy. Often conflated with international tuition relief awards.
FOAPAL	<i>Fund, Organization, Account, Program, Activity, Location</i>	An account code consisting of elements used to classify, record, budget and report financial transactions.
GETF	<i>Graduate Experience Task Force</i>	A departmental task force comprised of faculty and current graduate students working to improve the recruitment, training and overall experience of graduate students in our department.
GPC	<i>Graduate Program Coordinator</i>	A departmental administrative staff member who assists the GPD in related functions.
GPD	<i>Graduate Program Director</i>	A departmental academic staff member who is responsible for Biology's graduate programs, graduate students and postdocs.
GPS	<i>Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies</i>	A university-wide organization that provides leadership and strategic direction on matters relating to the graduate and postdoctoral community.
GTC	<i>Graduate Training Committee</i>	A standing departmental committee responsible for reviewing and recommending changes to the graduate program and procedures and for allocating prizes and awards to graduate students.

MCDB	<i>Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology</i>	One of three research streams within the Biology department.
MSc	<i>Master of Science</i>	The Biology department offers a thesis MSc, which is research-focused, typically takes 2 years to complete and culminates in a written thesis.
NBB	<i>Neurobiology and Behavior</i>	One of three research streams within the Biology department.
PGSS	<i>Post-Graduate and Student Society</i>	An association of all graduate students and postdoctoral fellows at McGill.
PhD	<i>Doctor of Philosophy</i>	The Biology department offers a PhD, which is research-focused, typically takes 4-5 years to complete and culminates in a written thesis and oral thesis defense.
PhD 1	<i>Doctor of Philosophy 1</i>	Students who enter the PhD program with a BSc start at PhD 1 and are required to complete a minimum of 4 years of study.
PhD 2	<i>Doctor of Philosophy 2</i>	Students who enter the PhD program with a MSc typically start at PhD 2 and are required to complete a minimum of 3 years of study.
PI	<i>Principal Investigator</i>	Technically, a person in charge of a scientific research grant. In academia, usually your supervisor/the professor leading your lab.
QE	<i>Qualifying Exam</i>	A formal evaluation of your ability to proceed to the attainment of a PhD, typically held within your second year of study.
SC	<i>Supervisory Committee</i>	The committee that oversees your research and degree progress and provides guidance and feedback in support of your studies.
TA(ship)	<i>Teaching Assistant(ship)</i>	A graduate student hired to assist a Course Coordinator or Supervisor with the instruction and evaluation of students in a course.
WIPS	<i>Work In Progress Seminars</i>	A departmental seminar series organized by MCDB graduate students for graduate students to discuss their research and seek feedback.

Getting Started

How Are Graduate Studies Organized at McGill?

You can think of McGill's organizational structure as a series of concentric circles. Within each of these circles there are different people/positions with whom you may interact over the course of your studies.



Department

Your primary point of contact is generally your **supervisor/principal investigator (PI)**, who is responsible for the running and funding of your lab and for mentoring you through your degree.

Your second point of contact is typically your [Supervisory Committee \(SC\)](#). Your SC will consist of other PIs from within the department (and sometimes from other departments) and assists with progress tracking and research project development. They can also help with problem solving in the supervisory relationship.

The [Graduate Program Coordinator \(GPC\)](#) is a departmental administrative staff member who can provide you with practical support with respect to admissions, registration, degree milestones and funding. They can also help you find resources relating to health and wellness and conflict resolution.

The [Graduate Program Director \(GPD\)](#) is a department academic staff member (i.e. a faculty member) who is responsible for Biology's graduate programs, graduate students and postdocs.

The GPD can often help with problem solving if your interactions with your PI and/or SC have proven unproductive.

Faculty

The Biology department is part of the Faculty of Science and within the Faculty of Science, the [Associate Dean of Graduate Education](#) is involved with graduate fellowships, courses and programs and in development of various initiatives designed to support graduate students.

University

Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) is the university-wide organization that manages matters relating to the graduate and postdoctoral community. You can read their strategic priorities [here](#). GPS oversees graduate student registration, fees, degree progress and leaves, as well as other aspects of your graduate experience. Their [website](#) will provide you with much of the information and resources required to navigate your degree and they have a separate site with resources relating to [supervision](#).

Within GPS, the [Associate Deans](#) are responsible for handling graduate student and postdoctoral affairs and for helping graduate students, postdocs, and their supervisors resolve problematic situations. They are also the disciplinary officers for all graduate students. The Dean of GPS oversees GPS and holds academic and administrative responsibility for graduate programs and postdoctoral experiences.

Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion

Special thanks to Fall 2021 BIOL 601 students Jory Griffith, Nikki Moore, Caroline Dallstream, and Hazel Shields for their contributions to this section.

In 2020, McGill University created a 5-year [Strategic Plan](#) to increase Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion (EDI) and numerous resources exist to help you address issues concerning EDI.

McGill carries out an annual census to understand the diversity of their student body. You can access the census results [here](#).

Resources

The [McGill webpage on equity](#) provides information on employment equity at McGill, initiatives and education for staff and students, and the office of mediation and reporting, including resources relating to:

[Anti-racism](#)

[Indigenous support](#)

[Gender and sexuality](#)

[Disabilities and accessibility](#)

[EDI in research](#)

[Initiatives and education](#)
[Equity-related policies and reports](#)
[Inclusivity in the classroom](#)
[Gender neutral bathrooms on campus](#)

The [McGill department of biology EDI page](#) links to McGill's strategic plans to promote EDI and address racism and provides other resources related to department-specific initiatives.

The [PGSS resources on gendered and sexual violence](#) provides resources for sexual assault survivors, witnesses and supporters.

The [Student Achievement and Accessibility](#) provides support and accommodation for students with disabilities.

Workshops & Education

McGill's [Sexual Violence Education Program](#) is a **mandatory** online sexual violence education program for the entire McGill community.

Teaching and Learning Services provides a series of workshops called "[Our Shared Spaces](#)". Current workshops include Being Black @ McGill, Sexuality 101, Gender 101, Fostering Inclusive communities, Intro to Anti-Oppression, and Addressing Microaggressions in the classroom.

[SKILLSETS](#) provides various workshops with topics that depend on the year, but past trainings have covered EDI-related topics.

Equity at McGill also provides a series of workshops through their [Equity Education](#) initiative. These cover a range of topics on equity, including accessibility and mentorship. While they are geared towards faculty, students are allowed to register.

Groups & Committees

There are many ways to involve yourself in promoting equity and diversity at McGill. Here are a few:

[EDI committee](#): Within the Department of Biology, the EDI committee consists of departmental faculty, staff, and graduate and undergraduate students. They organize departmental BIPOC events, anti-racism events, and run an EDI-focused book club.

[PGSS equity and diversity committee](#): The PGSS Equity and Diversity Committee is a group of graduate students dedicated to promoting EDI among the graduate community. They are a point of contact for graduate students who have EDI-related comments, questions or concerns.

Additionally, they provide numerous resources, run events, and organize the Equity and Allyship Book Club.

Diversity in STEM: A student-driven initiative at the Redpath Museum that promotes diversity in science, technology, engineering, math, and medicine. They run a mentorship program that pairs an undergraduate student in an underrepresented group with a graduate student mentor.

People and Places within Biology

Contact List

The Department of Biology maintains a [contact list](#) for faculty, support staff, and various committees. For the most up to date information, check [here](#). Some of the contacts you will need most frequently are listed below:

Position	Name	Contact Info	Responsibilities
Administrative Officer (AO)	Caroline LeBlond	Rm. N7/2, (514) 398-6402 caroline.leblond@mcgill.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any departmental administrative issues you cannot resolve elsewhere
Administrative Assistant	Luisa Sabaz	Rm. N7/7, (514) 398-5740 luisa.sabaz@mcgill.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Point of contact for any departmental administrative issues, if AO is unavailable
Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC)	Ancil Gittens	Rm. N7/6, (514) 398-5478 ancil.gittens@mcgill.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree milestones Form submissions Admissions Registration Funding Advising
Administrative Coordinator	Tami Piovesan	Rm. N7/7, (514) 399-9336 tami.piovesan@mcgill.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department listserv and notices uPrint Departmental phone line and email address (info.biology@mcgill.ca)
Student Affairs Coordinator	Patricia Lianos	Rm. N7/6, (514) 398-6401 patricia.lianos@mcgill.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student stipends Post doc hires/renewals Seminar series logistics

Web & Communications Building Director	Carole Smith	Rm. N8/13, (514) 398-6406 carole.smith@mcgill.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building access • Key requests • Building infrastructure issues (heating, renovations etc.).
Undergraduate Student Affairs Coordinator	Susan Gabe	Rm. N7/9A, (514) 398-7045 susan.gabe@mcgill.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Room bookings • TAs/hips
Biology Receiving	Joseph Iantomasi	Rm. N3/17, (514) 398-6432 joseph.iantomasi@mcgill.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Package delivery & holding
Graduate Program Co-Directors (GPD)	David Dankort and Nam-Sung Moon	Bellini, Rm. 264 david.dankort@mcgill.ca ; Bellini, Rm. 266 nam.moon@mcgill.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All aspects of the graduate program in Biology
Building Porter (Stewart Biology)	Dino Bisanti	Rm. N2/1 (514) 398-5078 stewartbioporter.fmd@mcgill.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate building issues (locked out, burst pipe, etc.)

Research Facilities

The two main buildings for Biology faculty and students are the Stewart Biology Building and the Bellini Life Sciences Complex, which house the majority of individual labs as well as core research facilities such as the [Phytotron](#), the [Integrated Quantitative Biology Initiative](#), and the [Advanced BioImaging Facility](#). These in-house capabilities are complemented by a [range of affiliated research facilities](#):

Facility	Location
Redpath Museum	Quebec
Gault Nature Reserve	Quebec
Morgan Arboretum	Quebec
Huntsman Marine Science Centre	New Brunswick
Subarctic Research Station	Quebec
Bellairs Research Institute	Barbados

Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute	Panama
Wilder and Helen Penfield Nature Reserve	Quebec

Student Associations

There are several associations organized for or by graduate students in the Department of Biology. The [Biology Graduate Student Association](#) (BGSA) organizes social and academic events for students and sends out weekly updates relevant to the Department. The [Post-Graduate Student's Society](#) (PGSS) advocates for graduate students and offers a variety of services including courses, community events, health insurance, and more. The [Association of Graduate Students Employed at McGill](#) (AGSEM) represents TAs and invigilators and has bargained with the McGill administration to produce Collective Agreements, which are legal documents that protect student workers.

Student Services

Students should be provided with office space in which to work while on campus. Office space is generally allocated by your lab, and you should first ask your PI and/or other lab members to see what is available. You may also ask the [Building Director](#).

The departmental lounge in the Stewart Biology Building, Room N8/1, is open to all members of the Biology Department. There are microwave ovens, a fridge, lunch tables, sinks, and books. There is also a single-cup coffee maker, with department-provided coffee (but bring your own milk). Users must clean up after themselves.

Students also have access to the lounge in the BGSA's office in the Stewart Biology Building, Room S3/5. There is a small kitchenette, socializing area, as well as communal and private workspaces, which can be used to meet with colleagues, undergrads, etc. They also have a renovated meeting room created especially for conference calls, with sophisticated microphones and webcams, sound proofing and a hardwired internet connection! Please contact the BGSA for further details. You can reserve these private spaces [here](#).

[Thomson House](#) is the graduate student lounge and headquarters for the [PGSS](#). You can work and socialize on the main floor, order food and drinks at the bar and attend [events](#) such as trivia night. They also have private meeting rooms and a ballroom [available for booking](#).

The department mailroom is located in the Stewart Biology, Room N8/11. Mail slots are allocated by lab. Only official departmental correspondence and stamped personal correspondence may be placed in the outgoing external mail bag.

Campus Life & Engagement (CL&E) provides a [detailed list of many of the resources available to McGill students](#). These include academic resources (writing help, library services, academic

policies, etc.), career and professional development resources (career planning, networking, skill building, etc.), resources for wellbeing (health and wellness needs, athletics and recreation, family care, international student services, etc.), and more.

Online Platforms

You will use several online platforms during your studies. For assistance with any of these platforms, contact [IT Services](#). The most commonly used platforms are described below:

Platform	Description
McGill Marketplace (accessed through Minerva)	Purchase equipment and supplies from preferred suppliers at lower prices
Minerva	Register for courses, view funding amounts and disbursements, submit travel advances and expense reports, and much more
myCourses	Access course materials, view grades, submit assignments, and more
myFuture	Search for various types of jobs and career-related events
myInvolvement	Find volunteer activities with organizations on and off campus, since up for workshops and events
myLab	View and update lab chemical inventories and access electronic material safety data sheets
myMcGill	Access multiple McGill platforms and important links without sign-in prompts
myPath	Create an individual development plan for professional development, career goals, and personal wellbeing
myProgress	Track degree progression and milestones (via Minerva)
myThesis	Nominate examiners and complete initial thesis submission
Workday	Apply for TAs, record hours worked, and view payment records

Mailing Lists

Information about funding opportunities, departmental affairs, and professional development opportunities is often distributed through mailing lists. You should email the listserv or its coordinators to be added. A number of campus listservs, including those maintained by [SKILLSETS](#) and [Career Planning Services \(CaPS\)](#), are available.

The Biology Department listserv (biologydept@lists.mcgill.ca) is managed by the [administrative coordinator](#), and is normally used for announcements of a general nature, such as seminars, lost/found items, etc. New students are automatically added to this listserv on a termly basis. Note that announcements meant strictly for students will never be circulated on the listserv and will instead be sent via email to graduate students only.

Some of the most important listservs for Biology students are detailed below:

List	Description	Sign Up
BGSA listserv (bgsa@lists.mcgill.ca)	Delivers weekly updates relevant to Biology students, including announcements about events.	Send an email with a blank subject line to listserv@lists.mcgill.ca containing the following text command in the body: subscribe BGSA firstname lastname.
BioWeekly	Contains department-wide announcements, including those concerning CEEB, NBB and MCDB seminars, EELs, WIPS, and PhD thesis seminars/defenses.	Send an email with a blank subject line to listserv@lists.mcgill.ca containing the following text command in the body: subscribe BIOWEEKLY firstname lastname.
Work in Progress Seminars (WIPS)	Schedule for talks throughout the year and regular reminders about upcoming presentations.	Ask your supervisor or lab members for the current contact person.
Ecology and Evolution Lunches (EELs)	Schedule for talks throughout the year and regular reminders about upcoming presentations.	Ask your supervisor or lab members for the current contact person.
Organismal Seminars	Updates about upcoming seminars.	Ask your supervisor or lab members for the current contact person.
Molecular Seminars	Updates about upcoming seminars.	Ask your supervisor or lab members for the current contact person.
NBB Seminars	Updates about upcoming seminars.	Ask your supervisor or lab members for the current contact person.

Human Resources

Leave of Absence

You can apply to take a [leave of absence](#) for a number of reasons, including new maternity/paternity, personal or family health, professional development, mandatory military service, and employment. To apply, you must [request a leave](#).

A leave of absence must be requested on a term-by-term basis and may be granted for a period of up to 52 weeks. You will not be charged tuition and fees during an authorized leave of absence. However, research supervisors are also not obligated to remunerate you while you are on leave.

To be covered by the graduate supplemental health and dental plan during a leave of absence, you should make arrangements with the PGSS and/or International Student Services. International students may face [additional considerations](#).

Parental Leave

The policies surrounding financial support for parental leaves of absence [depend on your funding sources](#). If you intend to take parental leave, you should familiarize yourself with the policies particular to your funding source. These policies are readily available for common funding sources including the Fonds de Recherche du Québec, the Tri-Council Agencies, and your supervisor's research grants. If you have received funding from other sources, it is your responsibility to inquire about parental leave policies.

To take parental leave, you must [request a leave of absence](#) for the terms that you will be away. Like other leaves of absence, parental leave can only be requested on a term-by-term basis.

Vacation Leave

Graduate students are normally entitled to [vacation](#), including [university holidays](#) and a total of 15 additional days throughout the year. If you take additional vacation leave, you may have your funding reduced. You and your supervisor should establish expectations concerning vacation timing and duration when you complete the [letter of understanding](#).

Financial resources

The office of [Scholarships and Student Aid](#) provides a broad range of resources to help you manage your finances. These resources include budgeting tutorials, debt management advice, and money-saving tips. Throughout the year, you can attend the [Frugal Scholar Workshops](#) to learn about specific topics such as filing Canadian and Quebec income taxes.

In addition, McGill and its partners now offer an eight-module course on [Personal Finance Essentials](#) that covers topics such as investing and real estate. These topics and others are also covered throughout the year by [SKILLSETS](#).

Health and Dental Insurance

Canadian students

You are automatically enrolled in a [supplemental health and dental plan](#) administered by the PGSS. The cost for a full-year of coverage under the Enhanced Care Plan is \$575 and you can switch to the Basic Care Plan for \$475 per year, choose only the [health or dental plan](#), or opt-out of the health and dental plan entirely. Whichever plan you choose, the cost is covered by the tuition and fees supplement provided by your supervisor as part of the specified [minimum level of support](#). If you begin your program in the winter or summer term, you are not covered by this plan by default and must opt-in if you wish to be covered.

International students

McGill requires all international students and your accompanying dependents to participate in the compulsory McGill [International Health Insurance](#) (IHI) plan which is administered by International Student Services. You are automatically charged the annual IHI fee of \$999 upon registration at McGill University in the Fall and Winter terms. In some cases, you may be [eligible for exemption](#) from this plan. Additionally, you are automatically enrolled in the Enhanced Dental Plan at the cost of \$200 per year and you may opt for more basic coverage or no dental coverage at all. Whichever plan you choose, the cost is covered by the tuition and fees supplement provided by your supervisor as part of the specified [minimum level of support](#).

Sexual Violence

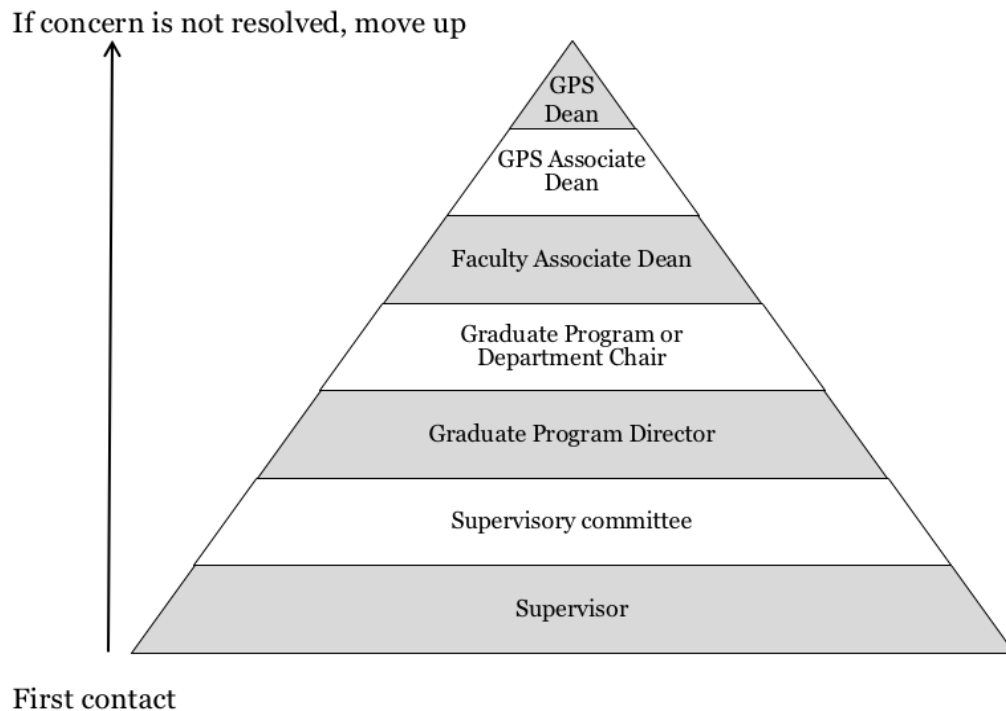
You must complete [It Takes All of Us](#), a mandatory online consent education program for everyone at McGill. This program is an essential piece of the University-wide response to sexual violence. You must complete the program in your first term through myCourses. Note that TAs may be required to complete the program twice.

The [Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education](#) (OSVRSE) provides support for all members of the McGill community who have been impacted by sexual violence and works to foster a culture of consent on campus and beyond.

Addressing problems

If you are experiencing a conflict with your supervisor, or have personal or academic concerns, there are a variety of people at McGill that can help. It is important to address problems when they arise and not to let them fester. It is equally important to maintain your own well-being. If you are struggling personally, practice self-care and seek help when you need it.

The hierarchy of help is provided by GPS and lists the people who can help you, in the order that you should contact them (e.g., try to speak to your supervisor first and if that does not resolve the issue, contact your SC, etc.).



For any issues involving McGill University and its members, you can also contact the [Ombudsperson](#). The Ombudsperson offers confidential, informal and independent dispute resolution services to all students. The Ombudsperson is an advocate for a fair process (and not an advocate for the individual or for the administration), acts solely in an advisory and intermediary role, and does not make University policy or replace formal channels.

If you are the victim of harassment, violence, and discrimination [prohibited by law](#) from any member of the McGill community, you can contact the [Office for Mediation and Reporting](#) to initiate mediation or a formal investigation.

Within the Department of Biology, you can also use the [BGSA Grievance & Suggestions form](#) to anonymously air any grievance you may have about your lab, the department, or graduate student life.

The [Student Wellness Hub](#) offers a wide variety of services to support your success and well-being. Some of the services offered include advising, well-being activities, and appointments with a clinician. Getting an in-person appointment with a doctor or clinician can be difficult. For emergencies, students should seek a hospital. For non-emergencies, students can also consider booking appointments through [Telehealth](#). Support can also be accessed through [Student Advocacy](#) for issues such as disputes with academic advisors.

Environmental Health and Safety

You are encouraged to familiarize yourself with [lab safety](#) at McGill. Additionally, if you will handle and dispose of hazardous materials in your research, you must complete [WHMIS 2015](#) and [Hazardous Waste Management & Disposal](#) training before beginning lab work. When applicable, you must also complete training on [biosafety](#), [biosafety cabinets](#), [radiation safety](#), and [laser safety](#).

At McGill, research groups conducting lab work use [myLab](#) to view and update the chemicals kept within the lab and access the related electronic material safety data sheets. MyLab is also used for issuing acquisition and disposal orders for certain hazardous chemicals.

For more information, you can contact the [Environmental Health and Safety](#) office for advice, training and technical support for laboratory safety. You can also contact the [Hazardous Waste Management](#) office which provides guidelines for the appropriate handling and disposal of hazardous waste.

Cost of Living

Housing

Housing costs in Montreal can vary widely, depending on location and living situation. Reported housing costs from a variety of sources are detailed below:

According to the 2020 BGSA Survey, graduate students from McGill's Biology Department spend an average of \$774 (median = \$720, n = 26) on rent per month. In 2019, the average monthly cost of an off-campus, one-bedroom apartment with low utility use in neighborhoods close to downtown was [\\$1005](#). On campus, McGill offers various housing options including apartment-style residences and shared-facilities housing with monthly prices ranging from [\\$605](#) - [\\$1356](#).

Outside of the downtown area, housing prices are much lower. For those living outside of the downtown area, note that a commute to the downtown area typically lasts [30 minutes](#).

As of 2023, data from the crowdsourcing website [Numbeo](#) suggest Montrealers, not necessarily students, spend the following on housing:

Accommodation	Downtown	Not downtown
One-bedroom apartment	\$1475	\$1100
Single-room in three-bedroom apartment	\$845	\$ 627

Additional Resources:

Good places to look for affordable housing:

[Facebook | McGill Off-campus Housing](#)

[Facebook | Montreal Apartments/Logements Montréal](#)

[Kijiji](#)

McGill Resources:

[The Good Neighbor Guide](#)

[McGill | Student Housing](#)

Average Monthly Expenses

In general, you can expect to spend \$500 to \$1000 per month on other living experiences.

Graduate students from McGill's Biology Department reported spending an average of \$549 per month on other living expenses in 2020. These expenses included utilities, phone & internet bills, groceries, household products, and transportation but did not include fitness memberships, prescription drugs, and healthcare expenses.

Public Transportation

Public transportation in Montreal is provided by the Société de Transport de Montréal and is relatively inexpensive. For daily commuters, the most economical transit pass is an OPUS card for four months, which costs \$220, although other [passes and fares](#) are available. Students apply for [student OPUS cards through Minerva](#), which they can then pick up at the Berri/UQAM station.

Getting acquainted with McGill and the Biology Department

Special thanks to Fall 2021 BIOL 601 students Moohebat Pourmajidian, Nada El Baba, Jamie Musgrove, and Shadi Rajab for their contributions to this section.

Campus Life & Engagement

CL&E organizes both [Fall and Winter orientation](#) events to help get you settled into your new role at McGill and point you towards academic, professional, and wellness [resources](#) to help you throughout your graduate career.

PGSS

The PGSS hosts [orientation activities and events](#) to welcome all graduate students at McGill. It's a great way to meet fellow graduate students across campus and learn about the services, resources, and activities provided by PGSS throughout the year. It's also often your first chance to visit [Thomson House](#), the graduate student lounge.

There are many ways to [get involved](#) with the PGSS, including a long list of committees. Joining a committee offers the chance to engage with topics that you care about and to build your CV. It

is also a good way to meet students at McGill with similar interests and can be a great way to broaden your network of contacts outside of the Biology department.

PGSS also offers various extracurricular courses that are open to graduate students, post-docs, faculty, alumni, and McGill staff. These courses provide opportunities to meet with your fellow students and faculty in a friendly environment. The courses include Language classes (French and Spanish), Yoga Flo, Basic Life Support Provider Course (CPR level C+) with the Emergency First Aid and self-defense courses. Courses are offered in the spring (8 weeks starting in mid-April), summer (2 weeks intensive beginning of July-limited selection of classes available), fall (10 weeks end of September), and winter (10 weeks, starting mid- January). Registration opens 1 month prior to the start of classes. Detailed information can be found here: [Course Information | PGSS](#)

BGSA

The BGSA welcomes new graduate students with events specifically for students in the Biology Department, to help break the ice with the people you will be seeing in the hallways on a daily basis. Stay tuned to the [BGSA listserv](#) for details.

The BGSA hosts Biology's Department Day each year, an event where students and faculty join together for a day filled with research talks, Q&A sessions, social events and workshops. Attending this event is a great way for new students to meet other students and faculty, present their work, socialize and form new collaborations. There are plenty of opportunities to get involved and help organize the event each year.

Science Outreach

Getting involved in outreach is a great way to connect with other students, and the community more generally. Please see the Handbook section on [Science Outreach](#) for more information.

International Student Services

[International Student Services \(ISS\)](#) offers a variety of [events and workshops](#) to help international students get more acquainted with Montreal and McGill. [The buddy program](#) pairs new international students with current/returning students (Buddy volunteers) who provide a helping hand for new arrivals. You can have online and/or face-to-face meetups with your buddy or communicate with them via email. Your buddy acts as a general resource to facilitate your arrival in Montreal and can give you information about courses, professors, campus life, clubs, etc. New students can [sign up here to find a buddy](#) and current students can [sign up here to become a Buddy volunteer](#). There is no hard deadline for signing up, although it's recommended to sign up in the summer before the term begins.

To-do List for New Students

Special thanks to Fall 2021 BIOL 601 students Wing-Zheng Ho, Laura Lardinois, Alex Paquette, Janaína Serrano, and Kennedy Zwarych for their contributions to this section.

Outlined below are key tasks to be done (1) before arriving at McGill and (2) within the first few weeks of a student's first semester. International students have a set of additional tasks to complete (i.e., pertaining to immigration, banking, SIN), which are included in a separate section.

Before You Arrive

1. **Accept** your [admission offer](#)
2. **Activate** your McGill username and password on [Minerva](#)
3. **Setup your McGill email(s)**: IT services will email you: ("IT Services for McGill Students" and "IT Services for McGill Employees" from mailadmin@mcgill.ca). Set up [forwarding](#) to a personal email if you wish. Your student email ends in @mail.mcgill.ca. If you are TAing, you will also have an employee email that ends in @mcgill.ca. You will need to access/check both.
Note: many of McGill's web pages require you to be signed in with your McGill email when you are off campus: if you get an error message when trying to access one of the resources below, check that you are logged in to your @mail.mcgill.ca or @mcgill.ca account.
4. **Update your profile**: Minerva → personal menu → address/phone/email/emergency contact
5. **Submit transcripts & proof of graduation**: ask your previous institution to send your official transcripts to officialschooldocs@mcgill.ca and ancil.gittens@mcgill.ca (Graduate Program Coordinator)
6. **Submit your legal documents**: Check what you're missing on Minerva → Student menu → Student accounts menu → View tuition fee & legal status. Find which documents are required for [Quebec residents](#), Canadians [outside of Quebec](#), and [International students](#).
7. **Sign up for orientation events**: see Handbook section "[Getting acquainted with McGill and Biology](#)" above.
8. **Set up an appointment** with the [Student Accessibility and Achievement](#) if you need accommodations (extra testing time, note-taking support, learning resources, assistive technology...). [Meeting with an advisor](#) early will allow you to discuss resources available to you, and to make sure that enough time is given to put any accommodations in place. SAA also has a helpful [FAQ page](#).
9. **Register for courses** for Fall and Winter semesters. Course requirements can be found in the [Handbook](#) or on the Biology [website](#). Communicate with your supervisor about

recommended/required courses. Make sure to sign up for the REGN RGCR course code (this makes sure you are officially registered as a student for the term).

10. **Complete** “[It Takes All of Us](#)” on myCourses (see Handbook section “[Sexual Violence](#)”). If you are a TA, you’ll have to do this twice → once as a student & once as staff.
11. **Complete** the Academic Integrity Tutorial on Minerva: Minerva → Student Menu → Academic Integrity Tutorial.
12. If you have courses at the Macdonald campus and are not driving, familiarize yourself with the [Shuttle Bus Rules](#)
13. **Look for housing:** See Handbook section “[Housing](#)”.
Note: the entirety of Montreal seems to move on July 1 every year, though areas near McGill are much more flexible, or tend to have leases starting May 1.

Within the First Few Weeks of Term

1. **Complete** the necessary Health and Safety Training to work in your lab. See Handbook section “[Environmental Health and Safety](#)”.
2. **Set up banking info on Minerva** for stipend/scholarship payments: Minerva → Student → Student Accounts Menu → Direct Deposit Bank Account
3. **Apply for Teaching Assistantships (TAs)** (*discuss with your supervisor first: part of your minimum support includes 180h of TAing/year*)
 - You’ll receive an e-mail from the department when the applications are open
 - Struggle with [Workday](#), it’s part of the process (check [Application guide](#))
 - Don’t hesitate to reach out to your department contact for help!
(susan.gabe@mcgill.ca)
4. **Apply for external fellowships and grants** (*optional - see Handbook section “[Awards & Scholarships](#)”, check your eligibility!*)
5. **Pay tuition**, or defer your tuition payment (see Handbook section “[Tuition Payment Deferrals](#)”)
6. **Learn about Health insurance.** See Handbook section “[Health and Dental Insurance](#)”.
Note: You are not automatically registered for insurance if you enter in the Winter semester. The opt-out period is very brief (~one month in the fall and the winter), so don’t forget to opt-out if you intend to have different insurance.
7. **Set up an appointment** with the [McGill Student Wellness Hub](#) if you need to arrange medication refills, or other medical services including doctor appointments, lab work, nurses, counsellors and psychiatrists. The Hub offers appointments with [Access Advisors](#), who help students navigate which services are offered on and off campus.
Note: If you call the office at 8:30am on any day, you can sometimes get same-day appointments. Normal wait times are usually a few weeks to a month.

8. **Sign up for mailing lists:** You may have lists for your lab, the building, the department, seminars, PGSS, BGSA...ask around and see what other students have signed up for (see Handbook section "[Mailing Lists](#)").
9. **Get your [student card](#)** from McGill's welcome center
10. **Set up card/key access** for your office and lab (ask your fellow lab members and/or supervisor).
11. **Set up a meeting with your PI** to determine expectations, training, meeting schedule, and to draft [a letter of understanding](#).
12. **Start brainstorming [supervisory committee](#) members** - look up McGill (& external) professors with complementary backgrounds to your proposed project
13. **Check [myProgress](#) Milestones** (see Handbook section "[Overview of Degree Milestones](#)") to check your program's requirements and make sure you don't miss the deadlines. For any questions, contact ancil.gittens@mcgill.ca

Extra Steps for International Students

Before you arrive

1. Look at resources on the [International Student Services \(ISS\) website](#)
2. **Sign up for orientation** for International students ([Orientation webinars](#), [Buddy Program](#)). Previous orientation/webinar recordings are also available online and can be helpful resources (i.e., [pre-arrival essentials](#), [Montreal & McGill](#)...).
3. **Apply for your immigration documents** ([Application guides for CAQ & Study Permit](#))
 - Start applying for your [CAQ](#) as soon as you get your McGill acceptance letter: Submit CAQ request → the proof of submission can already be used to start the Study Permit process (no need to wait for CAQ approval)
 - Start the **Study Permit & Visa** process
 - Set up medical & biometric appointments (if needed)
 - Proof of financial support (enough money to support you for the year)
 - McGill enrolment letter
 - Get a [visitor Visa](#) (if required - depends on citizenship)
 - Sign up for [AccueilPlus](#) - this helps you speed through immigration!

As soon as you arrive

1. **Get a Social Insurance Number (SIN):** after you arrive (you need to have your Student Permit in hand), you can [book an appointment](#) or go to a [Service Canada Office](#) without an appointment and ask for a SIN. Make sure you have [all the documents you need](#). When received, update your SIN in Workday and on Minerva.

2. **Get a [Canadian bank](#) account:** You need a Canadian account to be paid. You can already book an appointment online before arriving but will need to go in person with your immigration and ID documents to open your account. You may need a SIN to open an account (*this depends on the bank*).

Degree Progression

Registration Status

As you progress through your degree, your registration status as an [MSc](#) or [PhD](#) student may be classified as: (1) full-time; (2) continuing; (3) additional session; or (4) thesis evaluation. Registration status determines the [cost of tuition and fees](#). Typically, MSc students are required to complete 3 “full-time” terms (with a “continuing” status in the intervening Summer terms). After 3 full-time terms, you are registered for “additional sessions”. PhD students are required to complete 6 or 8 “full-time” terms (with a “continuing” status in the intervening Summer terms), depending on whether you enter as PhD 2 or PhD 1, respectively. For reference, McGill operates on a 3 x 4 month-long terms per year cycle (Fall, Winter, Summer).

Overview of Degree Milestones

Over the course of your Biology degree, you will pass several degree milestones such as holding annual supervisory committee (SC) meetings, passing a qualifying examination (QE), and submitting a thesis. The best way for you and your supervisor to track major milestones (e.g., committee meetings) is the web-based platform [myProgress](#). A detailed timeline of your research and administrative milestones is provided in the tables below. [Note: If you are enrolled in the Biology Environment or Neotropical Environment option, you will need to follow the course requirements for your option.]

MSc

MSc Milestones	Timeline
Complete a letter of understanding ^a	During the first 12 weeks and ideally annually thereafter
Submit the supervisory committee (SC) nomination form	During the first term
Complete BIOL 601 Introduction to Graduate Studies in Biology	During the first Fall term
Complete BIOL 602 (Molecular Biology) or BIOL 603 (Organismal Biology)	During the first (or second, for Winter starts) Winter term
Distribute a written report and progress tracking form to SC members	1 week before the SC meeting
Organize and hold an annual SC meeting	Within the first two terms (i.e., ~8 months) and annually thereafter

Complete a research presentation	Annually, after the first year of study
Apply for a “fast-track” transfer to PhD program (optional)	After completing 2, but not more than 4 “full-time” terms, by the normal application deadline for the desired start date (i.e. Fall or Winter term)
Declare your intent to submit a thesis	2 months prior to the anticipated date of initial thesis submission
Nominate a thesis examiner	1 month prior to the anticipated date of initial thesis submission
Complete the initial thesis submission	At least one month prior to final thesis submission. See Thesis Deadlines
Complete the final thesis submission	See Thesis Deadlines
Earn a minimum ^b of 3 additional course credits at the 500-level or above	Any time during the program

^a As of 2021, MSc students are recommended, but not required, to complete a letter of understanding

^b See [here](#) for more information on course requirements and taking additional courses

PhD

PhD Milestones	Timeline
Complete a letter of understanding	During the first 12 weeks and ideally annually thereafter
Submit an Individual Development Plan (IDP) verification report	Annually by June 1st
Submit the supervisory committee (SC) nomination form	During the first term
Complete BIOL 601 Introduction to Graduate Studies in Biology	During the first Fall term
Complete BIOL 602 (Molecular Biology) or BIOL 603 (Organismal Biology)	During the first (or second, for Winter starts) Winter term
Distribute the written report and progress tracking form to SC members	1 week before the SC meeting
Organize and hold an annual SC meeting	Within the first two terms (i.e., ~8 months) and annually thereafter
Register for the BIOL 700 Doctoral Qualifying Examination (QE) course	In advance of the term in which the QE meeting is to be held

Submit the QE committee nomination form	1-2 months before the QE
Organize and hold a QE meeting	Before the end of the second full year in the PhD program. For students entering as PhD1, they must complete their QE before the end of PhD2. For students entering as PhD2, they must complete their QE before the end of PhD3.
Complete a research presentation	Annually, after the first year of study
Register for the BIOL 702 Thesis Seminar course	In advance of the term in which the thesis seminar is to be held.
Complete a thesis seminar	3 months prior to the anticipated date of initial thesis submission
Complete the initial thesis submission	Thesis examiners must be given a minimum of 4 weeks to submit their report before the Oral Defense may proceed.
Submit the Oral Defense committee nomination form	Following initial thesis submission
Complete the Oral Defense	Usually 6 weeks after initial thesis submission but may be later.
Complete the final thesis submission	See Thesis Deadlines
Earn a minimum ^a of 6 additional course credits at the 500-level or above	Any time during the program

^a See [here](#) for more information on course requirements and taking additional courses

Letters of Understanding

As a PhD student, you and your supervisor are required to complete a [letter of understanding](#), ideally within the first 12 weeks of study. Letters of understanding are recommended but, as of yet, not required, for MSc students. A letter of understanding is intended to ensure that both you and your supervisor are clear about each other's expectations. The letter should follow the [Faculty of Science guidelines](#) and you can view other relevant resources collected by [GPS](#). You and your supervisor are encouraged to revisit the letter of understanding at least annually to address concerns and revise expectations.

The letter of understanding should be drafted over the course of a meeting between you and your supervisor. The letter should detail any agreements, expectations, and understandings

established between you and your supervisor. Once completed, you both must sign the letter and should keep a copy for your records. Additionally, you must upload the letter to myProgress.

Individual Development Plan

Individual Development Plans (IDPs) are a reflective exercise intended to help you set personal and professional goals, align your activities with these goals and track your progress towards them. IDPs are personal/private documents and, as such, you are not required to submit the actual document; rather, all PhD students admitted after 2019 are required to submit an IDP verification report via myCourses. More information on IDPs, reporting requirements and tools to help you create yours are available through [myPath](#).

Supervisory Committee Meetings (MSc & PhD)

The [supervisory committee \(SC\)](#) oversees your research progress and provides guidance and feedback in support of your studies. Members are typically selected by you, in collaboration with your supervisor. You and/or your supervisor should reach out to prospective members prior to nominating them formally to determine their availability and willingness to serve.

The SC will consist of your supervisor and at least two other faculty members, usually from the Department of Biology. Faculty members from other departments within McGill or from other institutions may also be selected where relevant. Your supervisor will serve as the Chair of the committee.

You must complete the [SC Nomination Form](#) within the first term and hold your first committee meeting within the first two terms (i.e. ~8 months) of your program. For the first committee meeting, the focus should be on your proposed thesis research. Thereafter, you must meet with your committee at least once a year for the committee to evaluate your progress in research and coursework. You can hold your meeting over Zoom, or [book a room](#) for the meeting; a two-hour booking is standard.

In advance of all committee meetings, you must prepare a written report, an oral presentation, and a [progress tracking form](#). For your first meeting, you should prepare a ~2 page executive summary of your proposed project. All subsequent SC reports should be no more than 10 pages of text (introduction, specific aims, summary of progress), accompanied by relevant figures, tables, a reference list, and a proposed timeline for the coming year. The goal of this report is to document your research progress and proposed plans, and to provide a reference for discussion during the meeting.

The oral presentation is 15 - 20 minutes long and should cover and complement the material in the progress report. The presentation is followed by a thorough discussion, during which committee members ask questions and provide feedback on your research progress and

direction. The committee's recommendations and assessment are summarized on the progress tracking form.

The [outcome](#) of each SC meeting can be “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory”. If your progress is determined to be unsatisfactory, a follow-up meeting must occur within 4-6 months (not sooner than 4 and not later than 6 months). Two unsatisfactory reports (not necessarily successive) constitute unsatisfactory progress towards the degree and may result in your withdrawal from the University. It is also possible for the committee to assign you an “Unsatisfactory” in a specific area (research plan, research skills, requisite knowledge or research accomplishments) without assigning an “Unsatisfactory” overall. In these cases, you are strongly encouraged to address this potential weakness prior to the next SC meeting.

Once completed and signed, you must upload a copy of the tracking form with the written report (and any extra attachments) to myProgress. An electronic copy of the tracking report should be retained by you and your supervisor.

Additional resources

[Supervisory Committees | Graduate & Postdoctoral Support](#)
[The Supervisory Committee | Department of Biology](#)

Courses (MSc & PhD)

Course Requirements

As a new or returning student, you must register on Minerva for both the Fall and Winter terms by adding the registration confirmation course REGN RCGR.

[MSc students](#) must register for thesis research courses during your first three terms (excluding the summer term). These courses simply confirm that you are engaged in thesis-related research and there are no lectures, assignments, or associated coursework of any kind. The thesis research courses are:

- BIOL 697 Master's Thesis Research 1 (13 credits)
- BIOL 698 Master's Thesis Research 2 (13 credits)
- BIOL 699 Master's Thesis Research 3 (13 credits)

[PhD students](#) do not need to register for thesis research courses. Instead, you must register for BIOL 700 Qualifying Examination for the term in which your QE will be held. Additionally, you must register for BIOL 702 PhD Seminar for the term in which your PhD seminar will be held.

As of Fall 2021, all graduate students entering the Biology department are required to take two newly offered 1.5 credit professional skills courses:

- BIOL 601 Introduction to Graduate Studies in Biology (1.5 credits)
- BIOL 602 Molecular Biology Research and Professional Skills (1.5 credits)
- BIOL 603 Organismal Biology Research and Professional Skills (1.5 credits)

All students must complete BIOL 601. MCDB and CEEB students must take BIOL 602 and BIOL 603, respectively, and NBB students, in consultation with your supervisor, can choose either BIOL 602 or BIOL 603. If you started your program before Fall 2021, you are not required to take these courses but may do so if you wish.

In addition to these required courses, you must take an additional three credits for your MSc program or an additional six credits for your PhD program. These courses must be at the 500-level or above. You may choose when to complete these additional course requirements, but this typically occurs within the first 2 years of your degree program.

You can choose courses from the [Department of Biology](#), [other departments within the Faculty of Science](#), and from [other faculties at McGill](#). You can also choose courses offered by other universities in Quebec through the [Quebec Inter-University Transfer Agreement](#). In all cases, courses must be approved by your thesis supervisor. You may also choose to solicit your SC members for course recommendations.

You must attain a passing grade (65% or a B- letter grade) in all required courses. You may take additional courses, including those below the 500-level, that are not required for your degree, so long as you maintain a minimum grade average of B-. However, enrolling in extra courses may entail additional tuition charges. Alternatively, you can audit courses, thereby avoiding additional tuition charges, so long as you receive permission from the course instructor. Audited courses will not appear on your transcript.

Course Registration

A tentative course schedule for the coming academic year is posted on [Minerva](#) in early April. Once the schedule is released, you can view the course offerings for the Fall and Winter terms and use [Class Schedule](#) and [Visual Schedule Builder](#) to identify the courses in which you'd like to enroll. A tentative schedule for the summer term is normally published in February.

Course registration will open for newly admitted MSc and PhD students at least a month before the start of the term. Returning graduate students will be assigned a time to register based on the number of outstanding credits for degree completion. You should receive an email stating that registration times have been published. You can then [view their assigned time and enroll in courses](#) on Minerva.

Qualifying Examinations (PhD)

The [qualifying examination \(QE\)](#) is a formal evaluation of your ability to proceed to the attainment of a PhD. It is not a “comprehensive” examination, insofar as this term implies that all

areas of biology will be covered. Rather, the intent is that the examination will focus on your area of proposed research, as well as related areas.

The QE must be held before the end of your second year in the PhD program. Students entering as PhD1, must complete their QE before the end of PhD2. Students entering as PhD2, must complete their QE before the end of PhD3. You must register for the [Doctoral Qualifying Examination \(BIOL 700\)](#) course in advance of the term in which you intend to hold the QE.

The QE is administered by a committee consisting of your supervisor, the members of your SC, an additional member and a representative from the GTC who will serve as the Chair of the Examining Committee. The additional member can be internal or external to the department, is suggested by your supervisor, in consultation with you, and must be approved by the GTC. The Chair of the Examining Committee will be appointed by the GTC. To establish your QE committee, you must submit a [Qualifying Examination Nomination Form](#).

Once a Chairperson has been appointed, you are responsible for scheduling the meeting and [booking a room](#) for the meeting. A 3-hour time booking is recommended although the QE typically lasts around 2 hours.

In Biology, the QE consists of a written proposal, an oral presentation, and an oral examination. Your written proposal must be submitted to the committee at least 7 days prior to the examination. As with the written proposal, the oral presentation defines the research area, forms a basis for questioning, and is part of the evidence upon which the final evaluation will be made. The presentation is typically 20 minutes long. After the presentation, the committee typically proceeds through two rounds of questioning, with each committee member having 10 - 15 minutes per round. You can find the Biology QE guidelines [here](#).

You are strongly encouraged to hold 2 SC meetings prior to your QE, and to use your second SC meeting to discuss with your committee how best to prepare for your QE. SC meetings and the QE target different criteria: the SC meeting evaluates practical progress towards degree, including intellectual development, research progress and other milestones, while the QE emphasizes intellectual development, including critical thinking, knowledge base and independence. The overarching goal of the QE is to evaluate your ability to conduct independent and original research.

The QE will be evaluated as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory. If you receive an unsatisfactory evaluation, you must repeat the examination within 4-6 months. If you receive a satisfactory evaluation, you may still be required by the committee to complete additional tasks (e.g., revise their research proposal, complete additional coursework, etc.).

You should bring a hard copy of the [QE report](#) (found at the end of the QE guidelines) to the meeting. The Chair is responsible for seeing that the report is completed during or just after the

meeting, signed by all members and sent to the GPC. The committee may decide that the QE can also serve as your annual SC meeting.

Research Presentations (MSc & PhD)

All students (PhD and MSc) are expected to give at least 1 research seminar a year to a scientific audience outside of their lab. Students must indicate that they have completed this milestone on the cover page of their annual SC report by writing the date, venue and title of their talk. Acceptable venues include [Work in Progress Seminars \(WIPS\)](#), Ecology and Evolution Lunches (EELS), the [NBB seminar series](#), or an academic conference within your field. Presentations should be at least 15 minutes long. First year students are exempt from this requirement.

Thesis (MSc & PhD)

As an MSc student, you must submit a thesis that demonstrates your ability to carry out research, organize results, and defend your approach and conclusions in a scholarly manner according to disciplinary norms. Additionally, your thesis must show your familiarity with previous work in the field although an exhaustive literature review is not necessarily required. Normally, a MSc thesis does not exceed 100 pages in length.

As a PhD student, you must submit a thesis that demonstrates original scholarship and makes a distinct contribution to the field. Your thesis must demonstrate your ability to plan and carry out research, organize results, and defend your approach and conclusions in a scholarly manner. The research presented in your thesis must meet current standards in the field and you must clearly demonstrate how the research advances knowledge in the field. Your PhD thesis should be as succinct as possible.

Publication in a peer-reviewed journal is not a requirement for either your MSc or PhD thesis.

You can submit your thesis as a traditional monograph or a [collection of related manuscripts](#). [Thesis guidelines](#), including [thesis formatting](#), and [FAQs](#), are available through GPS. For further guidance on thesis expectations, you can also see the theses of former students from the Department of Biology through [ProQuest](#).

Thesis Seminars (PhD)

As a PhD student, you are required to present your research during a 45-min thesis seminar, sometimes called an exit seminar, toward the end of your studies. The seminar will ideally be held at least 3 months prior to the expected date of initial thesis submission. Students from MCDB usually present at the Departmental [Work in Progress Seminars \(WIPS\)](#). You must register for the [PhD Seminar \(BIOL 702\)](#) course for the term in which your thesis seminar will be held. You are encouraged to invite the members of your SC.

The thesis seminar is not an exam. Nevertheless, it is a degree requirement and a grade of "incomplete" will be recorded on your transcript for BIOL 702 if you do not give your seminar during the term in which you are registered for this course. In order to receive a grade for BIOL 702, your supervisor must submit the [PhD seminar form](#) after the seminar.

Thesis Evaluation (MSc & PhD)

Your thesis evaluation includes an initial and final submission. For the initial submission, you submit your thesis for review by examiners who assign either a passing or failing evaluation. If your thesis receives a passing evaluation, you then complete a final thesis submission.

The initial and final submission can be accomplished in a single term or spread across two terms. If you intend to complete your thesis submission in one term, you must complete the initial submission early in the term so that your thesis examiners have a minimum of 4 weeks to evaluate the thesis AND you have sufficient time to make any corrections prior to the final submission deadline. If you complete your initial submission late in a term, then you will still need to register for the following term while their thesis is being evaluated. During this 'thesis evaluation' term, you pay [reduced tuition and fees](#).

You can find the procedure for thesis submission on the web-based platform [myThesis](#). Step-by-step instructions can be found [here](#). Through myThesis, you declare your 'Intent to Submit' at least two months prior to the anticipated date of initial thesis submission. Once you have completed the 'Intent to Submit', myThesis will indicate the date by which you need to complete the next step: Nomination of Examiners.

Examiners for your thesis are typically suggested by your supervisor in consultation with you. It is typically your supervisor's responsibility to informally contact the proposed examiner(s) in advance of nomination to determine their availability and willingness to serve.

As an MSc student, you must secure a single examiner who can be internal or external to the University. As a PhD student, you must secure an internal and an external examiner. Your internal examiner may be from within the Department of Biology or another unit within the University. Your external examiner must be from another institution outside of the University. More information can be found [here](#).

Examiners must be given a minimum of four weeks to evaluate the thesis and return the thesis examination report. For MSc theses, GPS will send copies of the report to you, your supervisor(s), and the Department of Biology. For PhD theses, the report is sent to the members of the Oral Defense committee and the Department of Biology. You will be given the report by your supervisor after the oral defense. You must make any corrections and/or minor revisions in consultation with your supervisor before final submission.

If your thesis does not receive a passing evaluation, then you will not graduate with an MSc or proceed to your oral PhD defense. However, you have the option to revise and resubmit a failed thesis. See the [thesis examination failures](#) page from GPS for more information.

The procedure for final thesis submission is the same for both MSc and PhD students. You [must upload your thesis to Minerva](#) and have your supervisor approve the submission in advance of the final thesis submission deadline.

Additional resources

[Thesis Deadlines | Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies](#)

[Thesis Guidelines | Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies](#)

[Final Thesis Submission | Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies](#)

Thesis Defense (PhD)

After completing your initial thesis submission, you must complete an [oral thesis defense](#). Your PhD thesis defense is scheduled by the Department and is typically held six weeks after initial thesis submission. The defense is held in a room booked by the Department and can last up to three hours. The [defense proceedings](#) are divided into three sections: a private pre-defense meeting, a public open session, and private evaluation session. You are not present at the two private sessions, during which the Oral Defense committee confirms procedures and deliberates on your performance, respectively.

Your thesis defense will be evaluated by a [committee](#) that includes a Pro-Dean selected by GPS, who will chair the oral defense; the Department Chair (or a delegate); your supervisor; your internal thesis examiner; and two additional members, one of which must be external to the Department of Biology. The external member may be from another department at McGill, another institution within Montreal, or from an institution outside of Montreal. The external member may be replaced by the external thesis examiner. You [nominate the additional members](#), with input from your supervisor, after your initial thesis submission. Note that the Pro-Dean does not vote on your performance.

The committee will evaluate the written and oral components of the thesis defense. The possible [outcomes](#) of an oral defense are "Passed" or three possible "Not Passed" (not passed oral, written or both). If you receive a "Not Passed" outcome, you will have 6 months to revise your thesis and/or re-take your oral defense.

Overview of MSc & PhD Committee Compositions

For ease of reference, the committees for MSc and PhD milestones are detailed below:

Committee	Members
Supervisory ^{ab}	1. Thesis supervisor
	2. Additional member
	3. Additional member
Additional members are typically from the Department of Biology. However, faculty members from other departments or institutions may also be selected where relevant.	
Qualifying Examination ^b	1. Chairperson
	2. Thesis supervisor
	3. Supervisory committee members
	4. Additional member
The Chairperson is appointed by the GTC. The additional member cannot be a member of the SC but may be internal or external to the Department of Biology. The additional member must be approved by the GTC.	
Thesis Defense ^b	1. Department Chair
	2. Thesis Supervisor
	3. Internal examiner
	4. Additional member (internal)
	5. Additional member (external)
The Department Chair may be represented by a nominated delegate. The internal examiner must be a faculty member at McGill and additional members cannot be from the SC. The external additional member must be external to the Biology department.	
Thesis Evaluation ^a	1. Thesis examiner

The thesis examiner can be internal or external to the Department of Biology.	
Thesis Evaluation ^b	1. Internal thesis examiner
	2. External thesis examiner
The external thesis examiner must be external to the University.	

^a MSc students only, ^b PhD students only

Changing “tracks”

MSc-PhD Transfers

As an MSc student, you may decide to transfer or [‘fast-track’ to the PhD program](#) without completing the full requirements of your MSc degree (i.e., submitting a Master’s thesis). You must initiate a transfer during your third or fourth term by [applying to the PhD program](#). You must display academic excellence (CGPA \geq 3.5) and evidence that you are capable of successfully completing a PhD thesis.

The MSc-PhD transfer must be [approved by your supervisor](#) and your SC. Your thesis supervisor must confirm that sufficient funds are available to provide you with the specified level of support for the duration of the PhD program. The transfer must be approved by the GTC, who will then recommend to GPS that a change of status take place.

PhD-MSc Transfers

In some circumstances, PhD students can transfer or [‘back-track’ to the MSc program](#). Back-tracking is strongly discouraged by GPS but, in some circumstances, may be preferable to your failing or withdrawing from the program.

To complete a PhD-MSc transfer, you must have permission from both the Graduate Program and GPS. The GPD must provide specific reason(s) when recommending the change in program to GPS. You then [apply to the MSc program](#) according to normal procedures and deadlines.

Professional Development

Seminars

You are expected to regularly attend at least one of the department's weekly [seminars](#). The main seminar series are the Molecular, Cellular, & Developmental Biology ([MCDB](#)) seminars, the Organismal Conservation, Ecology, Evolution, & Behaviour ([CEEB](#)) seminars, and the

Neurobiology & Behaviour ([NBB](#)) seminars. Although you will generally attend the seminar series that most closely aligns with your research interests, you are also encouraged to attend other departmental seminars and seminars from other departments, such as:

- [Biochemistry seminars](#)
- [Physiology seminars](#)
- [Anatomy and Cell Biology seminars](#)
- [Quantitative Life Sciences and Medicine seminars](#)
- [GeoSpectives \(Geography\) seminars](#)
- [GeoTop seminars](#)
- [Centre de Recherche en Biologie Structurale seminars](#)
- [Redpath Museum seminars](#)

Discussion Groups

Discussion groups are a venue for graduate students and faculty to discuss papers related to a particular discipline. Different groups are active each term depending on interest within the department. For info about the CEEB journal club, contact jacob.harvey@mail.mcgill.ca. For info about the 2SLGBTQIA+ health sciences discussion group, contact katy.dmowski@mail.mcgill.ca. For info about the population genetics discussion group, contact cameron.so@mail.mcgill.ca. For more info about the Connectivity and Conservation discussion group, contact laura.pollock@mcgill.ca.

Symposia and Conferences

You are encouraged to present your research at academic symposia and conferences over the course of your degree. You should speak with your supervisor to identify potential conferences and to discuss abstract submissions. Some venues worth considering include the:

Local

- [QCBS Symposium](#) (CEEB)
- [Department Day](#) (all students)

National

- [Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution Joint Meeting](#) (CEEB)
- [Ecological Society of America Annual Meeting](#) (CEEB)
- [Biophysical Society of Canada Annual Meeting](#) (MCDB)
- Canadian Developmental Biology Conference (MCDB)

International

- [Gordon Research Conferences](#) (MCDB)
- [American Society for Cell Biology](#) (MCDB)
- [Genetics Society of America](#) (MCDB)
- [European Molecular Biology Organization](#) (MCDB)

Workshops & Events

The Quebec Centre for Biodiversity Science offers an [extensive catalogue of workshops](#) and training opportunities on topics such as statistical analysis in R, meta-analysis, mapping and GIS, and more.

SKILLSETS offers [workshops](#) to help you strengthen your knowledge in your field. The workshops offered cover topics including financial skills, leadership, digital literacy, teaching, and grant writing. SKILLSETS also offers EDI-focused [teaching assistant \(TA\) training](#), including workshops on how to be an inclusive TA and how to foster an equity-centered classroom environment.

The PGSS offers [French and Spanish](#) courses geared towards various skill levels at the conveniently located Thomson House.

[Graphos workshops](#) tackle key writing topics including writing strategy, convention, topic, or genre. You can take these workshops to prepare for a seminar paper, conference talk, dissertation chapter, article manuscript, fellowship proposal, or job application. You may find the [Peer Writing Groups](#) to be especially helpful.

The [Digital Scholarship Hub](#) provides workshops designed to enhance your research through the use of digital technologies. The workshops offered include R for absolute beginners, making research open access, and project management for research.

The CaPS at McGill offers [career development workshops](#) focused on applying for jobs and graduate programs.

Science Outreach

Special thanks to Fall 2021 BIOL 601 students Nailya Ismailova, Rebecca Pahulje, Cameron So, Nada El Baba and Easton Houle for their contributions to this section.

Science outreach is when scientists share their knowledge with the general public to garner interest and an understanding of science. This is a great way to convey the importance of research, inspire public support and the next generation of scientists, and improve your communication skills! There are many ways to engage with science outreach during your graduate degree.

The [Office of Science Outreach](#) offers workshops to help students improve their science communication skills. They also organize several events and provide links to other opportunities both within and outside of McGill. You can find current opportunities [here](#).

[Diversity in STEMM](#) is an initiative led by students at the Redpath Museum. It connects students together through an online exhibit where students share their experiences in an interview format in collaboration with Student Television at McGill.

The [Office for Science and Society](#) also hosts [events](#) aimed at improving public understanding of science and may have opportunities for student involvement.

McGill offers a course on science outreach: [FSCI 500 Science Communication and Outreach](#).

Science outreach abroad and/or with Indigenous communities here in Canada can raise additional ethical considerations. Some resources for the ethical conduct of science outreach within these communities can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Some opportunities to engage with science outreach are listed in the table below:

Opportunity	How you can get involved	MCDB/NBB/CEEB
Brain Info	Answer questions online on neuroscience topics including diseases and mental health	MCDB, NBB
Broad Science	Share your research on a podcast featuring underrepresented scientists	MCDB, NBB, CEEB
Pint of Science	Present your research to a general audience while drinking a pint	MCDB, NBB, CEEB
The Redpath Museum	Present a public talk, lead a guided walk, or organize workshops	MCDB, NBB, CEEB
Brain Reach	Provide neuroscience-based workshops to elementary and high school students in underrepresented communities	MCDB, NBB
Hot Science, Cool Talks	Present your research to the general public	MCDB, NBB, CEEB
Let's Talk Science	Teach pre-planned STEM classes to high school and elementary students	MCDB, NBB, CEEB
PlantingScience	Mentor elementary to high school students on their experiments with plants (ONLINE)	MCDB, CEEB
BGSA Emails	BGSA Weekly-ish emails often provide one-time science outreach opportunities	MCDB, NBB, CEEB

Internships

Special thanks to Fall 2021 BIOL 601 students Bruna Soares de Souza, Mariam Hany Mohamed Anwar, Kari Hollet and Elsa Mardiné for their contributions to this section.

Incorporating an internship into your degree depends on many different factors. To make sure an internship is the right fit for you and your degree make sure to discuss your plans with your supervisor, committee, and/or an academic advisor. The value of pursuing an internship, in addition to your graduate studies/research, should be considered carefully, as the time commitment required may delay your degree progression. In addition, keep in mind that some internships require you to be at a certain stage in your degree.

You can start researching internships through the [internship section](#) of McGill's Career Planning Services (CaPS) website.

GPS offers a [Doctoral Internship Program](#) that gives McGill PhD students, at the end of their degree, the opportunity to learn and grow outside of academia through a remunerated internship of a period of 1-3 months. You can hear student testimonials [here](#).

[Mitacs](#) offers several programs which aim to connect companies, government and academia by coordinating university-industry research projects, including internships and travel funding for projects with international partners.

The [Gault Nature Reserve](#) runs a Summer Internship program. Contact the reserve's Associate Director David Maneli for more information.

Careers

Special thanks to Fall 2021 BIOL 601 students Carina Doyle, Yiting Fan, Silma Subah and Erica Fellin for their contributions to this section.

Exploring careers

McGill's [Career Planning Service](#) (CaPS) is a good place to start exploring possible career options. Their document "[What can I do with my studies in Biology](#)" lists many of the possible, diverse career paths a degree in Biology offers.

Start exploring potential careers through [myPath](#) – McGill's Individual Development plan tool, which helps you to identify your interests, values, goals and current skill sets. You can combine this with external tools such as [myIDP](#) from Science Careers. In addition, narrative podcasts like [PapaPhd](#) and blogs like [Roostervane](#) provide many free tips on professional and career development.

McGill's [TRaCE Project](#) looks at career outcomes for PhD students. They organize a speaker series, [Pathways for PhDs](#), and you can find [narratives](#) and links to [recent reports](#) on career

outcomes for PhD students. Scientific organizations like [iBiology](#), the [American Society for Cell Biology](#) and [Quebec Center for Biodiversity Science](#) offer professional development resources. Subscription to [Nature Careers](#) and [Science Careers](#) newsletters are a good way to see the diversity of careers in your field and to find job opportunities when the time comes.

Check your McGill email for relevant workshop series, such as McGill's [Career Planning Service](#) (CaPS) Industry Insider Series. BGSA also organizes Life Sciences Career Seminars – a monthly meeting to shine light on the wide variety of careers in life Sciences through conversation with McGill Alumni.

McGill Resources

1. McGill's [Career Planning Services](#) (CaPS) offers workshops, info sessions, career advising and more. They also help with CVs and interview advice. They have a separate section for MScs, PhDs and post-docs [here](#).
2. McGill's [Alumni Network](#) lets you search alumni according to their major and/or field. You can contact alumni for career advice and/or to hear about their particular career trajectory.
3. You can search for and apply to jobs within McGill through [WorkDay](#).
4. CaPS runs [myFuture](#), where you can search and apply for jobs.

Resources outside of McGill

Traditional job searching websites such as LinkedIn, Indeed, and Glassdoor can be useful for identifying science jobs, especially in industry. When looking for a position within a specific organization, it can be helpful to see if this organization has an internal job postings website. Applying directly through their website may be preferable to applying through a third-party website.

Many organizations now post their available positions on Twitter or Facebook, particularly academic positions. To look for jobs using social media apps such as Twitter, it can be helpful to start by identifying a few labs/organizations that you are interested in and looking through their recent posts for any related to hiring information.

Create your CV

Nearly all jobs require information from applicants, including a cover letter and resume or CV. CaPS offers events and workshops on how to write a resume, and provides information on [CV and cover letter](#) writing, as well as contact information for [career advisors](#) to review your documents.

Other universities may make their resume/CV resources publicly available, e.g. [Harvard University](#), which can provide an additional source of information and/or a different perspective.

Program Specializations & Affiliations

Program Specializations

In addition to the regular MSc and PhD programs, the Department of Biology offers [specialized programs](#), known as “concentrations” or options.

The [Neotropical Environment Option](#) (NEO) is a research-based concentration ideal if you research environmental issues relevant to the Neotropics and Latin American countries. This option ([MSc](#), [PhD](#)) is offered in collaboration with the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama and includes required courses and potential for additional graduate funding.

The Environment option offers you the opportunity to pursue environment-focused research in an interdisciplinary context. This concentration ([MSc](#), [PhD](#)) considers how various dimensions (scientific, social, legal, ethical) interact to define environment and sustainability issues.

Program Affiliations

Certain interdisciplinary programs are affiliated with the Department of Biology, such as [Quantitative Life Sciences](#) and the [Integrated Program in Neuroscience](#). The Quantitative Life Sciences program is available only to PhD students and covers the broad application of mathematical, computational, and other quantitative methods to study biological systems at all scales—from single molecules to the environment. The Integrated Program in Neuroscience allows students to conduct research in diverse fields of neuroscience, ranging from cellular and molecular, to behavioral and cognitive.

Graduate Funding

Minimum Level of Support

As an MSc or PhD student in the Department of Biology, you receive a minimum level of support, which for academic year 2023-24, is \$19,998 and \$21,525 in “take-home” support for MSc and PhD students, respectively, plus a full tuition & fees subsidy. This amount is scheduled to increase by 2.5% annually.

The minimum level of support is provided to MSc students for 2 years and to PhD students for 4 or 5 years, depending on whether you enter as PhD 2 or PhD 1, respectively. After this time, support will be offered only at the discretion of the department and your supervisor.

Funding Package Overview

You will receive funding from several different sources during your studies at McGill, which together make up your “funding package”. Once a year, you and your supervisor will sign and agree to a financial support form that details the funding you will receive. This funding will fall into several categories, with additional details for each provided below:

1. [Stipends](#)

You will receive a stipend to pursue your studies and progress towards your degree. This amount is not considered employment income and is [not subject to income tax](#). Stipends are paid by your supervisor and/or by awards that you receive.

2. [Tuition & Fees](#) Subsidy

You will receive a subsidy to cover the cost of tuition and fees which you must pay to the University each term. This subsidy is paid by your supervisor and/or by awards that you receive. International students may additionally receive a Differential Fee Waiver (DFW) from GPS or an international student tuition relief award from the Department to offset your higher tuition cost.

3. [Employment Income](#)

To bridge the gap between the stipend and the [minimum level of "take-home" support](#), you are typically expected to take on 180 hours per year of paid work as a McGill [teaching assistant \(TA\)](#). Unlike a stipend, assistantship income is taxable and comes from the Department/University.

4. [Awards & Scholarships](#)

You are strongly encouraged to apply for [internal and external awards](#). Depending on the award amount, it may be used to offset your supervisor's contributions to your stipend and tuition and fees and/or to reduce the number of TA hours you work.

5. [“Base” support](#)

This funding typically comes from the departmental Graduate Excellence Fund (GEF; Biology’s enrollment-driven allocation from GPS for graduate studies) and is intended to increase your total “take home” level of support.

The baseline funding package therefore consists of a stipend, a tuition and fees subsidy, employment income (i.e., TAs), awards (if applicable) and “base” support. When calculating your anticipated annual “take home” support, you should subtract the tuition and fees that you will owe for the year from your total funding package:

$$\text{Funding Package} = \text{Stipend} + \text{Employment Income} + \text{Base} + \text{Tuition \& Fees Subsidy}$$

$$\text{Take Home} = \text{Funding Package} - \text{Tuition \& Fees Owed}$$

Funding Package Details

Stipends

The stipend is intended to help cover your living expenses. Stipends are paid by your supervisor but may also be funded by awards or scholarships received by you. Supervisors can increase the stipend value for any reason and may do so, in particular, to ‘buy out’ your need to take on employment as a TA. The minimum required stipend amount is calculated annually and is equal to the minimum “take-home” support, minus the value of a 180-hour TAs (in the year that you started your degree program) and any base support provided by the department.

Employment Income

Typically, you will take on one 180-hour contract or two 90-hour TA contracts per year, which, in 2022-23, resulted in \$5945 of taxable income. TAs receive the same remuneration regardless of the course or position (e.g., lab vs. lecture assistant). As a TA, your wages are negotiated annually by the [Association for Graduate Students Employed at McGill \(AGSEM\)](#) according to a collective bargaining agreement. Any increase in assistantship income due to negotiated or scheduled increases in TA wages that occur after your first year do not affect the minimum stipend level that you receive and thus serve to increase your “take-home” support level.

You can take on additional TA contracts to increase your income. Before committing to additional assistantships, you should keep in mind that you are provided support for your degree for a limited time and that additional assistantship hours may reduce research productivity. You should discuss additional assistantships with your supervisor, ideally through your [letter of understanding](#). Alternatively, you can choose to forgo assistantships if you receive awards or are able to subsist on less than the specified minimum level of support.

Although they are uncommon in the Department of Biology, [research assistantships](#) may be available irregularly throughout the year and are another way for you to supplement your income.

Awards & Scholarships

You are strongly encouraged to apply for [awards and scholarships](#) whenever possible. These are good for you (valuable experience and good for your CV) and good for your lab/research group (free up funds for experiments, etc.). The value of these awards ranges from a few hundred to tens of thousands of dollars. Internal awards are those from within McGill. External awards are those from anybody outside of McGill, including awards from government agencies, industry, and sources outside Canada. For some [internal awards](#), you are automatically considered, but for others, you must apply. For [external funding](#), applications are required, and the selection process is usually highly competitive. Since 2022, GPS has required that all PhD students apply for at least one federal and one provincial external fellowship each year that they are eligible, although how or if this rule is enforced is unclear.

You and your supervisor are encouraged to establish expectations for award allocation through your [letter of understanding](#). Within the Department of Biology, awards will often contribute to offsetting your supervisor's contribution to your minimum level of support (i.e., stipend and tuition and fees). If the total value of received awards exceeds this amount, you will receive the excess amount as a 'bonus' or 'top-up', which can be used to supplement or replace TAs/employment income.

Some of the more common internal and external awards that Biology students across disciplines can apply for are listed in the tables below. (Note: award values and deadlines are approximate)

Internal Awards	Value (Total)	Deadline
Biology Excellence Award (new students)	10,000	Call for nominees prior to Fall/Winter application deadlines
Graduate Research Enhancement and Travel Award	750	Rolling
Mobility Award	Variable	Rolling
Science Graduate Professional Development Allocation	850	Rolling
Writing Year Award ^b	6000	Variable

^b PhD students only

External Awards	Value (per year)	Deadline
Canada Graduate Scholarship - Masters^a	17,500	December

Canada Graduate Scholarship - Doctoral^b	35,000	October
Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship^b	50,000	September
Tomlinson Doctoral Fellowships^b	35,000	Variable
Quebec Provincial Awards^{ab}	Variable	Variable

^a MSc students only, ^b PhD students only

Additional resources

[Funding Opportunities | Department of Biology](#)

[MSc Funding Opportunities | Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies](#)

[PhD Funding Opportunities | Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies](#)

[International Student Funding Opportunities | Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies](#)

[Travel Funding Opportunities | Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies](#)

[Award Application Workshops | Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies](#)

[Tips for Writing a Research Proposal | Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies](#)

“Base” support

As of Fall 2022, every MSc and PhD student within their guaranteed funding period (2 years for MSc students and 4 or 5 years for PhD students, depending on whether they enter as PhD2 or PhD1, respectively) will receive \$2,500 annually as “base” support from the Biology department/GPS. This amount replaces the one-time entrance award.

Need-based Financial Support

To supplement the specified minimum level of support, you can seek need-based financial support through McGill’s [Work Study Program](#). The Program offers access to clerical, research, technical, library or other jobs on campus or in some of the McGill-affiliated hospitals and organizations. You must demonstrate financial need to be eligible for the Work Study Program.

You can also apply for [government loans](#). [Canadian students](#), including those from [Quebec](#), apply directly to their province or territory of residence, while [US students](#) can apply for funding offered by their federal [government](#) and/or by a number of [alternative loan providers](#). International students interested in need-based student aid should inquire directly with their domestic governmental agencies.

Teaching Assistantships

Special thanks to Fall 2021 BIOL 601 students Lucas Eckert, Mia Marcellus, Sabrina Therrien and Maxine Wu for their contributions to this section.

Choosing which course(s) to TA

Ultimately, you choose whether to TA and to which courses you apply, but your supervisor may have some helpful suggestions or may even ask you to TA for a course they're teaching. Browse the [Biology course catalog](#) to get a feel for the content and structure of courses offered by the Biology department. (*Note: you may also apply to TAships outside of the Biology department.*) Biology courses with TA positions are listed by term [here](#). Not sure if a particular course will work with your schedule? You can use the [McGill Virtual Schedule Builder](#) to find out.

The time commitment and nature of the TA work will vary widely course-to-course. Some positions require heavy grading and/or a lot of time in the lab, whereas others may be more organizational and/or remote. It is a good idea to talk to your peers about which courses they have TA'd to get a sense of which TA positions will work best for you.

Most 100-200 level courses are fairly basic content-wise and only require a general understanding of biology and statistics. There is no need to necessarily stay within your specific area of expertise. Specific qualifications will be addressed in the Workday TA job postings.

You may apply to three TA positions, which you rank by preference. TA positions are awarded by the department largely based on the so-called "Priority Pool", as negotiated in the AGSEM Teaching Assistant Collective Agreement (see the [AGSEM FAQs for TAs](#) for more information), which is considered alongside qualifications. Positions, especially in upper-level courses, may be limited and it is always good to have a backup choice. (*Note: if you want the 180 hour position for a course that offers both 90 and 180 hour contracts, apply to both, while clearly specifying your preference in the application.*)

Who to contact about TA questions

Susan Gabe, Undergraduate Student Affairs Coordinator
Email: susan.gabe@mcgill.ca

Applying for TAships and Workday

Effective March 2021, all candidates must apply for TAships through [Workday](#). The Biology department's instructions for applying for TAships can be found [here](#).

TA postings are made available no later than:

- March 31st for Summer courses
- May 31st for Fall and Full Year courses
- November 1st for Winter courses

Application deadlines cannot be earlier than 15 days after the TA posting is made.

Note: these dates may change year-to-year. Keep an eye out [here](#) for application deadlines and on your [inbox](#) for emails from Susan Gabe.

You must apply either as an *internal* (current/active employee) or *external* (new or former employee) candidate. Even if you have held a TAship at McGill in the past, that contract is terminated once the TAship has ended, and you will have to apply externally. Instructions for applying internally or externally can be found [here](#).

Onboarding

Once you have been selected as a TA for a course, you will receive an email from Susan Gabe which will describe the “Onboarding” process. A Workday onboarding notification email will also be sent to your primary work email (if you already have a work email address) and to your primary home email (which you used to create the application). Regularly check your personal email address (the one used to apply to the position) and your McGill ones (student and employee accounts). Notifications will be sent to one or the other depending on which stage your application is at.

If you applied externally, you may encounter the following common technical difficulty during the onboarding process (not addressed in the instructions):

When trying to access your McGill employee account ([using VPN](#)) you may get authorization failures and be redirected to your student account. Follow these steps:

1. Login into your student [Minerva](#) account and create a password for your account under the *Personal* menu - reset McGill username password. This will reset the password for both the student AND employee accounts.
2. Open a new browser window in “incognito” mode, type in [workday.mcgill.ca](#) and login with your new employee credentials. Set up two factor authentication when prompted.
3. After the first two steps, you should be logged in to Workday and able to complete the onboarding process.

Once logged into your employee account on Workday, you will begin the process of onboarding. Multiple steps will be sent to your Workday inbox, and the site will automatically walk you through all tasks. A step-to-step guide to completing the tasks and navigating Workday will be attached in an Onboarding email. (*Note: Failing to complete your onboarding tasks in a timely manner may cause unnecessary consequences, such as delaying your first pay, or incorrect deductions on your pay.*)

Wages & Getting Paid

All TAs are paid the same hourly wage regardless of whether you choose to work 90 or 180 hours or if you TA a lab or a lecture course. This wage is negotiated by the [AGSEM](#).

You will be prompted to input your banking information directly into Workday during the onboarding process. The banking information you are required to enter can be found at the bottom of a cheque for the bank account you would like to use. Pay dates occur bi-weekly, but the start date may vary depending on the position. Refer to the bi-weekly payment schedule

[here](#). Access your pay slips and tax documents through your Workday account under the “Pay” tab.

Rights & Responsibilities

Please see the [AGSEM website](#) for a great description of all of your rights as a TA. Your basic responsibilities as a TA should be outlined on the job posting and more specifically in the workload form that you sign. If you have questions or concerns about your responsibilities, you should bring those up with the instructor.

One very effective way to know you are doing an appropriate amount of work is to [keep track of your hours](#). If you think you will exceed the hours listed in the contract, you should bring that up with the instructor. If you have significant issues as a TA, especially if those issues are with your instructor, you can [contact a grievance officer](#) through the AGSEM.

TA Resources

- [AGSEM Resources](#) - general resources provided by the AGSEM
- [McGill TA Resources](#) - general resources provided by McGill
- [McGill Teaching and Learning Services](#) - Resources on developing pedagogy
- [SKILLSETS TA Training Workshops](#) - semi-annual TA training and Learn to Teach Day

Tips and tricks

- TA for a class on a topic that you like or want to know more about, this will help make the work more enjoyable.
- Class attendance can be required, so check with the instructor.
- Keep track of your hours and (if needed) prepare for labs, conferences, and classes in advance.
- Review the material and be familiar with it to avoid learning everything at the same time as the students.
- Don't leave your work as a TA to the last minute as there can be a lot of students in a class, which means lots of questions, meetings, and exams to grade. Plan ahead and be reachable!
- Being a TA is not mandatory, a student can choose not to be a TA if they do not wish to do so. There is no obligation to do it every semester. Your PI cannot ask you to not TA. Whether or not you TA is your choice.
- A student can hold more than one TA position as long as the maximum of 180h is not exceeded, although this is rare.
- Speak to the course instructor or fellow course TAs (if any) concerning any of the responsibilities assigned.
- A student may be TAing a course alone or with other students, this is something which you should consider when applying for a job.
- Make sure to complete all of your requirements for TAing, especially if lab responsibilities are involved, as [WHMIS](#) training may be required.

- Remember to be respectful and inclusive to all students. Resources available on this subject can be found [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- Remember to fill out all of the necessary forms on time:
 - [Union Membership Form](#)
 - [Teaching Assistant Workload Form](#)
 - [Teaching Assistant Performance Evaluation](#)

Tuition & Fees

Tuition & Fees Cost

The [cost of tuition and fees](#) varies by program registration status (full-time, continuing, additional session, thesis-evaluation) and provincial/national residency (Quebec, Canada, International).

You are in full-time status while you complete your program residency requirements: three terms for [MSc students](#) and six to eight terms for [PhD students](#) depending on whether you enter as PhD 2 or PhD 1, respectively. Typically, only fall and winter terms contribute to residency requirements. During the summer, you are assigned a status of ‘continuing’. There is no tuition or fees owed for these ‘continuing’ status terms.

When you have met the residency requirements but are still completing your program requirements, you are assigned the ‘additional session’ status during fall, winter, and summer terms. Unlike ‘continuing’ status summer terms, you will be charged tuition and fees for ‘additional session’ summer terms.

If you submit your thesis past the [deadline](#) for one-term evaluation, you will have ‘thesis evaluation’ status for the following term while your thesis is being reviewed. If the thesis evaluation takes place during the summer term, you will still be charged registration and associated fees.

Below is an example of the total tuition and fees for MSc students by registration status for Fall 2023. Note that other statuses with different tuition and fees exist, including part-time and extension statuses. In addition, tuition and fees are not constant across the year and are typically highest in the Fall term, lower in the Winter term and lowest during Summer ‘additional’ sessions. McGill provides a tuition calculator which will allow you to see your tuition and fees based on program and status [here](#).

	Residency		
Registration Status	Quebec	Canada	International
Full-time	\$3,001.14	\$6,056.64	\$ 11,934.07

<i>Additional Session</i>	\$2,042.63	\$2,042.63	\$ 2,552.01
<i>Thesis Evaluation</i>	\$1,167.89	\$1,167.89	\$ 1,677.27

Paying Your Tuition & Fees

You are responsible for [paying tuition and fees](#) every term. An [e-bill](#) that details the tuition and fee charges will be available through Minerva roughly one month before the start of each term. Payments are technically due [at the start of each term](#). However, you have a ~30 day grace period to pay tuition and fees. During this period, you will not be charged interest or be denied access to course registration. After the grace period ends, non-payment will result in interest charges, late payment fees, and account holds that block access to registration, course add/drop, transcripts, etc. Payments are typically made through online banking, cheque, or other methods and take 1-3 working days to process.

The funds to cover tuition and fees are transferred to you via direct deposit from the funding source (typically your supervisor’s research grants). However, this amount is most commonly received via a series of [disbursements](#) that are evenly distributed throughout the year. This means that **you often have to cover tuition and fees “out-of-pocket” prior to receiving your full tuition and fees subsidy.**

Tuition Payment Deferrals

If you will be unable to pay your tuition and fees before the end of the 30-day payment grace period or you prefer to pay in “installments”, you can complete a tuition payment deferral.

You may choose to [defer tuition, registration fees, health and dental insurance charges](#), if you are waiting for funding disbursements to be deposited into your account. Deferred payments will not be charged interest, are granted on a term basis, and will be [deferred by 3-4 months](#), depending on the source of expected funding. To apply for a tuition payment deferral:

1. Log in to [Minerva](#)
2. Click on the **Financial Aid/Awards** tab
3. Click **Defer Payment of Tuition and Fees**

Differential Fee Waivers & International Tuition Relief

To offset your greater tuition and fees, international students may be eligible for a [Differential Fee Waiver](#) (DFW). DFWs can be external or internal. External DFWs, also known as “exemptions”, are available to a certain number of citizens from countries whose governments have entered into agreements on tuition fees with Québec. All French citizens are eligible for these exemptions. Internal DFWs are allocated to Faculties and Departments at McGill by GPS and, in the Department of Biology, are awarded by the GTC. It is the responsibility of your supervisor to notify the GPD that you should be considered for one of these internal DFWs. Your supervisor will notify you if the DFW is awarded.

You may also be awarded international tuition relief by the GTC. International tuition relief differs from a DFW in both the source of the funds and in its administration. International tuition relief awards come from the Biology’s departmental budget, whereas DFWs come from GPS. International tuition relief provides you with additional funds with which to pay your international tuition and fees, whereas DFWs are applied directly and reduce the tuition and fees that you must pay. The application process is, however, the same for both.

Funding Administration

Funding Disbursements

Stipends, tuition and fees subsidies, employment income, and some awards will be delivered through disbursements rather than in lump-sum payments. [Disbursement schedules](#) vary but are typically made on a monthly or bimonthly basis, on the 1st and/or 15th of each month. Note that income from TAships is distributed only during the term of employment, whereas stipends, tuition and fees subsidies and awards are typically divided equally across the entire year. You may see your disbursement schedule by doing the following:

1. Log in to [Minerva](#)
2. Click on the **Financial Aid & Awards** tab
3. Click **Scholarships & Awards Menu**
4. Click **My Financial Aid & Awards**
5. Select **Aid Year and Period** (awards are displayed by aid year, which is the academic year)

My Student Aid						
Description	Amount	Offer Date	Status		Accept/Decline Date	
STP [REDACTED]	\$26,000.00	30-AUG-2022	Assigned		30-AUG-2022	Disbursement Schedule
Grad Excellence Award-00286	\$0.00	14-SEP-2022	Rescinded			
Grad Excellence Award-00286	\$2,500.00	07-OCT-2022	Assigned		07-OCT-2022	Disbursement Schedule
Grad Excellence Award-00286	\$475.00	09-JAN-2023	Assigned		09-JAN-2023	Disbursement Schedule
Faculty of Science Grad Suppl	\$1,500.00	23-MAR-2023	Assigned		23-MAR-2023	Disbursement Schedule

The *description* column indicates the source of the funds or awards. “STP” usually refers to the portion of your stipend that comes from your supervisor. Grad Excellence Award-00286 are the funds coming departmental graduate funds. However, the description will not necessarily have a clear meaning. If you have questions, please check with the [Graduate Program Coordinator](#).

You can click on the disbursement schedule to see the actual dates of payment. In some cases, the disbursement schedule may be adjusted. Ideally, this is discussed with your supervisor when the stipend forms are signed before the start of each academic year. If you are concerned about your disbursement schedule, please immediately contact your supervisor and the [Graduate Program Coordinator](#).

Pay Schedule

Below is a table with typical pay schedules for different sources of income and payments. Please note that pay schedules may vary.

Item	Pay Schedule
Tuition & fees	Bills typically appear twice per year in Minerva, in August and December, i.e., before the Fall and the Winter Semester. Payments are due by the end of September/January but can be deferred .
Stipend, tuition & fees subsidy	Paid out biweekly, throughout the year
TAship salary	Paid out biweekly, but only during the semesters of active TAships
Differential fee waiver*	Deducted automatically from tuition & fees
International student tuition relief*	Paid out at the beginning of Fall and Winter terms
Internal/external awards & scholarships	Variable

*Applies to some international graduate students

Research Expenses

During your studies, the day-to-day costs of your research (e.g., consumables, facility fees) are generally covered by funds from your supervisor's research grants. However, you may need to pay for travel, small research equipment, and other expenses, especially in relation to field work. These expenses should ultimately be covered by your supervisor or the Department but in the short-term, you may need to pay out-of-pocket. To minimize this financial burden, you can apply for advances to cover the cost of anticipated expenses and/or complete expense reports to be reimbursed for outstanding expenses. You can get in-person guidance pertaining to research expenses by scheduling a meeting with the Department of Biology's Financial Services Team (scipod1.managers@mcgill.ca).

Advances

You can [apply for a travel advance](#) for expenses related to conference travel, field research, small departmental expenses, and more. Consult the [Procedures for Travel and Other Reimbursable Expenses](#) for more information on the different types of advances.

Expense Reports

You must [complete an expense report](#) to reconcile an advance or be reimbursed for expenses related to travel, conference registration, field research, and more. Most expenses must be

accompanied by digitized (i.e., scanned or photographed) original receipts. Notable exceptions include mileage claims and meal per diems. Consult the [Procedures for Travel and Other Reimbursable Expenses](#) and [Helpful Tips and Reminders](#) for more information.

Payment and Procurement

Goods and services can be paid for using [different methods](#) depending on the type of purchase and value. For clarifications on using available payment methods, please see the [Overview of Procurement & Payment Methods](#). You can use the [purchase decision chart](#) to determine which payment method is most appropriate. Questions on the different methods of payment can be re-directed to [Caroline](#), [Luisa](#) or to info.biology@mcgill.ca.

The [McGill MarketPlace \(MMP\)](#) is an e-procurement system; a virtual shopping mall where users can view, compare and order products from McGill contracted and preferred vendors. You can assign a cart with research-related items (e.g., lab supplies) to your supervisor for final review and purchasing.

The McGill University [Procurement Card \(PCard\)](#) is a credit card assigned to some McGill employees in order to allow purchasing of goods and services up to specified amounts for approved business purposes. Students will rarely use a PCard and should complete purchases through the McGill Marketplace, whenever possible.

Payment Requests are to be used when no other method of payment is appropriate (e.g., Purchase Requisitions, PCard, Payroll and Expense Reimbursements). Consult the [Payment Request Policy](#) to determine whether a Payment Request is appropriate.

Frequently Asked Questions

Booking a conference room

You can book conference rooms for meetings with your lab mates, your SC meeting, and your QE. You are typically responsible for booking a room for meetings with your SC and for your QE. You may also need to book a room for seminars, tutorials, or review sessions for your duties as a TA.

For committee meetings, you should ensure that you book a room with a projector. If possible, you should visit the room beforehand to familiarize yourself with the projector setup and ensure any required adapters are available. The [procedure to book a room](#) within the Department of Biology varies by building and room. You can also book a room through the [BGSA](#), and at [McGill's libraries](#) or [Thomson House](#).

Requesting building access

You can request access to Stewart Biology Building and restricted areas within the building by submitting a [building and key request form](#) to Carole Smith (carole.smith@mcgill.ca). To access McIntyre and the Bellini Life Sciences Complex, you should complete this [webform](#). If you encounter problems, contact Carole for assistance.

Submitting a Work Order

You can contact Carole Smith (carole.smith@mcgill.ca) for basic work orders (e.g., dead light bulbs, plumbing issues) in your office or lab. Depending on the nature of the work order, you may need to submit a FOAPAL for your supervisor's fund.

Renting a car

If you need a vehicle within or around the Montreal area for research purposes, you can rent vehicles within Canada and abroad through commercial rental agencies. If booking through a rental agency, you should use the [procedure established by Travel Services](#) for benefits like no underage fees, no additional driver fees, and unlimited mileage.

Completing a Travel Registry

When travelling internationally for field work, conferences, or other University-related affairs, you must complete a travel registry in advance of your departure. The registry is accessed through [Minerva](#) and you must detail your supplemental travel insurance, emergency contacts, and itineraries.

Submitting an Expense Report or Travel Advance

See the [Expense Report](#) and [Advances](#) sections of this handbook or see this [how-to](#) from Financial Services. You can get in-person guidance pertaining to research expenses by scheduling a meeting with the Department of Biology's Financial Services Team (scipod1.managers@mcgill.ca).

Troubleshooting in Minerva

You can get help with Minerva through the 'help' button (top-right corner). Some pages on Minerva will have specific help pages while others will not. If you can't find a relevant help page, contact the Minerva Help Line at 514-398-7878. Below are walkthroughs for common tasks on Minerva:

1. [How do I use Minerva to register for courses?](#)
2. [How can I get my transcripts?](#)
3. [How do I apply to graduate?](#)
4. [How do I designate a guest to access my financial information in Minerva?](#)

Troubleshooting in Workday

You will generally only interact with [Workday](#) when working as a research assistant or TA. Extensive documentation for [employees](#) covers most common processes. For connectivity issues, contact the IT Service Desk (514-398-3398). All other questions can be directed to [Caroline](#), [Luisa](#) or info.biology@mcgill.ca. You can also contact human resources (hr.hr@mcgill.ca, 514-398-4747), but most issues can be sorted out at the departmental level. Note: for many tasks in Workday, if not on campus, one must use the [VPN client](#) to connect to McGill's network.

Updating myProgress

You should check [myProgress](#) regularly to track your progress through the degree program. If any completed milestones are not properly recorded on myProgress, you should notify the myProgress administrator for the Biology department (the GPC). For some milestones such as progress tracking reports, you are responsible for submitting digital copies of the document to myProgress.

Accessing Tax Forms

Tax receipts pertaining to tuition, such as the T2202A and the Relevé 8, can be accessed on [Minerva](#). Tax receipts pertaining to employment such as TAships, including the T4, T4A, and Relevé 1, can be found on [Workday](#). Unlike a TAship, the Canadian Government does not recognize graduate studies as employment for tax reasons and employment insurance.

Starting in the Winter term

If you begin your studies in the Winter term, you are not automatically registered for the PGSS Health Plan or International Health Insurance. If you are from Quebec or another Canadian province or territory, you are not required to enroll for health insurance. If you are an international student, you must enroll for International Health Insurance.

You will also have your minimum level of support determined for an eight-month period rather than a twelve-month period. After the first eight months (January - August), your minimum level of support will be reevaluated for a twelve-month period (September - August).

You will also typically have fewer orientation activities than students entering in the Fall term.

Changing Disbursement Schedules

A disbursement schedule can only be modified if the award has not been disbursed. Awards that have not been disbursed can be identified by a status of "Forecast" in the Award/Summary Search Award details. Your supervisor will need to follow these [directions](#) to modify the disbursement schedule. Requests for modifications will be processed by [Patricia](#) and/or [Ancil](#).

Verifying Received Financial Support

You can verify that you are receiving the financial support specified on your support forms by totaling the value of awards listed on Minerva and the income from your employment (e.g., TA) contracts.

Printing

You can use [uPrint](#), a campus-wide copy and printing service, if your lab does not own a printer or scanner. To use uPrint on your personal computer, you must install the [uPrint drivers](#) (you must be logged into your McGill account to access the link). Once a document has been submitted for printing, you must go to a uPrint station and swipe your student card to initiate the print. A lab fund number can be assigned to your student ID. Contact [Tami](#) for more information. Two uPrint stations are available in N8/11 of Stewart Biology.

Lockers

The [McGill Biology Student Union](#) (MBSU) may have lockers for [rent](#) in Stewart Biology. If your lab is on the 2nd floor of the Bellini Life Sciences Complex or the 5th floor of the Stewart Biology Building, you may also have access to lockers and should speak with your lab mates or your supervisor for more information.