
You Belong Here

A Guide for First-Generation Students at McGill



What does it mean to be a First-Generation student?

First-Generation students are a unique part of any educational institution!

The definition of a First-Generation (or “First-Gen”) student is quite broad. McGill University does not have an official definition, but our peer-support group defines it as follows:

A First-Generation student is a student whose parents or care-givers did not complete a four-year, post-secondary degree. This includes students whose parents did not complete a four-year degree in Canada or the United States and students who are or were youth in care.

First-Gen students may face specific challenges that other university students (who have access to intergenerational knowledge) do not. This can include difficulty navigating the university environment, feelings of imposter syndrome or not belonging, and financial struggles.



Why this guide?

This guide helps First-Gen students learn about specific resources that can support them through their journey at McGill.

Starting a whole new experience at university can feel daunting. This guide is a peer-to-peer resource, first put together by a fellow First-Gen graduate student at McGill. It is meant to help you successfully make the transition to life at McGill and to introduce you to key services and resources to help you in your educational journey.

Welcome to McGill!

Campus Life and Engagement (CL&E) is thrilled to welcome you to McGill and to provide guidance and support as you embark along your university experience.

We know that the journey through university can be difficult and filled with many roadblocks and challenges. We are here to provide you with the necessary information on how to access resources and services that will help support you on your path pursuing a degree at McGill.

In 2019, Sarah Towle, a First-Gen student who went on to pursue a MSc at McGill, founded [1st Up: McGill's Peer Support Group for First-Gen students](#). Through her programming and involvement with [Campus Life & Engagement](#), she has helped develop a variety of amazing resources and programs for First-Gen students, including this guide!



This year, CL&E is excited to be continuing to develop programming throughout the year for First-Gen students, as well as organizing the First-Gen Orientation.

In this guide, you will find an introduction to many of the services McGill offers and messages from fellow First-Gen students and alumni. We hope it helps you in your own journey to academic success. And to quote a First-Gen - Michelle Obama - "never doubt that you deserve to be here."

- CL&E Team



Sarah Towle, MSc, McGill

Peer Support

1st Up: Peer Support

1st Up is McGill's official First-Generation Peer Support Group - solely dedicated to the needs of First-Gen students. The group runs peer drop-in sessions, monthly support meetings on a variety of topics (finances, self-care, job-hunting), and networking events. You can keep up to date on events via the group's (private) [Facebook group](#), their [Instagram Page](#), or on the [First Generation website](#).



First-Generation Orientation 2019

Students Helping Students

The [Students Helping Students](#) website lists every student mentorship and support opportunity available to both graduate and undergraduate students at McGill. Certain faculties and departments have mentorship programs that pair incoming students with upper-year students. There are also programs for specific populations run through groups such as the [Black Student Network](#), [the First People's House](#), [Queer McGill](#), and [the Office of Students Accessibility and Achievement](#).

Academic Support

Teaching and Learning Services

[Teaching and Learning Services](#) provides resources, support, and development opportunities to both graduate and undergraduate students. The office oversees [SKILLS21](#), a workshop-based skills development program for undergraduate students. For graduate students, [SKILLSETS](#) provides general, transitional, and professional skill development opportunities to complement research training. The office also has [a variety of resources](#) including but not limited to operating zoom, time management and upcoming workshops.

McGill Tutorial Services

[Tutorial Services](#) through the McGill Writing Service provides writing support for all students at the downtown campus. [Tutor Matching Program](#), through the Student Accessibility & Achievement, is a peer tutoring service that matches requests for academic assistance with qualified tutors selected from their bank of private tutors.



McGill Teaching and Learning Services runs programs like SKILLSETS and SKILLS21



Develop your skills.
Explore new ideas.
Make lasting connections.

Academic Support Continued



Study spaces at the McGill Library

McGill Library

[McGill Library](#) provides resources and services to support teaching, learning, and research at McGill University. Library staff are always there to [answer your questions](#). Why not get to know the [liaison librarian](#) dedicated to your area of study? They are subject specialists that can help you navigate the literature in your field.

Peer Tutoring

Certain faculties and departments at McGill offer peer tutoring services for free to students within specific programs. They are detailed below:

- [Arts Undergraduate Society Essay Centre](#): for help with everything from structure and style to grammar and citation assistance
- [Computer Science Undergraduate Helpdesk](#): open to anyone enrolled in a Computer Science course
- [Engineering Peer Tutoring Service](#): open to U0 and U1 engineering students
- [Science Undergraduate Society Peer Tutoring](#): open to anyone enrolled in a science class

Health and Wellness Support



The Wellness Hub

[The Student Wellness Hub](#) is the place to go for holistic health and wellness needs. It provides access to basic physical and mental health services, as well as health promotion and peer support programs. The on-campus team - which includes general practitioners, nurses, psychiatrists, counsellors, social workers, and dieticians - focuses on short-term, episodic care for students facing common mental and physical health concerns during their studies. The Hub is also offering a variety of workshops, [available here](#).



Every student has access to a Local Wellness Advisor - trained clinicians who help you with any mental health and wellness needs

Keep.meSAFE

[Keep.meSAFE](#) is a mental health counselling service that specializes in student mental health support. It is available to all McGill students and provides access to:

- In-person counselling appointments with hundreds of licensed counsellors in the City of Montreal, with minimal wait times.
- 24/7/365 immediate and unlimited access to licensed counsellors through telephone and mobile chat, even when travelling abroad.
- Mental health care in over 60 languages.

Financial and Career Support

Scholarships and StudentAid

[McGill Scholarships and Student Aid Office](#) administers financial support programs that are based **on merit and need** for students studying at McGill. Together, these programs serve to recognize, honour, encourage, and help students in their present academic endeavours and eventual goals in life. The office provides assistance, information, and financial workshops for [undergraduate](#), [graduate](#), and [postdoctoral](#) students. It also administers the [Work Study program](#), which offers students with demonstrated financial need access to specific on-campus jobs.



You can make a one-on-one appointment with a Financial Aid officer!



Career Planning

[McGill Career Planning Service](#) (CaPS) assists students in their career development and search for permanent, part-time, and summer jobs, as well as internships, by providing workshops, individual advising, a comprehensive job posting service, and an extensive Career Resource Centre. CaPS also helps run [MyFuture](#), a list of on- and off-campus jobs including those eligible for Work Study.

From First-Gen Students



If you have come this far in your academic journey, you have what it takes to go even further. Therefore, never doubt yourself or your capabilities, just do your best, don't be afraid to ask questions, work hard and turn your mistakes into learning opportunities. No matter what your background is, you can achieve goals you set.

- *Naya El Mokbel, Master of Science Pathology*

You should be proud of yourself, even when finding opportunities and resources can be hard and overwhelming, and when finding a balance between school and personal life is challenging. Please do not lose faith and keep pushing for your goal.

- *Jason Wang, Honours Economics and Finance, Desautels*

Your First-Gen identity can be a very powerful resource as you see things from a different angle and you are used to thinking outside the box, since you had to figure out a lot of things on your own. Talk about your experience to others; you'd be surprised how many students, professors and other university staff are First-Gen students themselves and can give you some valuable advice (it's also a great networking opportunity). Most of all, you have earned your place here and you absolutely have what it takes to succeed at university and beyond.

- *Sabine Rannio, PhD, Integrated Program in Neuroscience*



First Generation Orientation, 2019

Starting your university career as a First-Gen student can be daunting, and requires courage and self-sufficiency. Make the most of the resources McGill has to offer to help you navigate university life, and don't be afraid to get involved. Make sure you choose activities and extracurriculars that you're passionate about, though, so that you can build a network of collaborators who can vouch for your interests and commitment down the line.

- *Andra, BA (Environment & Development) '09 & BCL/LLB '14, Assistant Dean (Admissions & Recruitment), Faculty of Law*

I spent a lot of time in the library when I was a student, but I wish that someone had advised me to sit down with a subject librarian for just one hour. It would have saved me a lot of time and energy if I had learned from the start how to create an effective search strategy, set up alerts, and use a citation management software, for example. A university library can be intimidating, but everyone is there to support you and wants to see you succeed.

- *April, BSc (McGill), MSc (Sherbrooke), MLIS (McGill), Associate Librarian, McGill Library*

When employers hire new graduates, they know they are hiring someone who is just beginning. They don't expect you to be an expert. Rather, they expect you to know how to: learn effectively, manage your time and stress, and work in a group setting. Do not underestimate the value of spending time building this knowledge and skill set at university. And yes, they are absolutely things that require learning! Explore the resources in this pamphlet, ask more experienced people for tips, find mentors, explore books/podcasts on these subjects!

- *Alefia, BSc Honours Immunology '00, MSc(A) Nursing '15, Mental Health Nurse Clinician at CLSC Metro, CIUSSS Centre-Ouest*