

Student Experience Enhancement Fund 2023 – Final Report

Jasmine Muszik – 4-month Research Internship in France

This year, I had the incredible opportunity to live and do research in Clermont-Ferrand, France, as part of a research internship for my PhD program. This experience would not have been possible without the generous support provided by the Student Experience Enhancement Fund (SEEF). I am deeply thankful for the funding that was awarded to me, as it directly contributed towards my growth and my education.

From the months of February to May, I was partnered with the Institut national de recherche pour l'agriculture, l'alimentation et l'environnement (INRAE) to develop my research skills and to learn from a team of 30+ experts in my field who work there. During this time, I had goals of improving my statistical analysis abilities, learning more about experimental design, and working with a new species of animal.

I worked closely with my co-supervisor Dr. Nadege Aigueperse to learn the fundamentals of Principle Component Analysis (PCA) on a statistical analysis program called RStudio. She also mentored me to expand on my understanding of the concepts being used in my doctoral thesis which focuses on trying to understand animal emotion. I also travelled to one of INRAE's farm sites with Dr. Aigueperse to assist with a trial on goats, expanding my livestock experience (as I typically work with cattle) and getting to work hands-on using a test that was unfamiliar to me. I used this opportunity to examine the methods used during this project to try and identify ways that I could adapt the test for future applications at my laboratory in Canada, CowLife McGill.

I also partnered with computer technicians from the INRAE group to review and observe behaviour of cows from a trial previously completed there. This allowed me to see more efficient ways to use the software program Noldus Observer 14 XT for when I returned to Canada, as my research heavily uses this program for observing videos and collecting data. Not only was this useful in furthering my understanding of the inner workings of the program, but it will greatly impact future use in my lab, as I will be able to pass on this knowledge to other students to speed up the process of behavioural observation (which is typically quite time consuming and tedious).

Speaking with as many members of the team as possible was another important objective of mine, as I wanted to pick their minds and to brainstorm for better understanding of my own thesis concepts, but also to learn from well-established animal welfare and behaviourists. This was integral in growing my academic network which will hopefully allow for future research collaborations or job opportunities. Near the end of my stay, I even presented an overview of my research to the team, to discuss possible areas of refinement. As well, it helped me to get feedback on my current work, develop new ideas for my field, and improved my speaking skills in French. As a beginner to the language, it was my personal aspiration to

build upon my fundamental knowledge of French, as I feel it allows for better communication and would open the door for future connections to be made, both in Quebec where I am studying, and abroad. As an anglophone, I believe I have come quite far in my ability to communicate in French since starting this internship.

Not only was this my first time living outside of Canada, but it was my first time being in an environment where I did not speak the official language. It gave me a new perspective and respect for international students who move far away from their families for a better education, but that often deal with many hardships associated with culture shock, loneliness, etc. During my internship, I met students from France, Spain, Brazil, and Korea. Everyone was extremely welcoming and made an effort to include me in their gatherings. I spent my weekends with them hiking in nearby mountains, going rock-climbing or to karaoke, and of course, eating as much delicious French cuisine as possible! Although my time there was short, I am so happy to have had this experience and for the amazing friendships I made along the way. This journey has not only helped me to become a better researcher, student, and mentor, but has enriched my life in long-lasting ways that I will eternally be grateful for. Thank you again to SEEF for your contribution to my 4-month internship in France!

*see below for photos



