



# WILLIAM LYON MACKENZIE COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

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Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s) and MaCS applicants,

My name is Irina Petrovic and I am currently in my third year of an Honours Specialization in Physiology and Pharmacology at Western University. Being a part of the MaCS program in high school gave me the opportunity to learn in a welcoming environment, as part of a community of motivated students and passionate teachers. I have only fond memories of my years at Mackenzie.

Coming into grade nine, I was worried about keeping up with enriched high-school classes and a heavier workload. To my relief, while fast-paced, my courses were all manageable and much more engaging than the middle-school equivalents. Computer science, the class that seemed most intimidating, ended up being my favourite that year. The teacher emphasized problem-based learning and collaboration, assigning projects that pushed the limits of our knowledge and creativity and taught us the fundamentals of programming. Even though it has been five years since I took the class, the basics are still ingrained in my mind and have proven invaluable to any genomics research or statistical analysis I do at Western.

But the program offered more than just advanced classes—the best part of every year was our annual MaCS trip. The most memorable one was by far the Gr. 10 trip to Mattawa, a few hours up north. The first morning, we arrived in a beautiful forest covered in a thick blanket of snow. After settling into cozy cabins, we spent the next few days snowshoeing by the river, stargazing in the planetarium, and roasting marshmallows around a fire.

Despite having separate classes and field trips, MaCS students were well-integrated into the larger school community. We were encouraged to get involved in a variety of clubs. I competed in DECA, tutored elementary school students, and joined the school newspaper. These activities gave me the opportunity to explore my non-academic interests and connect with students outside the MaCS program.

Graduating from Mackenzie was bittersweet. The transition from high school to university can be overwhelming, but having a strong foundation in the sciences took a burden off my shoulders. My first semester science classes were all essentially a review of the material I had learned at Mac. Instead of spending hours trying to wrap my head around basic lecture content, I could focus on applying my knowledge to practice problems, with time left over to enjoy the social aspects of university. This “MaCS advantage” was especially evident in calculus, where I found my final exam easier than some of the tests I’d taken in Gr. 12 math!



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Beyond the curriculum, four years of balancing academics with extracurricular involvement pushed me to develop a solid work ethic and effective time management skills, both of which have proven incredibly useful. These skills have helped me succeed at university, in an environment that emphasizes independent learning and personal accountability.

The MaCS program provided an environment that not only encouraged academic achievement and a love of science, but fostered the formation of enduring friendships. I met one of my best friends while wiring a cardboard house in science, and another while working through a Turing assignment in the computer lab. And by the time we returned from the first MaCS trip to Muskoka, all ninety of us had become a tight-knit community.

Years later, we're all scattered across the country at different schools. My friends and I ended up pursuing diverse fields of study—one is specializing in neuroscience at Queen's, another is studying linguistics at the University of Toronto, and a third is pursuing a degree in kinesiology at Waterloo. But despite the physical distance between us now, we have stayed just as close as we were when we graduated.

The MaCS program accelerated my growth as a student, helped me define my academic path, and connected me with like-minded students that became my best friends. Throughout all the years I spent at Mackenzie, I have never looked back.

Sincerely,

Irina Petrovic