Personal information

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Major: Biology and Society
Period/Time of Exchange: Fall 2014

Practical information

Visa
As a US resident, you are not required to have a visa prior to entering Ireland. Once you arrive, if you are staying for more than three months, which all semester long students are, you will have to register with the Guarda to receive an identification card. This was quite a hassle and took over 5 hours in the international office to complete. The university was helpful in booking a specific time for us to go to the Guarda and they told us what to have with us. We needed proof that we had access to 3,000 euros, proof we were registered students at the university, international insurance information, and our student ID cards. The fee for the card was 300 euros.

When I arrived in the country it took about half an hour to go through immigration and customs in the airport. I had to show my passport an UCD paperwork. Once I was there, the immigration officer explained about registering with Guarda later in the semester and stamped my passport. It was all pretty easy.

Packing
I would highly recommend bringing an adapter for your electronic devices. UCD gave us a free 10 euro SIM card and as long as I had Wi-Fi, I could use my iPhone for every form of communication. There is no reason to bring many more electronics besides your phone and computer. I would recommend buying hair dryers, curling irons and straighteners in Ireland. I was also able to purchase sheets, toiletries, and towels cheaply in Ireland so I could throw them out before I left and didn’t have to worry about them taking up room in my suitcase. At the end of the semester the International Society held a ball so it would have been nice to know that I should have brought a fancy dress with me. Besides that, I brought warm clothes, layers and I definitely needed rain gear (umbrella, rain boots and rain jacket) since it rains a lot. Also I didn’t realize that it never got very cold so I packed a winter jacket unnecessarily. I was fine wearing a regular jacket and a scarf.

Arrival
Once I was on campus, I had many meetings with the exchange advisor to select my classes. We were set up with Irish student buddies, 2 buddies for 4 or 5 international students. We met these buddies a few weeks into the semester, which I felt was a bit late. After the initial meeting one buddy didn’t show up anymore and the other only set up one other meeting for the whole semester. This was quite disappointing. There wasn’t much for orientation besides one meeting with the head of the exchange program and a tour of the campus. However, even though there weren’t many orientation activities, I did not feel as though I was missing anything and I was able to adjust to the country just fine. I also arrived in Dublin a few days before I moved into the dorm so I used that time to learn my way around the city.

Academics

The University
The university is located about 20-30 minutes by bus outside the city of Dublin. The campus was not too big and all my classes were pretty close together. The whole campus had Wi-Fi, printing stations (5 cents per page) and a computer labs. There was one large library which was very nice and had laptops you could borrow. The semester started on September 1st and ended November 28th. There was one bank holiday on a Monday in October, but there were no other breaks. After classes ended there was a week for studying and then exams were held until December 19th. The main issue with the exams was that they were all located outside of the main campus. To get there you could walk 45 minutes, take a city bus for 10 minutes and then walk 15 minutes or take the free exam shuttle, which took about 20 minutes. However the free shuttle only came twice before the exam and filled up quickly. I took the shuttle once, but took the city bus and walked the rest of the time.

There was a club fair in the beginning of the semester so students were able to join various sports and societies. To join a society you have to pay 2 euro, which gives you a member ID card; if you are interesting in a sport, the membership fee is 10 euro. It was free to join the gym at the school, which was nice, but you needed to attend a gym induction in the beginning of the semester.
Courses
To enroll in classes students email the exchange office with their class choices and the staff enrolls them. There were certain subjects, like psychology, that are reserved for full-time UCD students, but if you are interested you can try to enroll at the end of the add/drop period, if spaces are available. Unfortunately, I forgot to email my choices in time so I had to meet with the exchange office to pick my classes once I arrived on campus. At first I was a little frustrated because all my classes were not my first choices, but by the end of the semester I was happy with my schedule. The international office was extremely helpful in this process and really took an interest in getting to know me and helping me. In most of my classes my grade was based on a final exam and either another exam during the year or a project/essay during the semester.

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<th>Class title</th>
<th>Bachelor or Master level?</th>
<th># of credits</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Ireland Uncovered</td>
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<td>Intelligence and Personality</td>
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<td>Intro to Classical Myth</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
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<td>History of Television</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
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Life Abroad

Language
Although in Ireland the national language was Irish, none of the classes were taught in Irish and the students never spoke Irish while I was there. The only time you were aware of the Irish language was on the street signs, which were all written in Irish and English. The university offered classes in the Irish language but they weren’t required. Sometimes it could be difficult to understand a heavier accent, especially if the person is from a more rural location, but once I got used to it, I never had an issue.

Banking
I did not open a local bank account and neither did the other American students I knew. During my time abroad I only ever used cash or a special international credit card with a chip that I was able to get from my bank at home. I found that this method was perfect for all my purchasing needs.

Housing
UCD had housing available for all the international students. In order to get housing, students are asked to log into the UCD housing portal over the summer to see what is available and select what works for you. It was really easy to do. I definitely recommend staying in the campus housing, just make sure you pick the Belfield campus, not the Blackrock campus which was a bus ride away from the main campus. Most of the housing is apartment-style with 4 or 6 students per apartment. I lived in Roebuck Hall 1 with 5 other people. We all had our own rooms and bathrooms and we shared a kitchen and living room. I absolutely loved it and wish the housing at Cornell was more like this. I did not have a meal plan so I had to do all my own cooking, which was fine for me. There is, however, one housing option which includes a meal plan. Besides that building there was a restaurant/dining hall on campus and a few places to buy sandwiches and other snacks. There was also a supermarket on campus so you could easily pick up groceries.

Transportation
For transportation, in the beginning of the semester I purchased a Leap Card for 12 euros. This card allowed me to get discounts on transportation and with it I could load money onto the card to pay for the bus so I didn’t have to have coins to pay. With the leap card each bus ride was 2.50 euros, without it, it would be 2.80 euros. The buses were great. There are two bus stops on the campus and they will take you pretty much anywhere you want to go. Besides the bus you could use the trains to travel to other parts of the country. A round-trip bus ticket to another part of Ireland or to Northern Ireland cost around 40 euros.

Overall exchange experience

I really enjoyed my time abroad and although I wasn’t as immersed in the culture as I hoped to be, I would definitely do it again. I loved the housing that I had abroad. Having my own bedroom, bathroom and sharing a kitchen with only 5 others was incredible. I also loved spending time with my friends, one I knew from Cornell and one I met from New Zealand. I know that they are both now life-long friends. I felt incredibly comfortable and safe in Ireland. There were multiple times when I was alone and in the city at night, even sometimes with luggage and I never feared for my safety. My best advice would be to make sure you always have a working phone with you, stay with people at all times, watch your belongings when you’re out in public and make sure you know where to go if you are ill or injured. I never was in need of medical attention so I do not know what was available.

The least satisfying part of my experience was the lack of Irish friends I made. Trying to meet Irish students was very challenging. Most of the events for exchange students were only with other international students so we didn’t meet many Irish students. Also on weekends most of the Irish students went home so only the international students were left on campus. And as I mentioned earlier I did not have the most successful time with my assigned buddies. In Ireland a very popular activity was going to clubs and bars to go drinking. Since I did not enjoy participating in these activities I probably missed out on opportunities to meet Irish people. I did go to a club twice and did not meet anyone except the people I went out with so after that I decided to spend my time doing more enjoyable activities.
During this semester abroad I learned a lot more about myself and what I was capable of doing. I had never lived more than a few hours from home and this was the longest I had ever gone without seeing my family. I learned that I am capable of cleaning and cooking for myself, I learned how to live and communicate well with 5 strangers, and I learned how to navigate the city of Dublin and the bus system by myself.

For future students I would advise that you make sure you know how to cook for yourself before you come here, start going out and learning the city of Dublin as soon as you arrive since there is a lot to see, and make sure to join clubs or sports if you want to meet students from Ireland.