CALS International Exchange Program Student Report
Kelsey, Fall 2014 [University College Dublin]

Personal information

Name: Kelsey N.
Major: Animal Science
Period/Time of Exchange: Fall 2014

Practical information

Visa
To study in Ireland you do not need to get a visa. When I travelled to Ireland I was able to get my passport stamped to allow me to stay in the country until I left at the end of the semester. A lot of people would’ve said I was lucky that the person at customs allowed me to stay in the country that long though as if you are staying for over 3 months you are generally required to register with immigration and pay a 300 euro fee. Since I did not register with immigration I once did have a problem entering the country after returning from a trip because the officer at customs should not have stamped my passport until I was leaving for the semester. My advice would be to plan ahead and go to the immigration office with the paperwork required and pay the fee so that you do not have to worry about problems at customs when travelling. The university’s international office was very helpful in preparing you for an immigration appointment if you needed it.

Packing
I was satisfied with what I packed. A lot of people looked at me like I was crazy due to the large volume of things packed, but in reality I saved a lot of money as I only had to purchase a few small things when I arrived. I saw paying the extra baggage fee as being a cheaper option than purchasing things that I could bring along, especially specific brands of products that I use on a daily basis from hair shampoo to body wash and medicines. One thing that really helped me was a luggage strap in which I could hook my suitcases together while navigating airports and getting to my dorm. It can also be helpful to bring an extra adapter in case one stops working or you lose one travelling. Do not bring straighteners, curlers, or hair dryers due to voltage differences. You can pick up ones in the country you travel to. Be aware of seasonal temperatures, when I went to Ireland I packed some warmer summer clothes, but never ended up using them as it had already cooled down there even though the U.S. was still experiencing warm summer temperatures.

Arrival
Taking an overnight flight is so convenient (if you sleep easily on planes!) My flight arrived in Dublin in the morning and I easily went through customs. Even though they never asked me to verify that I was studying abroad at UCD it is still important to have your acceptance letter from both Cornell and UCD in your carry-on bag, just in case they ask to see it. I arrived on campus in time for the orientation program to begin (one week prior to classes starting.) Check-in was very easy as I had completed all the requirements online prior to arriving. I was then given my campus card and was able to check into my dorm. I felt like a lot of the activities were centered around first year students, but there were plenty of events with free meals which was helpful since I still needed to get groceries. During the week there was lot of downtime which allowed me to explore campus, get my classes sorted out at the International office, and settle into my dorm. There was a Buddy Program set up at the university, but not on an individual basis, rather there was a group of international students assigned to a couple of Irish students. The program was not that organized and the initial time conflicted with a class, so I did not attend and my group never met again.

Academics

The University
The university was located about 30 minutes away on bus from city center and about an hour away from the airport. A lot of students live in the city and commute to campus each day so in terms of students living on campus there aren’t that many out of the total student body. On campus the dorms were only a 5-10 minute walk from classes depending on what dorm you lived in and where your classes were located. On campus there was a small grocery store, a gym and pool, cinema, post office, and a student bar. There were also several libraries, with the largest being the James Joyce library and computer labs. Printing was really easy as you could use any computer to print and then go to the nearest printer and scan you UCard (university card) and your documents would print off at that printer. At UCD there were many clubs you could get involved with for 2-3 euro a piece. These clubs varied and had a lot of different activities from movie nights, night outs, dinners, and trips. When I was at UCD I got involved in AgSoc (the agriculture society), FilmSoc (which had movies, popcorn, and soda every Tuesday and Thursday night), ESN (Erasmus student network), and the International Student’s Society. There were also many sports clubs that you could join. The academic calendar consisted of 12 weeks of classes and then 1 study week before 2 weeks of
exams. During the 12 weeks of classes we had one Monday off for the Irish Bank Holiday. There is no Fall Break.

### Courses

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While at UCD I took 6 classes which were each 5 credits a piece. A 30 credit course load is equivalent to a 15 credit semester here at Cornell. A few months before arriving I emailed them a form listing about 10 courses in which I was interested in learning. On their website there is a list of possible classes with descriptions, meeting times, and a breakdown of how the class is graded. Most of the classes have very few assignments during the semester and rather have a project due at the end of the semester with the final test being worth a large proportion of your grade (my final tests were worth 55-85% of my final grade for the course.) They will enroll you for as many of the classes as they can in the international office prior to arriving. During orientation week I then went to the office and got my schedule all figured out because sometimes classes need permission from professors and such to get into.

The office gets really busy so I suggest getting there early in the morning and taking a number because sometimes you can have to wait 2 hours to sit down with someone as almost every international student has something to fix on their schedule when they arrive. All of the classes I took were not needed for major, minor, or distribution credits. Just beware that it can sometimes be difficult to have classes from UCD count for requirements here, depending on the major and advisor, because 1 class there equates to 2.5 credits here. So for requirements that are 3 or 4 credits the classes may not be able to fulfill the requirement unless you take 2 classes to cover 1 requirement class. This is all done on an individual basis though so check with your advisor beforehand.

### Life Abroad

#### Living costs

While living on campus at Belgrove Residences the fee for the semester was 2,898 euros. I did not have to purchase any textbooks for my classes so that saved me a good amount of money. For transportation if you purchased a Leap Card for 10-15 euros you could save a lot of money while using the Dublin Bus system. A 5 day bus pass could be purchased for 20 euros. The 5 days of use did not have to be consecutive. Usually to get into city center one-way from UCD would be 2.60 euros. Even if you do not purchase a 5 day pass or other options, just using your Leap Card (that you can load with money) will save you money on bus fares.

To save money and time I usually had my groceries delivered from Tesco. If you can split the delivery cost with a suite mate or friend it makes the fee even less. I did not keep good records on exactly how much I spent per month on food, but I did make almost all of my meals in my apartment’s kitchen so that definitely helped keep costs down instead of eating lunches and such on campus every day.

A lot of my money was saved for travelling around on weekends. Every other weekend I would try to plan a trip either around Ireland or the rest of Europe. With the International Student’s Society trips around Ireland were priced at about 100 euros for the weekend. These were great trips and I would highly recommend them as it’s a great way to meet other students. While there the trips planned were to Galway, Cork, Northern Ireland, and an Adventure Weekend. They also did several day trips which ranged from 20-40 euros to Giant’s Causeway, Cliffs of Moher, Wicklow County, and Howth and Malahide. If you want to travel around Europe definitely check out RyanAir for flights. This is not a luxury airline by any means, but it can get you to many destinations for very low costs.

#### Language

While in Ireland I did not have any major problems with the Irish accent, although sometimes in class it would be hard to understand your classmates as they spoke fast with the accent. This is not something that will hinder your education though and it’s also not something you can prepare for ahead of time, it just takes some time to get acquainted to. As you travel through Ireland you will often see that signs are posted in both English and Gaelic. While at UCD you can take a course in Gaelic if you decide that’s something you’d be interested in learning.
Banking
While studying abroad I personally did not open an Irish bank account. A lot of other international students chose to, but instead I just made larger withdrawals at ATMs using my American debit card. If you plan ahead and don’t have to get money out that often you can easily avoid many transaction/ATM fees. This just worked better for me than opening another bank account and transferring money. If you are comfortable with carrying around cash and paying for things in it, instead of using a credit or debit cards you won’t have to pay the international fees.

Housing
I stayed right on campus in the Belgrove Residences. This was a great option for me as it was a 4 minute walk to the Ag Building where most of my classes were held. This residence was set-up apartment style with 4 individual rooms, 2 bathrooms, and a kitchen/dining area. At the beginning I paid a deposit fee of around 400 euros which you can get back at the end of the semester if you keep your living arrangements in excellent condition. Then I made a single payment of 2,898 euros to pay for my room and utility fees for the semester. The kitchen was nice to be able to prepare all of my meals in, but beware there is no oven just a stove-top. Also there wasn’t much fridge space so you can’t really stock up on groceries.

Transportation
The most common mode of transportation is the Dublin Bus system which I discussed a little bit above. At the beginning of the semester you can sign up for a student Leap Card at the Student Center and with that you can load money onto it at the Student’s Union store below the James Joyce Library or at Centra on campus. There are also other locations around town and at train stations. You can get a 5 day pass for 20 euros or a 30 day pass for 100 euros. A lot of times if you go out into the city at night the bus stops running around 11PM or 12AM so you may have to take a taxi back to campus. This will usually cost you around 15 euros, but it can be split between a group of people. To get to the Dublin Airport the most common way if you don’t want to take the Dublin buses (you have to take 2 buses and it takes about an hour and a half) is the Aircoach bus. The bus usually takes about 45 minutes to get to the airport from campus or vice versa. It stops on campus about every 10-15 minutes. If you book online it’ll cost you 14 euros for return. You can also purchase tickets directly at the bus stop at the airport, but that costs a few additional euros.

Health and Safety
While on campus I felt safe. There are strict rules about overnight guests and to have a guest you must check them in in advance. There are security guards present each night at every residence, so they will make you show your UCard to prove that you live in that residence to get in. You also have to scan your UCard to get into the stairwell to get to your apartment as well as your apartment and you can lock your individual bedroom within the apartment using your card. On campus they have a small pharmacy store where you can pick up different medical products, but other than that I never had to get any prescriptions there or go to the doctor’s office, so I do not quite know how that works. Luckily I was able to get my prescriptions sent to me, which was very handy.

Overall exchange experience
The best thing about my semester abroad was the ability to easily travel to countries I had only dreamed about visiting prior to my CALS Exchange. One of the most challenging things about my semester abroad was getting used to not having weekly assignments for each class and prelims, but rather having one final project (or only a few smaller assignments) and then having the final exam be worth so much of our final grade. The final exams were also held in a large exam hall with a couple thousand other students in many different classes all taking an exam at the same time. This was a weird concept as many of my other final exams at Cornell were held directly in the classroom that the class was always taught in or in Barton Hall, but not with other students from 15+ different classes. I think that studying abroad changed my educational perspective of how the Irish dairy industry operates as well as environmental regulations that EU countries face, which can be very different than regulations in the U.S. A tip for future students is to try new things whether it be food, a cultural activity, or even a class you would’ve never thought to take. Studying abroad gives you the opportunity to go outside of your comfort zone.