Personal information

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Major: Agricultural Sciences
Period/Time of Exchange: Fall 2014

Practical information

Visa
For Ireland, coming from the U.S. you don’t need a visa for 3 months. If you are planning on staying longer you must obtain one and the duration is one year. They are 300 euros and you have to apply for one at the Guarda office. The customs agents aren’t always on the same page when it comes to visas and how long you are eligible to stay in the country though. The first time I arrived the agent told me that I didn’t need to obtain a visa and he just put it into the system that I was staying three weeks later than my 3-month eligibility. When I returned from travelling close to the date of my 3-month duration ending, I had another customs agent tell me that the first one did not have the authority to tell me I could stay longer. I left the country once more before the date it ended, and I explained the situation to the next agent I had and she just stamped my passport without any problem. So there is some leeway when it comes to whether or not you will need a visa.

Packing
I had everything I needed and then some. I brought one large suitcase, a medium sized one, and a carry on sized suitcase and backpack for traveling around Europe. Most people only brought one large suitcase, a carry on and a backpack with them, so I packed a bit too much. I brought a lot of summer clothing for travel, but you really do not need much because Ireland doesn’t get much warmer than 65 degrees when arriving in September. I recommend bringing any toiletries, bedding, or things you will need that you can dispose of before you leave. If you have certain brands that you like, you’ll be able to find some of the same things over there but not everything.

Arrival
I didn’t have a problem with immigration when I first arrived. They just stamped my passport, and I was on my way once I told them I was studying in Dublin for the semester. We didn’t have a buddy at the university, but there were tons of programs and events scheduled for us to attend. Join the International Students’ Society; they planned trips for us to travel to other popular cities in Ireland like Galway, Cork, and Belfast. Orientation wasn’t too time consuming. There was one big welcoming assembly and then we had a few dinners, which helped to meet other people who were studying abroad. I do wish we were able to meet more Irish students in our major, but the classroom setting wasn’t really the place to try and meet them.

Academics

The University
UC Dublin is located about 30 minutes by bus south of Dublin city center, so if you plan on attending classes the best way to do so is living on campus. Many abroad students lived in apartments off campus, but it becomes expensive and time consuming to get to class. Another option would be to get a bike, but coming from the U.S. you have to get used to driving on the left side of the road first. The dorms are all on the outskirts of the main campus, but from most of the dorms, it’s only a 2-5 minute walk to classes. There are many computer labs, at least one in each building, but you can access Wi-Fi from just about anywhere on campus, so most people brought their own laptops. Class schedules are harder to get used to because they aren’t the same each week in most cases and they aren’t at the same time each day. If you have any problems the international office is very useful in finding ways to help you out, and they send out weekly emails to keep you informed on events or support that is available. There are many societies to get involved in on campus. I joined the Snowsports Society and was able to go skiing once a week for only 10 euros. They obviously didn’t have any snow so it was on a dry slope, but it was a great experience because I had never been on a dry slope before going to Ireland. The Film Society has free movie showings in the UCD cinema each week and it’s only 2 euros to join the club.

Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class title</th>
<th>Bachelor or Master level?</th>
<th># of credits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AESC20060: Soil Science Basics</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AESC30080: Agri-Environmental Issues and Policy</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>AESC30220: Soil Science Applications</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>AERD40040: Food and Agribusiness Strategy</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANSC30030: Animal Genomics</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRST30150: Ireland Uncovered</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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To enroll in classes, exchange students had to fill out a form and upload it to the study abroad coordinator at the host university. You pick extra classes to ensure you can fit them all in your schedule and get into them. If there are any problems with the courses, you can go into the Abroad office once you arrive on campus and fix the schedule with one of the staff members. Most final exams are 70-85% of the entire grade, so it’s difficult to see where you stand in the class until it’s too late. Each class had one extra contributing factor to the grade, either a lab or a paper that made up the other percent of the grade for the class. Since there aren’t many assignments throughout the semester, it is very easy to travel almost every weekend, so that was a positive thing about only having a final.

**Life Abroad**

**Living costs**  
Estimated monthly budget whilst on exchange  
- Housing was about 4,000 dollars for the semester  
- Food was probably around 60 euros each week  
- If you plan on going out a lot transportation can get costly, but it was pretty easy to stay on campus unless you needed to go to the airport or to City Centre. The monthly costs for transportation was probably about 40 euros not including travel to other countries. Ryanair and EasyJet have really affordable flights to other countries which can cost anywhere from 30-120 euros round trip.  
- The library has pretty much any books you would need to use on hand, so it isn’t really necessary to buy books.

**Language**  
Since the main language is English there wasn’t too much of a language barrier, but some thick Irish accents were hard to understand. I didn’t have a problem with understanding faculty, but some students with thicker Irish dialects I had to ask to repeat themselves. Irish people tend to speak fast, so you learn really quickly to listen carefully and pay more attention. There isn’t any need to take a language course before going over to Ireland, but I wish I had taken a course on the Gaelic language while I was attending UCD.

**Banking**  
I got along fine with my American credit card. My bank offered a card that didn’t charge me any international fees when I used it, so that was very helpful. If you only have a debit card and it charges you to take money out, it might be more beneficial to open an account through AIB, which is the bank on campus. A lot of international students I met brought cash and opened an account while abroad.

**Housing**  
I found housing through the housing portal and lived in the dorms on campus. The university gave details on how to apply for housing, but they didn’t really tell us what time it would open. I happened to check the portal around 2am on the day it was supposed to open and lucked out with being able to get a dorm. They tend to fill up fast because there is limited housing on campus. I liked living on campus because only being 2 minutes away from my classes gave me more motivation to go even though all of the lectures were on blackboard online and easy to access. Living on campus was more expensive then living in an apartment would have been, but it was all paid for before I arrived on campus, so I didn’t have to worry about paying a bill each month. The dorms had kitchens, so I made my own food or ordered delivery. San Marino’s and Domino’s were easy to order from. Only one of the dorms on campus has a meal plan because the rest don’t have dining halls. My dorm had a kitchen, but the kitchen didn’t have an oven, only a stovetop and a mini fridge for 4 people.

**Transportation**  
The Dublin Bus service is the best way to get around because you can get a student LeapCard and put money on it to travel by bus. Taxis are really expensive, but if you stay in City Centre later than midnight, taxis are really the only way to get back since campus is 30 minutes by bus. A taxi ride is about 15-20 euros and 1 euro is added for each extra passenger. The Bus is only about 3-4 euros both ways. You can pay with coins on the bus, but you can also get a LeapCard on campus in the first week of school because they set up a table to sell them. The cards can be filled at Centre – the campus grocery store. You can buy day passes, 5 for 20 euros, but if you only use it once per day it’s better to put a certain amount of money on the card.

**Health and Safety**  
There wasn’t a point where I didn’t feel safe in Ireland. When I traveled to other European countries, I had occasions when I felt unsafe usually when street vendors would get really close to me, but nothing that was drastic or life changing. Bring any medications you would need for the time you will be going for because they are hard to get while you are abroad. Do not trust anyone and know how to get back to where you need to be. When my parents were visiting a man waited outside of a museum and tried to get them to follow him down a side street to get back to the main street in Dublin, but they saw another guy further down and something didn’t seem right, so they continued walking in the direction they started going. If you look like a tourist, people will take advantage if they think they can. We had a pharmacy on campus where you could buy band-aids and other minor medical items and there is a medical center about 2 miles down the road.
Overall exchange experience

The best thing about my semester abroad was:
The best thing about my semester abroad was being able to travel almost every weekend. The most challenging thing about my semester abroad was not having any assignments until the very end of the semester. Most of my exams were worth 70% or more, so there was no way of knowing how well you would do in the class and improving until it was too late. I was able to travel to ten countries aside from Ireland and each one had similarities, but I was intrigued by their differences. The history of these countries and the architecture of the buildings was always striking. This experience was truly amazing.

The most challenging things about my semester abroad was:
The information taught was helpful, but it could have gone more in depth. Also the grading system was difficult because without any assignments until the final, it’s hard to know where you stand in the class or if you’ll get an acceptable mark.

The dorm I was in had just been renovated, so it was really nice. The only things that I didn’t like about it were the fact that there was only a stovetop, no oven and only a mini fridge for four people. Without a dining hall, it was harder to eat a balanced meal. I did order out a lot, and that was easy to do. The dorm that I was in was mainly international students, so while I met a lot of people also studying abroad, I felt that I didn’t meet many Irish students. Classes were large with 20,000 students on a smaller campus than Cornell’s and being in 3rd year classes, Irish students already had their groups, so it wasn’t really a setting to meet people. Security was high on campus and it was outside of the city, so I never felt unsafe there.