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Practical Advice

Visa
Ireland does not require a visa for study abroad students, although, they require that you register with the immigration department upon your arrival.

Packing
Pack for the weather that you will experience for the majority of your time in your host country. I packed for chilly weather and was quite happy with the clothes and outerwear I brought. I had friends that packed shorts and skirts, which they never used because the weather in Ireland was chilly by mid-September. If you plan on shopping in your host country and throughout your travels, I suggest that you leave some empty space in your luggage on your flight over. After doing quite a bit of shopping I ran out of room in my luggage very quickly when I was packing to return home.

Arrival
Upon arrival in Ireland you must register with immigration and pay a 300 euro fee. I was fortunate enough to have a nice customs officer at the airport who stamped my passport for 3.5 months so I did not have to register and pay the fee. Most of my friends abroad were not as lucky and had to register upon arrival. UCD has a very big international office that is an extremely helpful resource during the first few days while you are getting adjusted. The orientation program was nothing like Cornell’s, but the week off before classes gave me the time to settle in, make friends and learn my way around the university, which was very helpful. Shortly after arriving I was placed in a buddy group with several other international students. I did not utilize this opportunity very well to meet people, but it was definitely a great resource to meet other international students and make friends.

Academics

The University
UCD has a central campus that is approximately a 15 minute bus ride from city center. I lived on campus in an apartment dorm and had easy access to the campus library where there were available computers, printing and resources. The on campus dorms also came with wifi so I could do work in the comfort of my room as well. The academic calendar is very similar to Cornell, classes begin in early September and end about a week before Christmas. There is no large break during the fall term, but there is a bank holiday in October that offers a three day weekend. The International Office is very helpful and accessible at UCD for questions and also offers a wide variety of opportunity for social activities and events. If you are not interested in socializing through the international office there are clubs and sports at the university and the Irish students welcome international students to participate.

Courses
The international office at UCD enrolled me in classes, which was a bit of a hassle. The university did not allow the students to log on to the enrollment system so I could not check if classes were full. When I arrived at the international office to enroll in courses I was allotted a number and had to wait in line until someone could help me. In the case that a class was full, I had to immediately provide a back up course to enroll in that did not coincide with any other classes I had enrolled in. The university does not have a schedule software such as Schedulizer or Chequered to assist in the formation of a schedule so it required a lot of time and effort. Most of my courses divided my final grade into several parts, continuous assessment, which was quizzes throughout the semester, papers/projects and the final exam. The final exam was on average weighted to be about 50% of my final grade. While this may seem like a lot of pressure, the final exams were very straight forward so it wasn’t difficult to do well if you put in the effort to prepare.

Life Abroad

On campus housing for the fall semester at UCD costs approximately 3,500 euro. During my time abroad, I mainly cooked for myself in my apartment and occasionally went out to eat, I estimate that I spent approximately 50 euro a week on food.

In order to visit and spend time in the city center of Dublin you need a bus pass. I bought a bus pass that allowed me to travel unlimited for 30 non consecutive days in Dublin and that cost 115 euro, but I think it was worth every cent. The bus pass allowed me to ride into Dublin in the morning and then go home before entering back into the city in the evening. The only issue with Dublin bus is that it stops running after midnight, therefore, if you remain in the city at that time you must take a taxi back to UCD. If you split a taxi with 3 friends it should not cost more than 4-5 euro each.
I did not have to purchase any textbooks for my courses at UCD. The majority of my courses did not require textbooks and for the few that did I was able to find PDF versions online, which saved me a lot of money. I think that living costs abroad can really fluctuate on the person depending on how much travel, eating out and "luxurious" living they like. It is certainly possible to have a full abroad experience while not spending a ton of money. When booking travel to other countries be sure to remember that there are more costs than just transportation and housing such as food and tourist attractions.

Language
Interestingly enough only 7% of the Irish population is fluent in Irish, most of my friends could barely speak the language and knew just enough to pass their Irish exams in high school. Everyone in Ireland speaks English and I believe I adjusted and understood the Irish accent very quickly.

Banking
I did not open up a local bank account and I would recommend that as an option as long as you do appropriate research with your home bank. My home bank only charged a 1% fee for using my debit card or withdrawing money at an ATM and no Irish ATMs charge withdrawal fees. Over the course of the semester I do not think I spent more than $20 in banking fees and the cost to open an Irish bank account is more than that. I also had an international credit card that I could use with no fees whatsoever so I only used my debit card to access cash.

Housing
UCD did not arrange my housing for me, but they sent me all the information to login and select my on campus living facility. They open up the housing portal for international students very early so provided you sign up as soon as the portal opens there are plenty of options to choose from. I lived in Glenomena which was an apartment style dorm, I had my own bathroom and shared the kitchen with 5 other roommates. I had incredible roommates in my apartment and I would definitely recommend Glenomena. The private bathroom is so nice and eliminates the problems that go along with sharing a bathroom such as cleanliness, purchasing of toilet paper, soap, etc. and sharing the facility. The 3,500 euro fee for housing was due prior to my arrival, but it included all fees and utilities including heat, water and wifi. The kitchen in Glenomena was a very nice space and I cooked most of my meals there. I passed a small supermarket during my walk from classes to my apartment and I would just pick up groceries on my way home, which was very easy and accessible.

Transportation
The Dublin bus is the main mode of public transportation from UCD to Dublin city centre you can pay individually for each ride or you can purchase a student jump card (15euro) and a bus pass (100euro) that allows you to travel for 30 non consecutive days.

Health and Safety
I felt incredibly safe at all times in Dublin and on UCD's campus. The Irish people are so kind, friendly and always willing to help that I never struggled to feel welcome or safe during my time in Dublin. In terms of medical care, UCD has an on campus health center that I was fortunate enough to not have to visit during my time there. I had a friend that had to visit the health center and she said it was affordable and a very simple, easy process.

Overall exchange experience
The best thing about my semester abroad was the opportunity I had to immerse myself in Irish culture and make Irish friends. I think Irish people are some of the most kind and welcoming people and I absolutely loved the opportunity to enjoy their company and their beautiful city of Dublin.

The most challenging things about my semester abroad was saying goodbye at the end and having to leave. I was not ready to come back to the states quite yet because I had such a wonderful time and it was hard to say goodbye to such an amazing few months.

My semester abroad brought me a whole new perspective on myself and on the world. Everyone I met allowed me to open my eyes and see things in a new light. I think I learned a lot about myself and I learned to embrace the moment and just enjoy everything the world has to offer.