University College Dublin Exchange Report

I completed my exchange semester at the University College Dublin (UCD) in Dublin, Ireland. I am a First Nations Studies major, and took arts and humanities electives at UCD. I was on exchange during the Fall 2019 semester, in which classes took place from early September to mid December.

Preparation for Exchange

Prior to departing for Ireland, I was feeling fairly prepared for my semester abroad, as UCD had online video orientations on various topics such as accommodation and course registration. One thing that I would have found useful knowing, was the need to register for the Irish Residency Permit as far ahead of time as possible. It is very challenging to get appointments through the online system and although I was trying consistently, but I was not able to get an appointment until mid September, for early October. As a student, I was required to have been registered by Irish immigration within 90 days of arriving in Ireland.

In terms of packing, less is more. While you want to make sure you have everything you could need, there are plenty of stores to buy any forgotten items. Main priorities should be medicines and prescriptions that you may not be able to get. Also bring a rain jacket as you can expect it to rain a lot in Ireland. I personally also appreciated having a few pictures and mementos to hang up in order to make my accommodation feel more like home.

When deciding what my semester would look like, I only needed to take elective credits. I would suggest if you need to take specific courses, make sure you do your research, as it can be challenging to know exactly what courses will transfer as. You can access course outlines through http://www.ucd.ie/students/course_search.htm. Since the course enrollment was fairly close to the beginning of the semester, don’t worry too much if you cannot get into a course, as you can talk to
advisors in person. There is approximately a two-week gap in which you can drop your course, so there is time to change your mind.

In terms of financials, Ireland is fairly different from Vancouver. Housing is very expensive and hard to access, so I would suggest, if you can, finding somewhere to stay as early as possible. For food, grocery prices are similar to BC for the most part, however eating out is typically a bit more expensive (i.e. meals at least 15€ - which is approximately $22 Canadian). Keep in mind prices are in euro’s which is approximately $1.50 cad/euro. I would suggest bringing a few hundred euros, as well as have access to a credit card and debit cards that work internationally.

**During exchange**

When I arrived in Ireland, I travelled directly from the Dublin International Airport to the UCD campus where I would be living using AirCoach. AirCoach is a bus company that offers affordable and direct bus routes between the city centre and other parts of Dublin and the surrounding area. This service is very affordable (9-15€ - about 1/6th the price of a taxi) and drops students off directly across from the main entrance of UCD, and many students use the service so you will not be alone. Once you arrive on campus, there is a large tent set up near Merville, the central residence, where many RA’s are working to check you in speedily, and you are very quickly able to access your apartment.

While formal orientation did not occur until 5 days after I arrived in Dublin, there are many enjoyable activities that you can take part in such as mindfulness, exercise classes, free food, movies, shuttle rides to Ikea and other such events. When the official orientation begins, there are still no classes for another week, and the orientation week is a mix of fun activities and free trips, as well as information sessions, both generalized for all International students or exchange students but
also some specific to various programs. At the end of the week I felt ready to begin classes, and had a very basic idea of the layout of the campus.

While on exchange, I lived on campus in the Glenomena residence. This grouping of residences (there are 10 houses) all have en-suites which is definitely a plus. Especially due to the co-ed nature of the residences, I felt most comfortable having my own washroom. While this option is more expensive than the shared bathroom option (you would share with one other person), I definitely feel it was worth it. The ensuite dorms have apartments with 6 separate bedrooms and a shared kitchen and living room, while the non-ensuite dorms have 4 separate bedrooms, 2 shared bathrooms and a shared kitchen and living room. Glenomena is centrally located, a 5-minute walk from the central bus loop, and easily accessible to laundry facilities.
Ireland offers many unique experiences, both natural and cultural. The weather is similar to Vancouver, with a lot of rain, and similar temperatures, although a bit cooler in the summer. Also, being directly on the ocean, Dublin can be very windy. Some activities I enjoyed in and around Dublin included the National Museum of Ireland – Archaeology, local hikes such as the Greystones to Bray cliff walk (accessible by bus) and exploring nearby towns, such as the oceanfront village of Howth (accessible by bus or train).

Bog Bodies on Display at the National Museum of Ireland – Archaeology

Cliff walk from Greystones to Bray, and a delicious vegan meal in Bray
**After Exchange**

My exchange was an incredible experience. I was able to grow as a person, socially, academically and personally. The experience was definitely challenging being a completely different country across the world, all alone, but I would definitely recommend it as part of an undergraduate experience. One of the most challenging things of my exchange was adapting to living in a new culture and making connections with people from all over the world. It is vital to make these connections, as 3.5 months can feel long without a solid friend group. One of my favourite components of the exchange was travelling with new friends. Looking back, before I left for Ireland, I wish I would have done more research on the lifestyle of Ireland as well as places I wanted to see both inside and outside of Ireland. Don’t worry too much about the logistics of travel prior to arrival, as you may meet friends to travel with, and flights are extremely cheap once you arrive in Europe.

One final tip I have is to take every opportunity to go outside of your comfort zone, within reason, and listen to how you are feeling, its okay to take breaks and have time to yourself. My exchange one of my favourite experiences during my Undergrad and I would definitly recommended doing one if you can!