Exchange Report: UCD Ireland

Introduction
My spring 2014 semester from January to May was spent at the University College Dublin (UCD) in the Republic of Ireland. I attended the Quinn School of Business as an occasional business and law student. I specifically chose UCD as it is a business partner with SFU, and has a large variety of MIS courses to select from.

Preparation for Exchange
In preparing for my studies to UCD, I found attending the exchange information sessions invaluable. For example, I was unaware of the benefits with notifying the Canadian government of travelling outside of the country in case of any emergencies. Also, contacting my insurance company, I Have A Plan, to gain travel insurance and being informed of my coverage while abroad. I also found that talking with other people who had previously went on exchange helped with my own planning. For example, a friend who previously went on exchange mentioned to check up on possible vaccination requirements, and the banking situation. These were things that had not come across my mind, and could have been big issues had I not looked up the information. Additionally, travel.gc.ca, my host university’s exchange students webpage, and SFU’s outbound orientation were very useful in my planning.

The following items are things I packed and thought were useful when going on exchange:

- Towel
- Bed linen
- Travel-size personal toiletries (e.g. toothbrush & paste, shampoo & soap)

Depending on the host university dorm, some schools may or may not provide a fully furnished living space. It may also take a few days to get settled into a new country and figure out where the nearest supermarket is, especially if the country’s main language is not English. Therefore, I found it to be extremely useful to bring personal daily use items with me.

Ireland’s main public transportation is the Dublin Bus and Luas. However, the bus system can take about a 15 minute walk from the dorm to the station, while the Luas (think: tram system) is a 30 minute walk. Both systems take coins, the Leap card (similar to what the Compass card will be where you load it up with euros and scan the card when boarding), or the Rambler card (like the bus pass, but uses days of unlimited travel versus by month). Otherwise, there is the Dart system for more long distance travels which also accepts the above methods of payment. Dublin also provides a transportation system from the airport to drop off/pick up areas around the city centre and to UCD called Aircoach. Although not as efficient and quick as a taxi, it is substantially cheaper to ride with Aircoach for trips to UCD/Dublin Airport when travelling solo.
Most places in Ireland will accept credit cards. However, small villages may only accept cash, depending on the area. Cost of living is much higher than Vancouver, about 1.5 times more expensive. However, many restaurants offer student deals. Supermarkets also commonly have 3 for 2 deals and discounts on food close to expiration.

- Include information you would have found valuable when planning your exchange
- Packing, what to bring
- Travel and transportation
- Financial details (i.e. cash/credit card based society, cost of living as compared to Vancouver)

During Exchange

I stayed at the Belgrove residences while at UCD. I was assigned to an older dorm which consisted of 3 rooms, and a shared kitchen, washroom, and common space. However, UCD is in the processes of renovating all the dorms in Belgrove to have 4 bedrooms, 2 washrooms, and a kitchen. Our kitchen had a stove that included an oven. All renovated dorms do not include a stove, and instead, come with a microwave. The Belgrove residences contains its own laundromat with 8 washing machines and 8 dryers. Belgrove is about a 5-7 minute walk to the Quinn building, depending on the location of the house.
The structure of lectures at UCD are similar to SFU. Some courses will have labs/tutorials, and lectures will be in halls that can fit up to 150 students, or large meeting rooms for 30 students depending on the course. Depending on the professor, grading can vary on the weight put on assignments, quizzes, presentations, and participation. However, all business courses have a minimum of 50% put on the final exam. Marks are not on the bell-curve scale.
Dublin’s weather is similar to Vancouver. During January to May, it was constantly windy, cloudy, and rainy. It never gets very cold nor hot. I would suggest bringing rain boots or purchasing a pair upon arrival as UCD tends to be very muddy with lots of puddles in certain areas. Also, bring or purchase a sturdy umbrella and not the flimsy foldable ones, as the weather is very windy.

Places to visit for scenery viewing include:

- Cliffs of Moher
- Howth (on Sundays)
- Giants Causeway (Northern Ireland)
- Temple Bar Street
- Trinity College

Places to visit for shopping:

- Grafton street (higher-end shops)
- Henry Street
- Mary Street
- Parnell Street (Asian groceries and restaurants)
- Dundrum mall
- Stillorgan shopping centre

UCD offers many societies and clubs to join. At the beginning of the semester, there will be a refreshers week with booths to all the different societies available. Popular societies include the Film Soc, ESPN, and the International Students’ Society (ISS). Most societies will require a small membership fee starting from 2 euros. The Film Soc gives discounts to members who watch movies at the UCD cinema, and also host free movie nights of their own with popcorn and a soft drink. ESPN and ISS are societies primarily aimed at study abroad, exchange, and Erasmus students. They offer organized trips around Ireland and Northern Ireland. Tickets are usually sold out pretty fast for popular. Prices will range from 25 euros to 110 euros depending on the trip and associated activities. The trips are generally good value for what is offered, as it is a non-profit society and is subsidized by UCD. It also provides a good opportunity to meet other international students while exploring Ireland. I personally recommend signing up for trips to Galway, Belfast, and Donegal.

Reflection After Exchange

On my exchange trip, I learned to be more independent and to try new things by stepping out of my comfort zone, as cliché as it sounds. Studying abroad in a foreign place with no support system from home was a steep learning curve. I didn’t realize how much time and effort it took to go out for groceries, prepare all my meals, and perform basic cleaning duties. I also became more confident in myself and travelled alone in many instances. This forced me to talk to people whom I normally would not have talked to, which resulted in making many new friends.

If I could go back in time and tell my former self the lessons I learned from exchange, it would be to not worry so much about everything. There has to be some degree of planning for trips, but
not every detail has to be planned. Allow for changes and spontaneity. There will always be people everywhere you go, but it’s up to you to take the initiative to talk to them and make friends. Additionally, get in contact with fellow SFU study abroad students while travelling. They can be a great resource for asking what places are good to visit and restaurants to eat at while in a foreign country.

Also, I highly recommend applying for exchange as early as possible versus later, as the selection of transferable credits is higher for lower level courses than higher level courses as they become more specialized. Furthermore, there is more time to apply for a second semester of study abroad!

Figure 4: Watching Eurovision 2014 in the Global Lounge with new friends