

UCC student interview- study abroad

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General Experience

1. What country did you study in, and why did you choose that location?

I studied in Copenhagen, Denmark. I chose this place because I had previously visited the city on holiday and liked it very much.

2. What was the most surprising part of your experience abroad?

The most surprising thing about my experience was the number of opportunities available in the city. Almost anywhere you could meet another exchange student or local up for conversation or try an activity not available in Cork.

3. How did your expectations compare to the reality of living there?

My expectations and reality coincided well. I was not sure the details of what an exchange programme would entail, but it lived up to all thoughts and ideas I had beforehand.

4. How was the application process (applying to UCC and the host university)

As with all Erasmus opportunities, there is a lot of paperwork involved. Each document however had a clear reason to be necessary and the deadlines were manageable.

5. Was communication good from your host university?

All of the automated communication was efficient, logical and clear. The international office at the University of Copenhagen (KU) did not have a physical presence nor phone number. Getting a reply for an email would take up to two weeks so if there are any time-sensitive documents you need to submit, make sure to do it well in advance.

6. How did you find the information sessions provided from UCC? Do you have suggestions for other types of sessions we could provide?

The information sessions were mainly targeted towards the students which have an exchange as a mandatory part of their course, but there was relevant information for all. I would still recommend attending each session.

7. Did you look at the study abroad canvas page?

The canvas page had transcripts of the information sessions and other relevant documents so I used it.

8. If you did not get your first-choice university, is there any advice you can provide students about how to deal with this?

I got my first choice.

Academic Life

4. How was the education system different from your home country?

For students of science, each semester was broken up into two blocks of 7 weeks each. You take two classes per block at 7.5 ECTS each with the respective exams at the end. Each block feels more intense than the full semester at UCC.

Some classes (even in math) have oral exams instead of written.

5. What were your classes like, and did you face any challenges academically?

Many of the classes I took were aimed at masters students so they were more challenging than previous ones I have taken. However the lecturers are helpful and will point you to the relevant reading material.

6. Did studying abroad change your academic interests or goals?

As I was exposed to many people in different disciplines, it broadened my view on my opportunities and refined my interests.

7. Did you face any difficulty getting into classes?

It was clear how to sign up to classes. In terms of travel, I would cycle 15 minutes to class.

8. Did you meet/email with your UCC academic coordinator about your modules?

I met with him and several other lecturers to discuss which modules would be most suitable.

9. What was the class registration process?

There was a student portal at KU, similar to mystudentadmin.

Cultural Exchange

7. What was the biggest cultural difference you noticed?

The Danish flag was presented everywhere. Many people had it in their homes and many stores would hang them.

8. How did you adapt to the cultural and social norms?

I hung a Danish flag in my room.

9. Did you experience any culture shock or reverse culture shock?

Not particularly.

Personal Growth

10. How did studying abroad change you personally?

Yes. I learned how to become more independent and social.

11. What new skills or perspectives did you gain?

I can speak Danish now, am better at cooking and baking and can cycle without hands. I can also crochet well now.

12. What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?

Everyone would speak to me in Danish because I look like a local there so I studied hard. At first I didn't know where to find social events, so I did a lot of research on the opportunities available there.

Practical Aspects

13. How did you manage housing, food, and transportation while abroad?

Associated with the university is an organisation called the Housing Foundation. It caters to exchange students and offers them dormitories. Food was not hard to manage as I am good at cooking and I cycled almost everywhere there.

14. What advice would you give on budgeting or saving money for study abroad?

Copenhagen is an expensive city but it is manageable if you don't often go to restaurants.

15. How did you handle language barriers (if there were any)?

Many people spoke to me in Danish at the start of a conversation but many people also speak fluent English. As it is quite embarrassing to ask people to switch to English, I began studying Danish the summer before I went there. There are also free language classes, but self-study is much more useful.

16. If you had to apply for a visa, how did this process go for you? (can you include what steps you had to take to apply for the visa)

I already have a Danish passport so that was not an issue.

17. If you registered for additional supports (learning supports, counselling etc), do you feel the host university offered suitable services for you?

N/A

Social Life & Networking

16. Did you make friends from other countries? How did those relationships influence you?

Many of my friends were other exchange students. I want to thank them for being part of my exchange.

17. Were there any memorable local traditions or events you participated in?

The Christmas markets were really nice and festive. I attended some of the music festivals there. One of my friends turned 25 that year and it is Danish tradition to sprinkle (lots of) cinnamon on them if they are still single at that age.

18. How did you stay in touch with people back home?

Mainly texting and with a few people I called them. I also visited Ireland during Christmas.

Career & Future Plans

19. Has your experience abroad influenced your career path?

Very slightly. My goals remain mainly the same.

20. Would you consider working or living abroad again?

Definitely. Most probably in a Nordic country or even Denmark again.

21. Did you do any internships, research, or volunteering during your time abroad?

I volunteered for ESN (Erasmus Student Network) which provides social events for students.

Reflection & Advice

22. What do you wish you had known before going abroad?

From knowing exchange students at UCC, it seemed like most people had a very close friend all throughout the year. This is not always the case.

23. What was the most rewarding part of the experience?

Changing up my life for a year.

24. What advice would you give someone thinking about studying abroad?

You will not regret it. If you ever feel lonely or homesick, text/call some family or friends. If you're in Europe, know that you're still pretty close to Ireland and can always return for a bit. There's nothing stopping you from taking a holiday during the semester too. If you have a bucket list, you can definitely cross a few things off now.



General Experience

1. What country did you study in, and why did you choose that location?

I studied at Aarhus University, in Aarhus, Denmark. I chose to study at Aarhus because Aarhus offered courses taught in English in the arts faculty, which were required for my bachelor's degree in theatre and performative practices.

2. What was the most surprising part of your experience abroad?

The most surprising part of my experience abroad was having to live in a hostel for the first two weeks when I arrived, because I was naïve in thinking that I could check into my accommodation that early. And to clarify, I came to Aarhus significantly early to assure that I could participate in the activities and events facilitated for the international incomers, in late August.

3. How did your expectations compare to the reality of living there?

The reality of living in Aarhus exceeded my expectations before arrival.

4. How was the application process (applying to UCC and the host university)

The application process was quite long, and very specific, but it was very worth it.

5. Was communication good from your host university?

Communication was very helpful and continuously consistent from my host university, whenever it was sought.

6. How did you find the information sessions provided from UCC? Do you have suggestions for other types of sessions we could provide?

I found the information sessions very helpful.

7. Did you look at the study abroad canvas page?

I did look at the page.

8. If you did not get your first-choice university, is there any advice you can provide students about how to deal with this?

I did not get my first choice. My first choice was Malta, but I count my lucky stars that I did not get it because after studying in Aarhus, my second choice, I cannot imagine the Erasmus experience in any other way. The second choice is always a good choice to go for, if you are not granted your first.

Academic Life

4. How was the education system different from your home country?

Essays were counted in characters, not words. A total of 1,200 essay characters constitutes one essay. Also, it is noteworthy that classes in Aarhus can last up to 4 hours. Two (or three maximum) breaks were granted per lesson.

5. What were your classes like, and did you face any challenges academically?

My classes were more difficult (or challenging per-se) in Aarhus, compared to at UCC. Particularly the modules “Classical Heritage and European Identities” and “Regional Theme: The Himalayas.” The essays and group projects for these courses were challenging. That being said, the other classes in the arts faculty were easier, and more enjoyable.

6. Did studying abroad change your academic interests or goals?

It did not change my goals. I still intend to complete my degree, which is how I felt before the academic period abroad commenced.

7. Did you face any difficulty getting into classes

No, because I lived close to my classes.

8. Did you mee/email with your UCC academic coordinator about your modules?

Sometimes.

9. What was the class registration process?

I registered for classes by using the Aarhus University Course Catalogue on the internet, and with continuous communication with lecturers connected to the specific course. Their contact information (name/email/phone number) is found when you look up the specific course, on the Catalogue.

Cultural Exchange

7. What was the biggest cultural difference you noticed?

There is strictness on public transport. Ensure that you pay for each bus ticket.

8. How did you adapt to the cultural and social norms?

Well.

9. Did you experience any culture shock or reverse culture shock?

No big shocks.

Personal Growth

10. How did studying abroad change you personally?

It made me truly, truly grateful for the experience.

11. What new skills or perspectives did you gain?

The courses continued to challenge me, so I gained experience by continuing to work harder at what challenged me more.

12. What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?

Challenges with college courses. Perseverance, and by planning a specific timetable at the beginning of both the autumn and winter semesters.

Practical Aspects

13. How did you manage housing, food, and transportation while abroad?

Well. There was a supermarket (four infact) next door to my accommodation, and a bus stop at the front of my building that could be used to go into town, or classes.

14. What advice would you give on budgeting or saving money for study abroad?

Just be cautious with your Erasmus Grant.

15. How did you handle language barriers (if there were any)?

There were none. All Danish people are fluent in English.

16. If you had to apply for a visa, how did this process go for you? (can you include what steps you had to take to apply for the visa)

I did not have to.

17. If you registered for additional supports (learning supports, counselling etc), do you feel the host university offered suitable services for you?

I did not.

Social Life & Networking

16. Did you make friends from other countries? How did those relationships influence you?

I made some very good friends. They were from many countries. I made some friends at GAA training, and I became very close with my roommates. They are very good individuals, and they influenced me positively with support.

17. Were there any memorable local traditions or events you participated in?

Borglum Kollegiet, my accommodation, hosted a block party, plus one group activity called Tour De Chambre, each semester. For any outgoing Erasmus student to Aarhus who ends up living at this accommodation, the events are a must do.

18. How did you stay in touch with people back home?

Whatsapp/SC/Instagram

Career & Future Plans

19. Has your experience abroad influenced your career path?

Not necessarily, but it is bringing me closer towards graduation.

20. Would you consider working or living abroad again?

Most definitely.

21. Did you do any internships, research, or volunteering during your time abroad?

I did not.

Reflection & Advice

22. What do you wish you had known before going abroad?

Be wary about having no second thoughts that you are in a position to move straight into your accommodation when you arrive in your host country.

23. What was the most rewarding part of the experience?

Passing all of my classes.

24. What advice would you give someone thinking about studying abroad?

Be prepared for the workload. Also, budget your Erasmus grant wisely, because the first payment is at the beginning of the year, and the last payment isn't until you are just about to leave.

General Experience

1. What country did you study in, and why did you choose that location?

Netherlands, in the city Wageningen. This university is one of the best in the world for life sciences, so it was a good option for my study direction into ecology.

3. How did your expectations compare to the reality of living there?

My experience was far better than what I expected. I really enjoyed the different teaching methods, along with the variety of different faculties my classmates were in, so everyone contributed a different perspective.

From a social perspective, everyone was so open and willing to be friends. Over the one year the friendships became really strong.

4. How was the application process (applying to UCC and the host university)

In my opinion it was straightforward. The only difficulty was finding the course list from the host university, but otherwise all instructions were communicated clearly and staff was all supportive.

5. Was communication good from your host university?

Yes.

6. How did you find the information sessions provided from UCC? Do you have suggestions for other types of sessions we could provide?

It was useful, and I found attending all of them helped me get a better idea for what to expect. However, I found it more useful being put in touch directly with a student who went to Wageningen the year before. The one-on-one conversation helped a lot.

7. If you did not get your first-choice university, is there any advice you can provide students about how to deal with this?

For me, Wageningen wasn't my first choice, but in the end I am grateful it turned out how it did. So don't let it demotivate you from going.

Academic Life

4. How was the education system different from your home country?

There was group work in every course that I took. Also, the year was divided into 6 periods, instead of two semesters. Like this we focused on one or two courses at a time.

5. Did studying abroad change your academic interests or goals?

Not change, but I feel more confident in the direction that I was considering before. I believe it has to do with experiencing a variety of courses with students in other faculties.

6. Did you mee/email with your UCC academic coordinator about your modules?

Yes. I made a few changes throughout the academic year. The communication was clear and helpful.

Cultural Exchange

7. Did you experience any culture shock or reverse culture shock?

No. I am used to living abroad and surrounded by diverse cultures and nationalities, so I felt quite comfortable and expecting of the culture change.

Personal Growth

10. How did studying abroad change you personally?

I notice I've become more social, and comfortable in social settings, and in expressing myself and my thoughts. It also made me more confident overall.

11. What new skills or perspectives did you gain?

I've learned how to cooperate and work in groups for assignments, as this was a large part of my study experience in Wageningen.

Practical Aspects

13. How did you manage housing, food, and transportation while abroad?

For transport, I 100% recommend getting a bike at the start. You can get them second hand. For food, prices are similar to that in Cork.

14. What advice would you give on budgeting or saving money for study abroad?

I recommend saving some money on the side for travel. We travelled as much as we could in our free time, so having some savings for trips is great! By planning your months ahead and what plans you have to spend money helps to have a clear overview of the common month.

Social Life & Networking

16. Did you make friends from other countries? How did those relationships influence you?

Yes, I've made friends from all different countries, and it really brought diversity to the friend group. Sometimes we would have funny "language barriers" where the meaning got lost in the way different people expressed themselves, but it was always interesting to see how they chose to express themselves, based on their mother tongue. Hereby, we also learned some basics of each other's languages.

18. How did you stay in touch with people back home?

I used to call my friends, as well as send each other texts with updates on our daily lives.

Career & Future Plans

19. Would you consider working or living abroad again?

Definitely. I am used to moving a lot throughout my life, and this Erasmus experience has definitely confirmed by mindset that I enjoy living in foreign countries.

Reflection & Advice

22. What do you wish you had known before going abroad?

It would have been worth it to get a travel subscription card right at the beginning to make travel around the Netherlands cheaper.

23. What advice would you give someone thinking about studying abroad?

Keep an open mind in meeting new people. Also travel and visit new countries over weekends. Trips with new friends brings you all closer quickly.

Université de Grenoble Alpes

General Experience

1. What country did you study in, and why did you choose that location?

I studied in France, specifically in the alpine city of Grenoble. I chose this city because of its rich history and remarkable surrounding landscapes. In Ireland, I live by the coast, I wanted to experience what it's like to be surrounded by Europe's biggest mountain ranges. For me, it was about living in a completely different landscape to what I have lived in for the previous twenty years.

2. What was the most surprising part of your experience abroad?

My Erasmus was full of surprises, although I can safely say they were never negative. I was most impressed by how accommodating Grenoble is to its student population. The price of my accommodation was heavily subsidised by the French state (€302 per month, I was pleased to see that my CAF application paid me €697 of this back when I returned home). Everything about the city seems to have some sort of focus on students. There was a student travel card I availed of that provided me with unlimited tram, local bus and regional bus travel for only €18 a month, which saved me a small fortune.

3. How did your expectations compare to the reality of living there?
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Academic Life

4. How was the education system different from your home country?
 5. What were your classes like, and did you face any challenges academically?
 6. Did studying abroad change your academic interests or goals?
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Cultural Exchange

7. What was the biggest cultural difference you noticed?

The French in Grenoble do not shy away from new experiences and new people. I feel as though in Ireland, there can sometimes be a quiet reluctance to try something against the grain for fear of external scrutiny. There was none of that in Grenoble, which made for very interesting conversation. It was also remarkably easy to organise activities with my French friends. At the drop of a hat, we could find ourselves up a mountain, on a climbing wall, cycling to the nearest soccer pitch, playing basketball or visiting the city's biggest thrift store - the list goes on.

8. How did you adapt to the cultural and social norms? To be completely honest, the French way of life embraced me. As I grew more comfortable in France, I began to discover how the social norms already aligned with my own values. This could have been as simple as greeting the shopkeeper as one entered a shop, treating meals as a sacred space to connect with others or of course the strong collectivist elements of team projects.
9. Did you experience any culture shock or reverse culture shock?

I decided to bring my girlfriend over with me as a 'mini-holiday' of sorts for the first few days of my Erasmus. One farewell on the escalators in Lyon airport later and things became more complex. The most challenging days for me were the ones before the college year began. My room was tiny (12m² - funnily enough the same size as the newer rooms in Cork Prison), I didn't know a soul in the city and I had never lived out of home before. Not to mention that my French wasn't exactly spectacular.

This culture shock wore off in a short while by making great friends with the people who shared my floor with me, engaging with the French in my classes inside and outside of the college, educating myself in the cities museums, spending lots of time in nature and getting a routine in order.

Personal Growth

10. How did studying abroad change you personally?

My outlook on life has been overhauled by my experience abroad. Before, I was achievements-driven, my ambitions were largely professional. While that is important, I increasingly became more aware of the more important things in life.

I now spend as much time as I humanly can outdoors in Ireland. Grenoble is a phenomenal city for outdoor adventure, which I enjoyed immensely. Furthermore, I learned the values, beliefs and attitudes of a plethora of nationalities. In Ireland, I believe there to be a very fast pace of life, the work-life balance isn't always up to scratch. I met many different nationals of many different countries who put a much greater focus on relationship building and human connection, rather than strictly personal accolades. My eyes have been opened to the most important things in life; time in nature and time with others.

11. What new skills or perspectives did you gain?

The level of my French grew by astronomical amounts. These days, in my job at home, I can conduct business very comfortably in French. I call my old floor mates and casually converse in French almost every day. I listen to French podcasts, music and radio and read French news articles out of enjoyment; not out of practice.

12. What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?

Practical Aspects

13. How did you manage housing, food, and transportation while abroad?

14. What advice would you give on budgeting or saving money for study abroad?

15. How did you handle language barriers (if there were any)?

Social Life & Networking

16. Did you make friends from other countries? How did those relationships influence you?

17. Were there any memorable local traditions or events you participated in?

Where do I start? The Savoyard on my floor made fondue for us of an evening, my Alsatian friend brought me to a few high-level ice hockey matches, I was warmly invited to a Ramadan meal on my floor with a large group of my Moroccan friends (Where I was kindly taught about the backstory of each food item), my Algerian friend cooked tremendous food for me and gifted me plenty of baklavas, I visited the markets of Saint Bruno, I attended a protest in the street. I participated in the Olinpiades (a massive carnival with all of the nearby colleges), I travelled to the remarkable Coup D'Icare air show, I read out poetry in front of a crowd of French people for Arts week. I completed the rite of passage by climbing Chamechaude, and of course I did plenty of skiing.

18. How did you stay in touch with people back home?

It was incredibly easy for me to put the time aside to call my girlfriend and my family daily.

Career & Future Plans

19. Has your experience abroad influenced your career path?

20. Would you consider working or living abroad again?

21. Did you do any internships, research, or volunteering during your time abroad?

Reflection & Advice

22. What do you wish you had known before going abroad?

23. What was the most rewarding part of the experience?

24. What advice would you give someone thinking about studying abroad?

University of Oslo

General Experience

1. **What country did you study in, and why did you choose that location?** Oslo, Norway. I choose it for the nature, outdoor lifestyle and the class options
 2. **What was the most surprising part of your experience abroad?** How different the college life was compared to UCC. It is much more relaxed, exams are take home/open book etc
 3. **How did your expectations compare to the reality of living there?** It was even better than expected in terms of my experience but definitely very expensive- you just have to be smart with spending, I didn't have a huge budget whatsoever and still managed
 4. **How was the application process (applying to UCC and the host university)-** very easy
 5. **Was communication good from your host university?** yes they were great
 6. **How did you find the information sessions provided from UCC?** Do you have suggestions for other types of sessions we could provide? the best sessions were definitely the ones where past erasmus students spoke first hand about their experiences
 7. **Did you look at the study abroad canvas page?** Yes
 8. **If you did not get your first-choice university, is there any advice you can provide students about how to deal with this?** N/A
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Academic Life

4. **How was the education system different from your home country?** It was a lot more relaxed, class only 3 days a week - very self learning based- no tutorials. A little frustrating at times.
 5. **What were your classes like, and did you face any challenges academically?** Some classes were not very law heavy (my ucc degree) - which was deceiving based on how they were advertised- they were a lot more theoretical/philosophical. Second semester I chose more carefully and loved my classes.
 6. **Did studying abroad change your academic interests or goals?** No
 7. **Did you face any difficulty getting into classes?** The spaces were very limited in the Norwegian classes so I didn't get a spot, make sure you check the specific deadline as it's shorter than every other module deadline.
 8. **Did you mee/email with your UCC academic coordinator about your modules?** no
 9. **What was the class registration process?** It was similar to UCC- you applied online on the university website.
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Cultural Exchange

7. **What was the biggest cultural difference you noticed?** People are quieter and the lifestyle is very relaxed, there is a huge emphasis on work/life balance
 8. **How did you adapt to the cultural and social norms?** It was very easy as I am quite independent, it's great for people who are social but equally comfortable with having their own space/ alone time.
 9. **Did you experience any culture shock or reverse culture shock?** No, but it was definitely very nice, different to Ireland- neither is better than the other but very different.
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Personal Growth

10. **How did studying abroad change you personally?** I think I matured a lot, the first time moving away from home was great for growth/independence and meeting so many new people from different places around the world.
 11. **What new skills or perspectives did you gain?** Lots of new experiences with so many new people, having roommates etc was fun and taught me a lot about other cultures
 12. **What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?** I loved the snowy winters and for the most part it didn't bother me but it was definitely an adjustment getting used to it being pitch black at 3pm until around 12pm the following day, the short days were quite disorientating.
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Practical Aspects

13. **How did you manage housing, food, and transportation while abroad?** The food was expensive but generally grand. In the winter it was annoying, you couldn't get much fresh produce if you're on a budget as it was all imported and so it went bad very quickly. It's ok if you're not too bothered/fussy with food but if you love cooking fancy meals it's probably going to be tricky. Transport is great, student tickets work for literally every mode of transport and you get the discount if you buy it for 30 days. Housing was great, I recommend Kringsja student village but everywhere I went that friends lived in was still nice. Be careful to clean well when moving out, they catch you for very minor things and charge 100 euro.
14. **What advice would you give on budgeting or saving money for study abroad?** Have a budget every month, the first month you will spend more because you're only moving etc getting things for you flat/learning the best places to shop for less. Rema 100 is cheaper than Kiwi (kiwi is the shop in Kringsja but you can get a bus to Sogn student village its about 10 minutes away at there is a Rema there)
15. **How did you handle language barriers (if there were any)?** Everyone pretty much speaks fluent english
16. **If you had to apply for a visa, how did this process go for you? (can you include what steps you had to take to apply for the visa)** N/a

17. If you registered for additional supports (learning supports, counselling etc), do you feel the host university offered suitable services for you? N/a
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Social Life & Networking

16. Did you make friends from other countries? How did those relationships influence you? Yes I did, I made some of the best friends of my life, there is a special closeness you have with erasmus friends.
17. Were there any memorable local traditions or events you participated in? '17 Mai' is Norway's national day and it's so much fun.
18. How did you stay in touch with people back home? FaceTime, text, phone calls
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Career & Future Plans

19. Has your experience abroad influenced your career path? I would absolutely love to live in Oslo, however even though everyone is fluent in English, Norwegian is required in most professional offices so I must work on that.
20. Would you consider working or living abroad again? Yes
21. Did you do any internships, research, or volunteering during your time abroad? No
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Reflection & Advice

22. What do you wish you had known before going abroad? Staying in contact with friends and family at home is so much easier than you think, it's ok to be homesick sometimes, sometimes you will have no money but you will figure it out.
23. What was the most rewarding part of the experience? Meeting my new friends and getting to explore Norway's beautiful nature
24. What advice would you give someone thinking about studying abroad? Definitely do it, It was probably the best year of my life!

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North Carolina State University

General Experience

1. What country did you study in, and why did you choose that location?

United States – North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC

My US passport made studying in the US particularly attractive. I had lived in NC briefly as a child, so it felt like an opportunity for a full-circle moment. More importantly, I knew the Electrical Engineering programme in NCSU is nationally-recognised. The warmer, sunnier autumn weather was a big pull, too!

2. What was the most surprising part of your experience abroad?

Culture shock! The American university experience – particularly at larger state schools – is very integrated. It is more apparent that higher education is a business venture over there. There is a constant stream of events and opportunities to meet people, which can be overwhelming at times. This is especially true for international students, whose experience is catered for in many respects. I took some time to get used to the all-encompassing campus atmosphere.

3. How did your expectations compare to the reality of living there?

There were no huge surprises for me due to my half-American upbringing, but I was struck by how many of the big college stereotypes are true – mostly the good ones. The local attitudes toward drinking and individualism contrast even more sharply with our own than I thought. The diversity of personality and background is even wider than I had expected. There are many such America-specific things, like how everything is as cartoonishly super-sized as you would expect, but from the perspective of any given study abroad student in any given country there aren't many common themes.

Each country and culture is different, and your experience will be shaped by these differences and how you respond to them. My main focus was on embracing the different and the strange in the moment, rather than immediately forming an opinion.

4. How was the application process (applying to UCC and the host university)

Impressively straightforward, although it was helped tremendously by my being a US citizen. For my peers, the visa application process seemed reasonably well-illuminated. I will stress two things: 1) Prioritise the embassy appointment, as this is in some ways the least flexible aspect of the process, and 2) Organise yourself as early as possible with regard to accommodation to avoid inconvenient living arrangements – this will play a significant role in shaping your experience.

5. Was communication good from your host university?

I found the NCSU study abroad office excellent in every respect. They were attentive, quick to respond to queries and almost always available. As others have said, it is important to show up well early on with these people, so being particularly polite in emails and exchanges is advised. You never know if you may suddenly be in desperate need of help from them at some point in your exchange programme.

6. How did you find the information sessions provided from UCC? Do you have suggestions for other types of sessions we could provide?

I thought they were good overall, though perhaps slightly repetitive in places. I appreciated the fact that they quickly became tailored toward US universities, since this allowed the presenters to give more specific advice on US culture and customs, etc.

I think I would have benefited from connecting with someone (preferably from my course) who had attended the university (or another American university) the previous year. Already this summer I have been contacted by a student in the year below me asking for advice from my own personal experience last year. It would be a worthwhile investment of resources on UCC's part to connect future / prospective study abroad participants with those who have come before them so that they can talk more candidly and specifically about recommendations, etc.

7. Did you look at the study abroad canvas page?

Very rarely (oops) – just to check the pre-departure documents list. I also briefly read through some former students' advice.

I did appreciate that it was a repository for information sessions & slideshows, since I missed a couple and was able to find relevant information via the Canvas page.

8. If you did not get your first-choice university, is there any advice you can provide students about how to deal with this?

N/A

Academic Life

4. How was the education system different from your home country?

Much like American life and culture more broadly, the US higher education system is obsessed with relative ranking and class position. To this end, marking standards are very high, i.e. a "good" grade is between 90-100%. This was an exceptional adjustment for us, given our different approach to exams. It's not that Irish standards are lower: America likes the idea of high achievement, especially through hard work, so there is an increased emphasis on continuous assessment as a means of "proving" that you deserve the A grade.

I think most UCC students who study abroad in America – although this varies widely based on which degree you study and where – will be surprised by the culture of academic competition that arises in some places.

5. What were your classes like, and did you face any challenges academically?

My classes were a mixed bag in terms of difficulty, as you would expect. The first thing to say is that classes are larger in NCSU, with a wider scope and fewer modules overall. This is a change itself, since I needed to adjust to learning fewer topics in more depth. The material tends to be segmented with CA for each portion, which can be a challenge depending on how you pace your study (study week merchants may struggle here!).

I found the level of academic rigour higher than I'd expected. I will admit that I did not realise how developed NCSU's Electrical Engineering programme was until I had already arrived. Although I was prepared for the CA emphasis, I struggled with distributing my time between different projects.

One of my modules is likely the most difficult course I will ever take in university. It is important to say that it was difficult primarily because I was missing some recommended prerequisites. Even still, it pushed me to the very edge. I overcame the challenge by relying on my fellow classmates for help and by liaising with the professor on ways to fast-track my understanding.

6. Did studying abroad change your academic interests or goals?

My Intro to Embedded Systems class was both my most challenging module and inspired my interest in all things embedded systems-oriented. I would highly recommend you branch out (if permitted by your academic advisor) to sample areas you wouldn't otherwise get in UCC.

7. Did you face any difficulty getting into classes

N/A

8. Did you meet/email with your UCC academic coordinator about your modules?

Yes, my academic coordinator gave me good advice on module selection choices. A good advisor will leave most of the specifics to you in my experience.

9. What was the class registration process?

For NC State, class registration occurred through the student portal. There was an application process where I listed classes in order of preference, including extras in case of availability issues. Quickly thereafter I received confirmation of my class selection. It was all very intuitive.

I later heard stories from other UCC students that failing to register early cost them their preferred module – be aware that most universities will privilege American students over internationals when it comes to class registration. Also do your due diligence over which classes are popular and fill up quickly, versus those classes which may not be offered if significant interest is not secured.

Cultural Exchange

7. What was the biggest cultural difference you noticed?

Drinking culture – there is a very low tolerance for public drinking of any kind, this extending even to loud bar conversations. When you combine this with America's more militant approach to policing and the general state of heightened danger associated with a gun culture, public drinking can be a serious liability. I would mostly plan on avoiding drinking outside of designated university venues.

8. How did you adapt to the cultural and social norms?

They say Ireland is the most Americanized European country, and on my evidence that is certainly true. Outside of obvious differences in approach to policing, guns, drinking, etc, we share most things in common. In the trans-Atlantic case, adaptation is more about "reading the room" when it comes to politics and local norms (America is a giant place, even different states can have different expectations, e.g. North vs South).

9. Did you experience any culture shock or reverse culture shock?

Nothing outside of what I have already mentioned. Americans certainly tend to be more open, take themselves more seriously, and may not catch certain jokes or turns of phrase. That being said, so long as you respect these differences and approach interactions with an open mind, you will be fine – the Irish are one of Americans' favourite groups, as they will say themselves!

The only instances in which I saw a foreign student get into trouble, Irish or not, were when they stopped trying to adapt.

Personal Growth

10. How did studying abroad change you personally?

My biggest area of self-improvement was my responsibility. Like many of my peers, studying abroad was my first experience of living out of home. I had to quickly become self-reliant, which is made more difficult when you are immersed in an unfamiliar culture. The saving grace is that most of the people you'll be surrounded by are in exactly the same boat, and there is camaraderie to be found there.

In retrospect, I returned from my semester abroad as a far more independent person, capable of organising myself and my daily routine far better. I was very surprised to find that I struggled initially to re-integrate myself within the family house when I came home.

11. What new skills or perspectives did you gain?

As with any cultural immersion, I found that my time in the US gave me a new perspective on their cultural norms. I found myself becoming more open-minded in the face of attitudes that differed from my own. I think this ability to integrate oneself into an unnatural culture is an important skill in the workplace as well as in travel and life.

12. What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?

Personally, I found maintaining a long-distance relationship to be one of my biggest challenges, and also my most rewarding. Whereas most familial bonds and friendships can survive a downturn when one party is engrossed in a semester abroad, romantic relationships require constant attention. It took more emotional maturity and communication than I had anticipated, but with forward planning I found a long-distance relationship not only manageable, but deeply rewarding.

Practical Aspects

13. How did you manage housing, food, and transportation while abroad?

I had help from my parents with regard to the primary costs (housing, tuition, food plan). I would be a big proponent of the Meal Plan if your university offers one. Although the quality of food can be hit-and-miss, they remove all the uncertainty around when, where, and how you are going to eat on any given day – you will have bigger concerns, I promise! A meal plan doesn't preclude you from going out and trying other restaurants, and in my estimation it saved me more than \$1000 over the course of the semester.

With respect to transportation, most US universities tend to offer free shuttles between campuses throughout the day. I tended to walk between lectures or take the “Wolfline” bus service if I was in a hurry. There are generally electric scooters available, although you should be careful not to blow a hole in your budget with these (I saw that happen in real time)!

Outside of campus, transport in America tends to have an every-man-for-himself vibe. Most cities have poor, insufficient public transport options. Buses mostly. Roads are designed with only cars in mind, and the US is so vast that walking between locations isn’t feasible. You will more than likely be relying on Uber for transport outside of campus – this is a large part of the reason I didn’t get to explore the wider Raleigh area more thoroughly.

14. What advice would you give on budgeting or saving money for study abroad?

There are no secrets here either: save up in advance and be frugal (stick to Meal Plan food where possible, don’t expand your wardrobe significantly, etc). Revolut worked fine for myself and all the UCC lads in NC. I would particularly warn against currency changes – convert Euros to dollars in bulk on Revolut, then spend judiciously.

15. How did you handle language barriers (if there were any)?

Give them an ol’ rendition of Amhrán na bhFiann and a few Irishisms and they’ll be satisfied that you’re “not from around here” :)

16. If you had to apply for a visa, how did this process go for you? (can you include what steps you had to take to apply for the visa)

N/A

17. If you registered for additional supports (learning supports, counselling etc), do you feel the host university offered suitable services for you?

N/A

Social Life & Networking

16. Did you make friends from other countries? How did those relationships influence you?

I made a few very good friendships. All were mutual friends between the UCC lads I went over with. I keep in regular contact with one friend from Cairo, with whom I travelled to NYC and Orlando. Outside of classes, I essentially built my study abroad experience around my friendships with him and others. I plan on visiting him (*avoiding* the summer heat) A friend for life, for sure.

I really enjoyed all the cultural cross-over that occurs in the first few weeks while everyone is finding their feet. NCSU – like many other university choices – do an excellent job of introducing the foreign students to one another, and to the wider community. All of my non-UCC friendships were formed through activities organised in the early weeks by the Study Abroad office.

17. Were there any memorable local traditions or events you participated in?

All the classic American things, really. School spirit events (think *Freshers* equivalents), football games, Labour Day weekend, etc.

18. How did you stay in touch with people back home?

There is no secret here. Staying in touch takes consistent effort on both sides – that goes for all your relationships. I would highly recommend discussing loose “rules” around communication before you leave so that you can maintain healthy relationships back home without overly worrying about them. This is especially true for partners / girlfriends / boyfriends.

Schedule days of the week for Facetime calls, send occasional texts about plans and events, write letters or postcards if that’s your thing (one of my favourite mementos is the stack of letters sent back and forth across the Atlantic while I was away. It can be a cool thing to look back on).

Career & Future Plans

19. Has your experience abroad influenced your career path?

This largely remains to be seen, but even in the first 6 months since I’ve come home I have directly referenced two of the modules and projects I worked on in interviews / work discussions. Studying abroad sets your CV apart from most others, particularly if you can expand on your experience in the context of your career path.

On the other hand, if you are adventurous and ambitious with your class selection you may find that you really enjoy or really dislike certain subjects; in my experience, studying abroad allows you to tune into which subjects you are enjoying more than studying at your home university. In my case, I discovered that I have a serious interest in Embedded Systems. This has led me to working with embedded systems in my current internship, and I’m considering an embedded systems project for my FYP.

20. Would you consider working or living abroad again?

Yes, I certainly would. Some people seem to be born with wanderlust – I am not one of them! However, studying abroad forced me so far out of my comfort zone that, in the process of adapting, I learned new skills and gained new perspectives in ways that I couldn’t have otherwise. The idea of exposing myself to that culture shock again to grow as a person is exciting, despite how scary it can be at times.

21. Did you do any internships, research, or volunteering during your time abroad?

No, but I wish I had sought research opportunities (although this is better suited for people doing a full year as 1 semester is too short).. In the same vein as studying abroad enhances your CV for employers, working in academia while you are at it will astronomically increase your appeal. Again, this is something that requires forethought: research the available universities and which research areas they are engaged in. Sometimes the professor / lecturer / adviser you work with is more important than the work itself.

I would also caution against allowing intensive extracurriculars to dominate your time: you will have enough on your plate with social activities, travel, etc! An attempt at balance is key.

Reflection & Advice

22. What do you wish you had known before going abroad?

Naturally, people tend to associate the study abroad experience with cultural and social opportunity, the ability to travel and sightseeing. While I did my fair share of all of these things, I did not expect that my semester abroad would become such an opportunity for academic accomplishment. I suddenly had access to classes and lecturers I wouldn't otherwise have had, and in retrospect I wish I had more fully appreciated the chance to take interesting courses and boost my education. To sum it up, just because you're studying abroad doesn't mean that academic achievement has to go out the window; on the contrary, depending on your university and mindset, it can be the thing that most sets you apart from the rest!

23. What was the most rewarding part of the experience?

The two things I will treasure most from my 4 months abroad are the memories I made and the friends I made them with, both existing UCC pals and international students we picked up along the way. I was lucky enough to get a top-notch education while being exposed to a host of different cultures, with a smattering of travel thrown in. By far the most memorable semester of my college career.

24. What advice would you give someone thinking about studying abroad?

Do your research – this is an opportunity like no other, but only if you make the right decisions for YOU early on. How academic / laissez-faire do you want to be? How much travel do you want to do, and when (you can make travel plans on the fly, but it will cost you more)? Are there other friends & UCC students you would like to go with, or will you challenge yourself to go solo?

The cliché is true: no two people are the same, and no two study abroad students are looking for exactly the same experiences. If you had decided to commit to this, I would recommend going all-in.



General Experience

1. What country did you study in, and why did you choose that location?
 - I studied in Leipzig, Germany. I chose to do my studies here because of the course choices – I wanted to continue with multiple languages and Leipzig were one of the few universities to offer Catalan. I also liked that it was in Eastern Germany and quite close to the capital and also Poland and the Czech Republic.
 2. What was the most surprising part of your experience abroad?
 - One thing that surprised me is just how many Irish people were also here studying; you feel right at home sometimes. A few other things would be stereotypes that are completely the opposite of what you usually think Germans are like (not always, but Leipzig is a student city, and the youthful atmosphere is very different to some of the rural towns I've visited here).
 3. How did your expectations compare to the reality of living there?
 - I think most of my expectations were exceeded. I didn't really know what to expect and just went all in with an open mind. I've met amazing people and gotten to know a completely different culture and society over my time here.
 4. How was the application process (applying to UCC and the host university)
 - There are a lot of forms, and between delays, holidays, and different schedules there's a lot of waiting. Get things done early, keep track of them well, and don't stress when there's no responses. It comes around, and if not, pester like no tomorrow.
 5. Was communication good from your host university?
 - For the most part yes. When people aren't replying try to contact someone else relevant as a workaround.
 6. How did you find the information sessions provided from UCC? Do you have suggestions for other types of sessions we could provide?
 - I think they were good and set me up well for what was expected of me and what I should've expected going forward as well.
 7. Did you look at the study abroad canvas page?
 - I think near the beginning I visited it a few times just to read up on information, but otherwise not really – maybe I should have.
 8. If you did not get your first-choice university, is there any advice you can provide students about how to deal with this?
 - I did get my first choice, BUT, any other choice will work, and there're always ways to make things possible. A new experience anywhere is a positive thing not negative.
-

Academic Life

4. How was the education system different from your home country?
 - Lecture hours were scheduled within quarterly hour differences, one class lasts on average 90 minutes, timeliness is a concept that applies to only specific teachers, and the system here is oftentimes a lot slower. If you need something, see people in person, or get on to them early. I also found my classes to be a bit easier.
 5. What were your classes like, and did you face any challenges academically?
 - I mainly focused on language classes for a set of languages as part of my course, so I didn't have many lectures and large seminars like for law, physics, literature majors etc. They were fun, interesting, and catered to me if I was feeling behind. I took everything in German – that was a challenge. It takes effort to catch and understand, definitely take that into account if you're not studying in English.
 6. Did studying abroad change your academic interests or goals?
 - I've found a new interest for German and Catalan and have started looking more into translation and interpretation work. It's changed my perspective on living abroad, and mostly for the better.
 7. Did you face any difficulty getting into classes
 - As an Erasmus student unfortunately, we tend to get last pick over classes, which you register for on a first come first serve basis. That was a bit annoying, so back up plans were important. I did get rejected more than once, but in the end I've done everything I wanted to be doing.
 8. Did you meet/email with your UCC academic coordinator about your modules?
 - Yes, my plans and my reality often changed so there was continuous emailing making sure what I was doing was okay on UCC's side.
 9. What was the class registration process?
 - I studied on behalf of the Germanistik institute, and that meant I was registered under them. For most courses there is a registration window before the semester begins. Online on a platform called TOOL, you pick out these courses and hopefully get them. However you can also study other courses from different institutes, for these you have to directly register with either the lecturer or coordinator and they have to give you the greenlight.
-

Cultural Exchange

7. What was the biggest cultural difference you noticed?
 - Planning and overplanning are what make a lot of German bureaucracy quite slow.

- Drinking culture is different here as well, it's odd to see everyone drinking publicly.
- The way people speak to you and respond to you. Germans are quite difficult to be friends with, you have to spend quite a long time with them for people to soften up or for you to actually become buddies.

8. How did you adapt to the cultural and social norms?

- I befriended lots of people, went to lots of events and made sure I walked around the place without headphones on. I watched what people did, how they did it and why. I asked questions when I was confused. I consulted the internet, I watched German news. Try to be German! See what that means.

9. Did you experience any culture shock or reverse culture shock?

- A little bit but not much. I come from a multicultural background, that helps.

Personal Growth

10. How did studying abroad change you personally?

- I feel more confident, genuine and tolerant. I think it threw me into the deep end of independence and providing for myself. I feel more well-equipped to deal with the ups and downs of living and I think I've become a more open person.

11. What new skills or perspectives did you gain?

- Organising, leading and planning improves a lot when you must do it all yourself or for yourself and 10 others.
- I've learned about a lot of others' lives and perspectives.
- My cooking has improved.
- My German has sky rocketed.
- My social skills are better – you really have to get yourself out there, you can't do that silently.

12. What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?

- A lot of misunderstandings, a lot of form-filling and translating and double checking. You have to be patient and attentive. And ask for help when you need it. It's not silly when it's important.
- Studying isn't always easy, especially when classes are difficult or if something happens, so you have to take a step back and let yourself relax and exist sometimes too.

Practical Aspects

13. How did you manage housing, food, and transportation while abroad?

- I went for student housing and was lucky enough to get a room before I came to Leipzig. I had a yearly contract. I had a roommate. We shared some stuff, some not, and split the cleaning. Always kept communication open.
- I love cooking so I just budgeted for what I really needed first before allowing myself to buy extras.
- The university fee includes a semester ticket for all second-rate transport across the whole of Germany. It only excludes high speed trains. It's brilliant and I wish I had that in Ireland. If you're going somewhere remote, use bikes or if you have the confidence, rent a car. They have a car-share system in place.

14. What advice would you give on budgeting or saving money for study abroad?

- Take it seriously.
- Always cover priorities and essentials first. If it helps, create a separate account from which your rent and other utilities will be taken from. Calculate what that should be monthly and put in a lump sum in there so you can forget about it.
- I used revolut and transferred myself money to spend, that way I had to consciously add money for expenditure and didn't invisibly spend it from my main BOI account.
- Between trips, food, culture and everything in between, you WILL spend money, and you have to know it's okay to. You ought to experience what you can, just make sure you're warm at night and have food. Provide for yourself.
- Track excel sheets if it helps. Make lists on paper to estimate what you'll spend in certain months if you've prebooked things, then adjust your allowed expenditure accordingly.

15. How did you handle language barriers (if there were any)?

- Keep trying and don't give up.
- Learn, learn, learn.
- Use translators if you need to or ask someone for help.

16. If you had to apply for a visa, how did this process go for you? (can you include what steps you had to take to apply for the visa)

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17. If you registered for additional supports (learning supports, counselling etc), do you feel the host university offered suitable services for you?

- ---

Social Life & Networking

16. Did you make friends from other countries? How did those relationships influence you?

- I did, and plenty. I've changed my food palette, my opinions and my perspectives on a lot of topics. They've been amazing as help, and for

bonding because we were all dealing with the same things from very individual backgrounds. You learn a lot.

17. Were there any memorable local traditions or events you participated in?

- I've went to protests, beer gardens, been at parks and played with Germans, been to flea markets and eaten at Currywurst stands. There's a lot that goes on, just by living in the city you end up involuntarily participating in all of its shenanigans. When I went to other places in Germany, I tried to see what set them apart as well.

18. How did you stay in touch with people back home?

- I called them regularly, or asked the odd, "hey how are ya?"
 - I came back on two occasions, namely Christmas, and then in May but because my siblings were graduating.
-

Career & Future Plans

19. Has your experience abroad influenced your career path?

- In many ways I'm sure it has. I'm still figuring that out.

20. Would you consider working or living abroad again?

- Absolutely. It's solidified my want for wanting to in the first place.

21. Did you do any internships, research, or volunteering during your time abroad?

- No I haven't. Some friends have and they seemed really happy about their experiences.
-

Reflection & Advice

22. What do you wish you had known before going abroad?

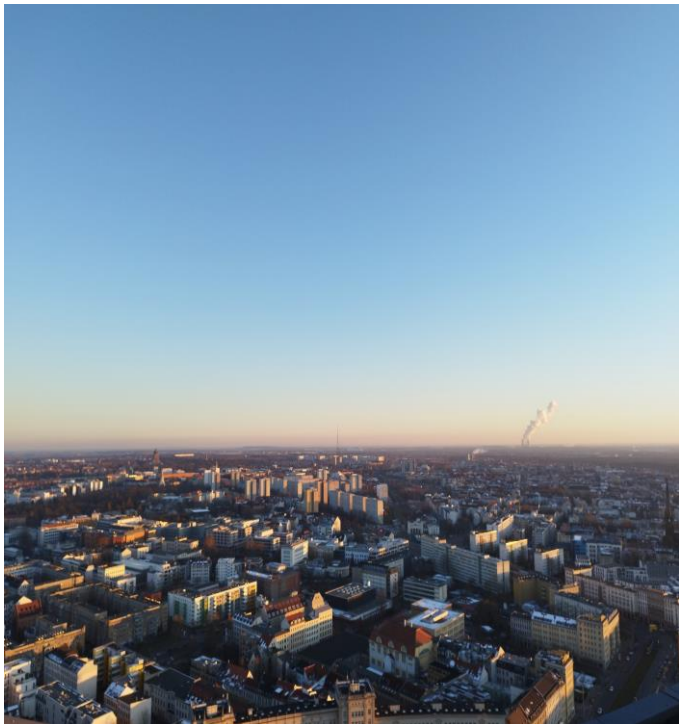
- There's a lot more you have to deal with than just yourself and some forms for registration. You start to juggle a lot more than you think is possible, but it's all feasible when you put your mind to it.

23. What was the most rewarding part of the experience?

- Embracing every last bit. Eating and hanging out with other cultures. Visiting new places, cities, and countries. Learning new languages and new words. Participating in events and eating döner kebabs like there's no tomorrow.

24. What advice would you give someone thinking about studying abroad?

- Do it. It'll be tough and not really that simple at first, but you'll learn a lot, and you'll change and grow in ways you wouldn't at home. Go see the world, it's worth it.



General Experience

- 1. What country did you study in, and why did you choose that location?** I studied in Lyon, France. I study French as part of my degree and I chose the city in particular because it wasn't as busy as Paris but I was still able to have the experience of city living
- 2. What was the most surprising part of your experience abroad?** I missed home a lot more than I expected I would. The lack of organisation/communication in terms of administration in France was quite surprising too, you really have to go looking for all of the information yourself
- 3. How did your expectations compare to the reality of living there?** Lyon was a lovely city to live in, it was a busy city which matched my expectations. However, the amenities are more spread out than I expected. (Supermarkets, pharmacies, etc)
- 4. How was the application process (applying to UCC and the host university)** The application was very smooth on both the UCC and host university side, all online. I found the learning agreement quite confusing.
- 5. Was communication good from your host university?** Not particularly, we didn't have any guidance on timetables up until we had already arrived in France, I ended up missing the first week of lectures in some modules because we hadn't been provided with the information from the university but the classes had already started
- 6. How did you find the information sessions provided from UCC? Do you have suggestions for other types of sessions we could provide?** The information sessions were good, I particularly liked the checklist style presentations. No further sessions needed in my opinion
- 7. Did you look at the study abroad canvas page?** Yes, I frequently referred back to it throughout my time abroad
- 8. If you did not get your first-choice university, is there any advice you can provide students about how to deal with this?** N/A

Academic Life

- 4. How was the education system different from your home country?** Classes started at 8am and could run until 8pm. Lectures were 3 hours long. For my particular field of study there were no tutorials or seminars, it is very self-guided study. The weighting of credits per module is much lower. I took 8 modules per semester to the equivalent of 52 credits, but the lecture hours were the same as a 5 credit module in Ireland.
- 5. What were your classes like, and did you face any challenges academically?** All of my classes were taught through French so learning in a language other than my mother tongue was the biggest challenge.
- 6. Did studying abroad change your academic interests or goals?** It changed them for that particular year, as I had to be gracious with myself knowing that achieving the same standard in French as in English was not possible, particularly while navigating living away from home too.

7. **Did you face any difficulty getting into classes?** Yes, but only because of timetable clashes
 8. **Did you mee/email with your UCC academic coordinator about your modules?** No, they were approved on my learning agreement by him
 9. **What was the class registration process?** Classes were selected online.
-

Cultural Exchange

7. **What was the biggest cultural difference you noticed?** The lack of chatty nature of the French. You could go a whole day sitting beside people in lectures without any conversation. Very different to Ireland !
 8. **How did you adapt to the cultural and social norms?** I adapted to the norms a bit, eating at more typical French times, dressing more typically for college. However, I have returned to my original habits since returning home.
 9. **Did you experience any culture shock or reverse culture shock?** Not particularly
-

Personal Growth

10. **How did studying abroad change you personally?** Studying abroad entirely changed my perspective on things. I have a whole new appreciation for UCC, and the way my degree is taught there. I appreciate the comforts of home so much more now. I really discovered the things that are most important to me while abroad.
 11. **What new skills or perspectives did you gain?** I gained the perspective on what little things positively and negatively affect my life
 12. **What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?** I seriously struggled with homesickness. I balanced it with trips home and visits from family where it was financially and physically possible.
-

Practical Aspects

13. **How did you manage housing, food, and transportation while abroad?** I organised my housing through an association partnered with the university. I got a monthly transport pass which cost €25. I had a weekly grocery budget, and I meal prepped a lot.
14. **What advice would you give on budgeting or saving money for study abroad?** I would say to not be unreasonable, there will be certain things that are going to go outside of budget, but if you are fairly consistent around spending, the habits will stick. Make sure to live, not just survive !
15. **How did you handle language barriers (if there were any)?** Translate apps and preparing for a conversation before it happened. Bringing a friend for help, combined we have more language knowledge

16. If you had to apply for a visa, how did this process go for you? (can you include what steps you had to take to apply for the visa) N/A

17. If you registered for additional supports (learning supports, counselling etc), do you feel the host university offered suitable services for you? N/A

Social Life & Networking

16. Did you make friends from other countries? How did those relationships influence you? Yes I made friends from multiple different countries. I found it really interesting to hear about their different cultures and to bond over the shared study abroad experiences.

17. Were there any memorable local traditions or events you participated in? Fete des Lumieres, Irish in Lyon events and the Christmas markets are the most memorable. As well as rugby and ice hockey matches I went to.

18. How did you stay in touch with people back home? Texting and calling.

Career & Future Plans

19. Has your experience abroad influenced your career path? Yes, I would like to work abroad for a while in the future, but it has confirmed for me that I would like to be based in Ireland in the longrun

20. Would you consider working or living abroad again? Yes

21. Did you do any internships, research, or volunteering during your time abroad? I volunteered for the local gaa club tournament while abroad. It was a very fun experience, meeting new people and especially meeting Irish people who have been living in France with decades and the stories behind how they ended up there.

Reflection & Advice

22. What do you wish you had known before going abroad? How everything administrative will take patience. And that having lived away from home in Ireland is really not the same as moving to another country. There are lots of other difficulties to deal with, and it is much harder than I had prepared myself for it to be. Also, a lot of the social events are alcohol based, and as someone who doesn't drink, it takes balance and navigation to socialise and not feel left out while still maintaining your lifestyle.

23. What was the most rewarding part of the experience? The improvement in my language abilities

24. What advice would you give someone thinking about studying abroad? Make sure and choose your location wisely, pick somewhere that follows your lifestyle. If the option is there, go with people you know, they become your family. Consider what your

weaknesses and sensitivities are here in Ireland first and plan how you would deal with them abroad. Make a pros and cons list for anything and everything !



General Experience

1. **What country did you study in, and why did you choose that location?** I studied in the city of Groningen in the Netherlands. I had never visited the Netherlands prior to my exchange but I was attracted to the scenery and the culture of the country (the art, history, people etc) so I wished to explore it. I chose Groningen because it is a student city, not too large and it's far enough from the crowds and tourism of Amsterdam.
2. **What was the most surprising part of your experience abroad?** Cycling! I thought I could get away with walking and using public transport but cycling was an absolute necessity and made life so much easier. I was surprised how much I ended up loving it, and how much I miss it now. Cycling in the Netherlands is very different to Ireland because there are so many cyclists and the cities and roads are really designed for your benefit.
3. **How did your expectations compare to the reality of living there?**
4. **How was the application process (applying to UCC and the host university)**
There was a lot more paperwork (digital) and admin work involved than I originally thought, both before leaving, during my stay and after returning! It was important to keep on top of what I had and had not submitted and to make sure everything was up to date.
5. **Was communication good from your host university?** Yes, they were not as quick to respond as UCC staff, but were helpful and accommodating on the whole.
6. **How did you find the information sessions provided from UCC? Do you have suggestions for other types of sessions we could provide?** Not overly helpful, as generally different degrees and programmes were combined into one large session, meaning a lot of information was discussed which was not relevant to me. Once or twice, the sessions also clashed with a lecture or seminar which I then had to miss.
7. **Did you look at the study abroad canvas page?** Yes, when completing my Online Learning Agreement, the example template on the canvas page was helpful
8. **If you did not get your first-choice university, is there any advice you can provide students about how to deal with this?** The city I got was my third choice and I was initially apprehensive and a little disappointed I didn't get my first or second. However, it ended up being such a great fit and a brilliant experience. The year really is what you make of it, so even if you don't get your first choice, you get out of the Erasmus what you put into it.

Furthermore, in my case, I knew I definitely wanted to go to the Netherlands and, although I had preferences for cities and universities, wherever I got was good because it was more about the country for me. All the universities I listed on my application were Dutch so I knew that even if I didn't get my first choice, I'd be going to my country of choice regardless.

Academic Life

4. **How was the education system different from your home country?** A lot more class participation and discussion is expected, encouraged (or even mandatory in some classes). More presentation and group work than home. Classes are more interactive than Ireland
 5. **What were your classes like, and did you face any challenges academically?** I was initially enrolled in a Linguistics class that was too high for my level as I had never studied it before, so I was transferred to a beginner's class.
 6. **Did studying abroad change your academic interests or goals?** It cemented to me which areas of my degree do and do not interest me, and I will be sure to choose modules accordingly when I return home
 7. **Did you face any difficulty getting into classes** Yes, I often did not get my first choice of classes, but alternatives were offered
 8. **Did you mee/email with your UCC academic coordinator about your modules?** Yes, often, to ensure I was meeting my necessary academic goals. Matthieu Nivard was my academic coordinator and he was so extremely helpful and accommodating
 9. **What was the class registration process?** We were sent a long list of available modules and then a preference sheet where we numbered 1-3 which classes we wanted to take each semester, plus two back-up options. We then received the sheet back, letting us know which classes we had been enrolled in and which we hadn't (sometimes we were enrolled in alternative classes which hadn't been listed at all, but ones which were still related to our degrees in topic)
-

Cultural Exchange

7. **What was the biggest cultural difference you noticed?**
 8. **How did you adapt to the cultural and social norms?**
 9. **Did you experience any culture shock or reverse culture shock?**
-

Personal Growth

10. **How did studying abroad change you personally?**
 11. **What new skills or perspectives did you gain?** I learned a lot of academic skills. Because the academic stakes were low for the year abroad I had the chance to try new study skills and learned more efficient ways to study and to write essays.
 12. **What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?**
-

Practical Aspects

13. **How did you manage housing, food, and transportation while abroad?** Housing: student housing with a Dutch company called the SSH, I had to register early and booking was competitive. Transportation: I rented a bike from 'Swapfiets' and paid on

a monthly basis, any necessary repairs were quick and totally free. I also got a student mobility card (for which you pay a monthly fee and get reduced fares), the Dutch equivalent of a leap card, which I used on the train (useful) and the bus (didn't use very often, you could just tap on and off with your phone / card if you wanted). Food: it's worth shopping around to find the cheaper stores for groceries, e.g Plus was cheaper than Jumbo, Jumbo was cheaper than Albert Heijn, etc.

14. What advice would you give on budgeting or saving money for study abroad?

Look into apps like TooGoodToGo and see what's available in your area. If there are good thrift stores near you, use them. I bought all my kitchen appliances, cutlery, pots, pans, plates, stationary, cups, mugs, clothes, etc. from Mammamini and the prices were incredibly cheap (plus good quality)

15. How did you handle language barriers (if there were any)?

16. If you had to apply for a visa, how did this process go for you? (can you include what steps you had to take to apply for the visa)

17. If you registered for additional supports (learning supports, counselling etc), do you feel the host university offered suitable services for you? I registered for a counselling support (unrelated to Erasmus life) but received a disappointing reply from the university, and no follow-up

Social Life & Networking

16. Did you make friends from other countries? How did those relationships influence you? Yes, my friendship group was all non-Irish (some Dutch and some German). It was so refreshing and exciting to mix with other cultures.

17. Were there any memorable local traditions or events you participated in?

18. How did you stay in touch with people back home? Messaging and video call, planning things to do when visiting home, planning visits to other friends who were on Erasmus

Career & Future Plans

19. Has your experience abroad influenced your career path?

20. Would you consider working or living abroad again? Yes, definitely. And I'd love to travel to the Netherlands again

21. Did you do any internships, research, or volunteering during your time abroad? I volunteered at a local children's centre. I worked in the craft department and mixed with children from different cultures and backgrounds

Reflection & Advice

- 22. What do you wish you had known before going abroad?** How quickly it would go. How a lot of Semester 1 was just settling in and laying the foundations for really enjoying Semester 2.
- 23. What was the most rewarding part of the experience?** Having a familiarity with a foreign place, friends and family visiting and giving them a tour, getting used to streets and routes and not needing Google maps to navigate anymore!
- 24. What advice would you give someone thinking about studying abroad?** It was such a great experience for me so I would 100% recommend it. Be aware of expenses, available grants, and the amount of paperwork and prep involved. Make lists, keep on top of what you have done and what you have left to do. Keep a secure list of passwords you make for new accounts– there will be lots of them! If you want to get a job while on Erasmus, look into it as early as possible and also research regulations surrounding work while on exchange (do you need local health insurance or a local bank account). Take lots of pictures. The year will be what you make it and take from it, so do what makes *you* happy



25.









Universidad de Malaga (Commerce Faculty)

General Experience

1. What country did you study in, and why did you choose that location?

I studied with the University of Malaga in Spain. I chose this location as it seemed like a vibrant city, full of students and culture. I also took into account the difficulty of Spanish in different regions depending on dialect and accents, as from previous students I had learned that Spanish was often much harder to grasp in the North of Spain.

2. What was the most surprising part of your experience abroad?

I was surprised by how helpful the students and staff were in my college, I studied in the faculty of Commerce, as I had heard that the academic side of Erasmus can often be the most difficult aspect as many international students don't get the opportunity to form relationships with the students. However, I was very lucky that I became friends with the Spanish students in my course, which greatly helped my level of Spanish as well as my academic experience.

3. How did your expectations compare to the reality of living there?

At first I was quite nervous, as I was moving to a new city, away from my friends and family, speaking in a language that I was not confident in. However, I found that I assimilated into Spanish life very quickly and that the city was not so difficult to navigate thanks to their efficient bus and underground system. I also did not expect to meet so many Erasmus students from other countries, I believe that having people who were in the same boat as me made the Erasmus process much easier.

4. How was the application process (applying to UCC and the host university)

As the Erasmus programme has been ongoing for multiple years, I found it quite easy and straightforward to complete the application process, considering UCC is well experienced in this aspect it was a rather smooth process.

5. Was communication good from your host university?

I ran into some difficulty with administration as correspondence often takes longer than in UCC, so I often found it best to meet with college staff in person or ask questions directly to the reception at my faculty.

6. How did you find the information sessions provided from UCC? Do you have suggestions for other types of sessions we could provide?

I found the information sessions very informative and helpful, especially since I could contact the coordinators directly about any questions I had before and during my Erasmus, advice and help was offered quickly.

7. Did you look at the study abroad canvas page?

I found that the information provided through the Canvas page to be very helpful and gave me a good idea of what to expect on my year abroad.

8. If you did not get your first-choice university, is there any advice you can provide students about how to deal with this?

Academic Life

4. How was the education system different from your home country?

I found that the style of lectures and education was quite relaxed and lecturers were often quite understanding of my level of Spanish and made accommodations regarding this, so don't be afraid to ask your lecturers for help.

5. What were your classes like, and did you face any challenges academically?

I found the language barrier a bit difficult at the start, but you quickly adjust and by semester two I found that my understanding of lectures greatly improved.

6. Did studying abroad change your academic interests or goals?

I found it made me more open to the idea of working or living abroad in the future.

7. Did you face any difficulty getting into classes

I was able to switch classes depending on my schedule as there was often clashes with my timetable.

8. Did you mee/email with your UCC academic coordinator about your modules?

I found that regarding module changes I was able to resolve this within my receiving college, however I did email them about issues with my modules.

9. What was the class registration process?

All classes were registered through the college's platform Algoria, however for timetable changes I contacted the secretary of my faculty.

Cultural Exchange

7. What was the biggest cultural difference you noticed?

I didn't find that I experienced much cultural differences besides the fact that my daily routine in terms of classes and social activities ran later into the evening and night.

8. How did you adapt to the cultural and social norms?

I found after a few days I naturally adapted to this change.

9. Did you experience any culture shock or reverse culture shock?

No

Personal Growth

10. How did studying abroad change you personally?

There were far more class presentations which I believe improved my confidence and level of Spanish.

11. What new skills or perspectives did you gain?

My social skills improved a lot as well as my self-sufficiency.

12. What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?

I learned to become more self-reliant and as it was difficult moving to a new country where I didn't know anyone but putting myself out there really helped.

Practical Aspects

13. How did you manage housing, food, and transportation while abroad?

Malaga has a great public transport system and many options in terms of grocery shopping for people with different intolerances and allergies so this aspect was quite easy.

14. What advice would you give on budgeting or saving money for study abroad?

Malaga is generally cheaper than Ireland so budgeting is not too hard, I believe the Erasmus grant helped a lot.

15. How did you handle language barriers (if there were any)?

In my region of Andalusia the accent was a bit more difficult to understand so I would recommend trying to practice as often as you can, even small interactions in restaurants and shops can be a great help.

16. If you had to apply for a visa, how did this process go for you? (can you include what steps you had to take to apply for the visa)

17. If you registered for additional supports (learning supports, counselling etc), do you feel the host university offered suitable services for you?

Social Life & Networking

16. Did you make friends from other countries? How did those relationships influence you?

I made friends with both other Erasmus students and Spanish students from my college, friends which I still keep in regular contact with now. I would recommend taking a look at Malaga Southern Experiences on Instagram, they organise a lot of events and trips for Erasmus students.

17. Were there any memorable local traditions or events you participated in?

There were many parades and festivals throughout the year which were a huge part of deepening my understanding of the culture in Malaga.

18. How did you stay in touch with people back home?

Mostly by phone or FaceTime.

Career & Future Plans

19. Has your experience abroad influenced your career path?

Definitely, I am now considering working abroad or travelling after I finish my degree.

20. Would you consider working or living abroad again?

Yes

21. Did you do any internships, research, or volunteering during your time abroad?

No

Reflection & Advice

22. What do you wish you had known before going abroad?

I was quite nervous before my Erasmus however there are many resources and organisations which made this transition a lot easier.

23. What was the most rewarding part of the experience?

The friendships I made.

24. What advice would you give someone thinking about studying abroad?

Try to put yourself out there as much as possible and remember all of the other Erasmus students are in the same boat as you so try to embrace this experience as much as possible.



Zhaw (Chemistry)

General Experience

1. What country did you study in, and why did you choose that location?

Switzerland. It was a very convenient exchange as I did not require a foreign language to do the programme. It was also practical research based, which was preferable to lectures for chemistry.

2. What was the most surprising part of your experience abroad?

I fit in very well with choirs that were entirely Swiss, and the cultural overlap was welcome with my peers.

3. How did your expectations compare to the reality of living there?

My expectations were exceeded.

4. How was the application process (applying to UCC and the host university)

There had been a switch to an online application portal while I was filling out the documentation, but this was reasonably straightforward.

5. Was communication good from your host university?

Communication was excellent, and support from the international office staff was fantastic.

6. How did you find the information sessions provided from UCC? Do you have suggestions for other types of sessions we could provide?

I don't recall using them, as it was not Erasmus per-se, much of the information was not pertinent.

7. Did you look at the study abroad canvas page?

No

8. If you did not get your first-choice university, is there any advice you can provide students about how to deal with this?

Academic Life

4. How was the education system different from your home country?

The lab work was almost entirely independent, and allowed me to fail and learn, something crucial to research. I had no issue with asking other researchers for help, and the environment and facilities were excellent. The lectures (1 day of lectures per week in green chemistry) didn't capture my interest as much as lectures in UCC, though the exam was very manageable.

5. What were your classes like, and did you face any challenges academically?

The lectures were an hour away by train, between 10:00 – 15:30 with breaks. There were MSc. students there and the lectures were in English. As a native speaker, I think I was in a better position than the other students for the exam and presentation, which were in English.

6. Did studying abroad change your academic interests or goals?

After completing the research project, I feel more strongly about pursuing a PhD in Ireland. If I fail to get funding I intend to do a MSc. In Switzerland.

7. Did you face any difficulty getting into classes

The train to Olten for lectures was expensive, and it was a surprise to the international office that we (2 of us) had been registered with lectures so far away.

8. Did you meet/email with your UCC academic coordinator about your modules?

No, though adequate information was given when applying for the exchange.

9. What was the class registration process?

Signing into the education portal and checking a box.

Cultural Exchange

7. What was the biggest cultural difference you noticed?

Drinking culture is not a big thing in Switzerland, though that's mostly because of the price, so house parties are more popular.

8. How did you adapt to the cultural and social norms?

I was more aware of speaking to non-native English speakers, as slang and particularly Irish slang doesn't translate well. Humour usually still came across quite well though.

9. Did you experience any culture shock or reverse culture shock?

Personal Growth

10. How did studying abroad change you personally?

I've become more independent and confident in myself. Living with someone in my course strengthened our friendship greatly, and we made life-long academic and social memories.

11. What new skills or perspectives did you gain?

Being in two Swiss choirs as the only international student was difficult sometimes, but I've become a more confident singer, and my research in the lab has strengthened my practical skills in chemistry as well as opening my eyes to the possibility of doing research in Switzerland.

12. What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?

The apartment we lived in had no microwave, so I was cooking fresh most days. The price of groceries (particularly meat) was higher than Ireland, so I was cooking with a lot of vegetables, and bringing meals to the lab for lunch.

Practical Aspects

13. How did you manage housing, food, and transportation while abroad?

Transport discount cards were a necessity, and while it was expensive (210 CHF combined), it meant I was paying half-fares and had free transport before/after certain times. Housing was sorted through an organisation with the university (WOKO), though I would recommend finding accommodation with a private owner, as their communication was poor and the tenancy rules were stringent. Buying discounted/reduced food was necessary, especially for meat. Shops like CO-OP, Migros and Denner were the main places I shopped at. Online stores like Galaxus were used for everything outside food, with excellent prices compared to brick-and-mortar shops.

14. What advice would you give on budgeting or saving money for study abroad?

Set aside a portion of the money you make from working so that you don't have to miss out on events abroad. Eating smart will keep your spending lower, and Erasmus Student Network events are very cheap, so get involved with them. Alias, another student event organisation, has weekly student meetups and other events with cheap alcohol and food, and many students go to these events.

15. How did you handle language barriers (if there were any)?

I studied German for 6 years, though found it difficult to understand Swiss German. 90% of people spoke English to a good level, though at times there were interactions with older individuals who didn't attempt to speak English or ask a colleague to talk to me instead. Registering at the municipality for my study period was quite interesting, having to do this entirely in German because the person there didn't ask for assistance.

16. If you had to apply for a visa, how did this process go for you? (can you include what steps you had to take to apply for the visa)

N/A

17. If you registered for additional supports (learning supports, counselling etc), do you feel the host university offered suitable services for you?

N/A

Social Life & Networking

16. Did you make friends from other countries? How did those relationships influence you?

I made friends through the choirs I was in and got to introduce some Irish culture to them. I performed in two concerts and have kept in contact with these people. Most students in Waedenswil (location of ZHAW) were environmental engineers, but discussing STEM came easily, and there were subsidised university parties that also helped the socialising with my lab peers.

17. Were there any memorable local traditions or events you participated in?

I got to sing in Swiss German and Rumantsch (Niche cultural language, like that of Irish) at concerts for religious holidays. The second concert was for the Ascension, and the church had

set up benches and music for the village. I visited Lucerne for Fasnachtsmarkt, an event the week before Carnival, where there were parades of brass bands and people in costume.

18. How did you stay in touch with people back home?

I called my parents around once a week and texted my friends most days. I sent postcards to my friends and family. Some of them visited while I was abroad.

Career & Future Plans

19. Has your experience abroad influenced your career path?

I intend to do a PhD in Ireland, or a MSc in Switzerland if I don't get funding.

20. Would you consider working or living abroad again?

I would return to Switzerland once I have work in the chemical industry, and intend to settle in continental Europe.

21. Did you do any internships, research, or volunteering during your time abroad?

Most of my exchange consisted of practical and literature research, though there wasn't anything outside of this.

Reflection & Advice

22. What do you wish you had known before going abroad

I shouldn't have brought so many winter clothes; it was a pain having to ship them back to Ireland. The Swiss summer is very hot.

23. What was the most rewarding part of the experience?

I loved singing with foreign choirs, and the independence I had in the lab was fantastic.

24. What advice would you give someone thinking about studying abroad?

Do it. It's the easiest excuse to live abroad, and having the opportunity to do it as part of your studies is a great way to see if post-graduate studies abroad could be for you.



General Experience

1. What country did you study in, and why did you choose that location?

France and Spain, I chose these countries because I would like to teach French and Spanish

2. What was the most surprising part of your experience abroad?
3. How did your expectations compare to the reality of living there?
4. How was the application process (applying to UCC and the host university)

It was very smooth, and I received positive support from both UCC and the host universities

5. Was communication good from your host university?

They were both good

6. How did you find the information sessions provided by UCC? Do you have suggestions for other types of sessions we could provide?
7. Did you look at the study abroad canvas page?

I did

8. If you did not get your first-choice university, is there any advice you can provide students about how to deal with this?

Academic Life

4. How was the education system different from your home country?

There were significantly fewer classes abroad compared to UCC. I would have 1-2 classes a day

5. What were your classes like, and did you face any challenges academically?

Classes were very chill and quite casual, and I didn't face any challenges

6. Did studying abroad change your academic interests or goals?

It inspired me to branch out more in my chosen career field

7. Did you face any difficulty getting into classes

I didn't face any difficulties

8. Did you meet/email with your UCC academic coordinator about your modules?

I just emailed them

9. What was the class registration process?

It was all done online

Cultural Exchange

7. What was the biggest cultural difference you noticed?

In Spain, everything is open much later compared to here and they're very big on expressing love

In France, I felt like the French students were close-minded and didn't really want to interact with the international students

8. How did you adapt to the cultural and social norms?

9. Did you experience any culture shock or reverse culture shock?

Personal Growth

10. How did studying abroad change you personally?

I'm more open to trying new things now

11. What new skills or perspectives did you gain?

Having to adapt quickly to a busy city lifestyle

12. What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?

Practical Aspects

13. How did you manage housing, food, and transportation while abroad?

I had financial support with the erasmus grant, SAF and SUSI

14. What advice would you give on budgeting or saving money for study abroad?

Use the summer before you leave to really save up for emergencies

15. How did you handle language barriers (if there were any)?

There weren't any for me

16. If you had to apply for a visa, how did this process go for you? (can you include what steps you had to take to apply for the visa)

17. If you registered for additional supports (learning supports, counselling etc), do you feel the host university offered suitable services for you?

Social Life & Networking

16. Did you make friends from other countries? How did those relationships influence you?

I made friends with people from various countries. I got to learn about other cultures and learn about other people's way of life

17. Were there any memorable local traditions or events you participated in?

18. How did you stay in touch with people back home?

Constant texting and calls every now and then

Career & Future Plans

19. Has your experience abroad influenced your career path?

It has

20. Would you consider working or living abroad again?

I definitely would

21. Did you do any internships, research, or volunteering during your time abroad?

I volunteered as an English Language Assistant when I was in France

Reflection & Advice

22. What do you wish you had known before going abroad?

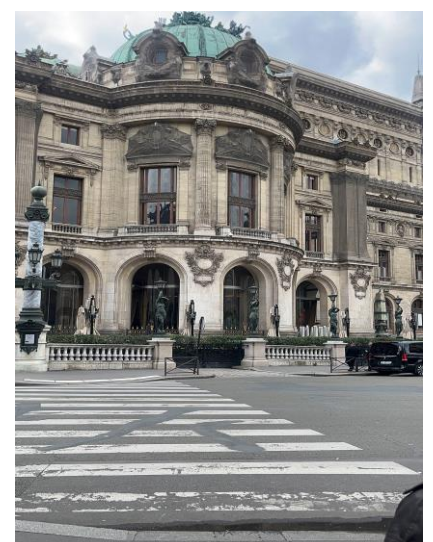
The prices of groceries

23. What was the most rewarding part of the experience?

Improving my language skills

24. What advice would you give someone thinking about studying abroad?

Don't overstress, everything always works itself out and most importantly have fun



My Erasmus Experience in Rennes, France

General Experience

I decided to spend my year abroad in Rennes, France because it is a major student based city with a lot of facilities and services suited for international students. I found it quite easy to navigate and it had a nice and relaxed atmosphere in day-to-day life, which appealed to me greatly.

The most surprising aspect was how easily and quickly I found myself settling into my new home for a couple of months, and also how perfectly suited the city was for my needs. The reality of living in Rennes absolutely exceeded my expectations by falling in love with it from the moment I arrived, including its unique beauty, the culture and the friendliness of the people. The application process for my host university, (Université Rennes 2) wasn't necessarily hard, however it was quite lengthy and so it took some time to read through the various documents and to fully understand everything, so just remember to be patient with it!

Academic Life

The French education system is significantly different to Ireland, from what I had experienced. The university modules had much lower credits and so I had to take up a numerous amount of classes, but I personally thought the workload wasn't as difficult as I was expecting it to be. Most of my classes were about 1-2 hours a week and so that allowed me to do a lot of other things in my free time.

There was a broad range of topics to choose from in the modules catalogue and so I was able to pick the topics that interested me the most, such as translation and multilingualism, for example. I thoroughly enjoyed these classes as they enhanced my understanding and interest in those subjects.

Unfortunately, in the second semester Rennes 2 students began to strike and protest against the French government, which led to the closure of the university for several weeks. Despite this, there were some online resources available to compensate for it. Communication was clear and honest from the university and they did their best to help the international students during this period. We made UCC aware of this situation and they showed great support also.

Cultural Exchange

I was surprised to learn about Rennes' celtic roots which plays an important role in their culture. I noticed several similarities between the Breton and Irish languages, therefore I felt a strong connection to my home in Ireland when I was abroad. I adapted very quickly into society there due to its sense of familiarity. A few things that surprised me were how traditional the people were, in comparison to other major cities in France. For example, most shops and businesses were closed every Sunday, which took me a while to get used to, and I also noticed how much they love to celebrate unique events that have been taking place for hundreds of years!

Personal Growth

I have definitely changed for the better after my year abroad. I have become more outgoing and confident in general but I believe that these are important aspects to have when settling into a new environment and meeting new people! I have gained a lot of independence as it was my very first time living out of home, so I quickly learned how to look after myself entirely. My whole perspective of things changed completely as everything was different and new and I had no choice but to figure things out in my own way, which is now a very beneficial skill for me to have. Of course there are moments where I was feeling homesick, but thankfully it never lasted long because of the support from home and from my new friends!

Practical Aspects

I was incredibly lucky to be placed in university accommodation, which was located directly across the road from Rennes 2, and right next to the metro station. The transport system was very reliable, with easy access to buses and metros every couple of minutes, which made the city very easy to travel around. I would highly recommend applying for Crous housing while in France as they have accommodations in a lot of cities, and the rent is very affordable!

In regards to budgeting and financing, it would be best to plan in advance for activities and for shopping and to keep track of your weekly spending.

I struggled with the language barrier during the first few weeks abroad, mostly because I wasn't confident enough in my speaking skills, however I am lucky that most people I interacted with were patient and willing to help and trying to understand the conversation. The most common issue I had was when I spoke French, I would receive an answer in English which was a bit disappointing at first but after a while it was getting easier to converse entirely through French as I was improving.

Social Life & Networking

The ESN (Erasmus Student Network) is a fantastic way to meet people and to make new friends. There were many events and meetups organised for international students every week and that's how I got to make both international and Irish friends. We spent a lot of time learning and talking about our own countries and cultures which I found fascinating and I'm glad to have these new connections with people from all over the world! I believe that the friends I've made in Rennes will be friends for life as we bonded over so much, during a shared experience. I was able to contact my family and friends at home almost everyday through social media and video calls, which was also a great help for minimising homesickness.

Reflection & Advice

I absolutely recommend studying abroad. It was undoubtedly the best experience of my life and I found it to be super beneficial in many aspects such as personal and academic growth and creating long term international connections.

Something I wish I knew before going abroad was that everyone's experience is different and that you have to make it your own. It is completely normal to feel scared or unsure about this new change but after a while it will definitely get easier and there are always people there to support you no matter what. The most important thing is to put yourself out there and try new things even if you are nervous! And remember to enjoy every moment!



ESN Pub Crawl



Jersey Night with my new Irish friends!



A visit to the Mont Saint Michel



Playing on the Rennes GAA team

General Experience

What country did you study in, and why did you choose that location?

I studied at University of Cologne in Germany. I chose Germany because I study German and French (World Languages) so had to study in either a German-speaking or French-speaking country. I chose Cologne specifically because I liked that it is one of Germany's largest cities and is renowned for being very welcoming, fun and open minded.

What was the most surprising part of your experience abroad?

I think I was surprised how many peaks and troughs there were. It was sometimes quite stressful and isolating, particularly in the beginning, but I also had some of the most enjoyable and memorable experiences of my life. The difference between these two points was at times surprising, but looking back on it, both the good periods and the bad periods helped me grow.

How did your expectations compare to the reality of living there?

I tried not to go in with too many expectations. I had never been to Germany before, so I didn't have many ideas about what the country would be like. In terms of the Erasmus experience I would say it matched up with what I expected and had heard from others.

How was the application process (applying to UCC and the host university)

The application process is long and at times pretty tiresome, especially at the host university where all the procedures and systems are different. However, I think once you complete all the forms, everything is signed off and in place, it gave me a sense of satisfaction knowing everything was sorted and taken care of.

Was communication good from your host university?

On the administration side they were pretty good. They sent out detailed emails at key points in the year regarding registration, exams, learning agreement, results etc, however there was very little communication of other activities, help or tips etc. regarding settling into Germany and meeting other Erasmus students.

How did you find the information sessions provided from UCC? Do you have suggestions for other types of sessions we could provide?

I found them to be of good quality and provided all the information required without being overwhelming. Perhaps, sessions focusing on expectations would be useful and allowing space to talk about the positive and negative experiences they would be expected to face.

Did you look at the study abroad canvas page?

Yes, mainly to find the documents and forms etc referenced in the emails from the study abroad office.

If you did not get your first-choice university, is there any advice you can provide students about how to deal with this?

I got my first-choice university.

Academic Life

How was the education system different from your home country?

Overall it was quite similar in terms of types of classes - lectures, tutorials, language classes etc. One of two main differences I noticed was the flexibility of German degrees - students here can much more easily structure their degree to their needs and interests and don't have to follow a strict 3/4 year programme but rather take full semesters off to work/travel and then return when they want. Secondly, the fees are negligible compared to Ireland, only around 300€ per semester and the teaching quality is just the same, if not at times better, than back home. The fees also include a travel ticket for public transport in the entire country as well as access to subsidised cafeterias that serve cheap and healthy food. These two combined, in my opinion, would make studying in Germany hugely more worth it for what you get than in Ireland.

What were your classes like, and did you face any challenges academically?

Pretty similar to what I have experienced before in terms of content, teaching style, participation etc. I didn't necessarily struggle with the content of the classes but the language barrier was at times a struggle, despite it being the focus of my degree. For example in my French classes we had to translate often from French into German which put me at a disadvantage as I was the only non-native German speaker.

Did studying abroad change your academic interests or goals?

No I wouldn't say so, I was studying similar things to what I had done at UCC.

Did you face any difficulty getting into classes

No, most of my classes were quite small in number and even then weren't at maximum capacity according to the enrolment system.

Did you mee/email with your UCC academic coordinator about your modules?

Yes, I had to clarify information regarding credits and suitability, as well as sending updated OLA I made after changing some classes.

What was the class registration process?

Pretty simple, essentially just involved hitting an enrolment button and then receiving an email once the lecturer had confirmed your place.

Cultural Exchange

What was the biggest cultural difference you noticed?

Perhaps the communication style of Germans. Germans can initially be quite reserved and aren't as chatty as Irish people and so it is sometimes hard to tell what they think of you. However, it isn't because they are rude, they prefer instead to have more deeper authentic conversations once they get to know you, rather than more surface level jokey banter. They were much more likely to talk about their experiences, emotions and setbacks as well as what was positive.

How did you adapt to the cultural and social norms?

I think I just adapted to it naturally through time and without really thinking about it. The more I became comfortable in the language, the better I could understand what was being expected of me and how things worked. I wouldn't say it was a conscious process.

Did you experience any culture shock or reverse culture shock?

I actually really appreciated some of the famous German honesty. Whilst having the craic and banter is an important part of being Irish, it can sometimes be a bit superficial and people don't have those deeper authentic conversations as much. At times the matter of factness does come off as rude, but most of the time it is not done in a nasty way and let's you know where you stand.

Personal Growth

How did studying abroad change you personally?

Studying abroad definitely increased my confidence and allowed me to better develop as a person away from normal life back home. I felt I could at times be more authentic and myself around people I met abroad and it was much easier to connect with others as we were all going through the same experience. The time away from home gave me the space to explore other parts of myself and my interests which at times can be pushed aside when you are in the comfort and stability of being at home.

What new skills or perspectives did you gain?

I definitely improved my language and communication skills, in both my languages, which as a World Languages student is the main purpose of the year abroad. I think I learnt to put less pressure on myself and be more relaxed and open minded to whatever the year would bring rather than trying to make it perfect. I think I also definitely learnt the value of good authentic friendships, as the friends I made abroad felt very real and meaningful, despite them only lasting a short time.

What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?

The main challenge I think was feelings of isolation and uncertainty towards the start of the year abroad. I also found the period between Christmas and January quite tough as that is when you have all your assignments and exams due. I overcame feelings of isolation and loneliness by making sure I got out of the house as much as I could, even if just to go on walks. It helped me clear my head and allow me to focus on something else. I also spent most of the mid semester period (Feb - March) in Ireland rather than in Germany. I initially planned on spending that time doing lots of travelling etc but by the end of the first semester I was feeling quite burnt out and needed some time away. I think it's important to realise it's okay to take a break and come home, you don't have to force yourself to stay just because you think going home will ruin the opportunity.

Practical Aspects

How did you manage housing, food, and transportation while abroad?

Housing was quite difficult to find and I ended up finding my apartment through contacting the previous student from UCC who was studying in Cologne. The rental agreement was pretty standard in terms of rent, deposit etc. Food I found to be cheaper in general than in Ireland and there is a good selection of supermarkets including Aldi and Lidl. There was a more budget type store called Netto and a more premium one called Rewe. Food on campus was incredibly cheap compared to UCC and there was plenty of cafes across the different buildings. At the Mensa (cafeteria) it is possible to get a full cooked meal, with a salad and desert as standard, for around €3. As a registered student in Germany you get the Deutschlandticket which gives you unlimited travel on all urban and regional trains, including the metros, therefore you never have to worry about tickets when using the public transport in Cologne. There are also high speed ICE trains that connect the larger cities but are not included in the ticket. In general, NRW and Germany as a whole is very well connected with trains so it was by far the most common form of transport I used.

What advice would you give on budgeting or saving money for study abroad?

Try to have as much money saved up before you go, as whilst the Erasmus grant is useful it doesn't stretch that far. Eating on campus was sometimes cheaper than buying food for lunches etc and they do evening meals too until 6pm, so it was often what I did if I was running a bit low on money. Germany seemed to be cheaper than Ireland, but not by a huge amount, so with good budgeting you could make your money stretch more than back home.

How did you handle language barriers (if there were any)?

As I had studied German before there was not an immediate language barrier when I arrived. Lots of Germans speak good English and when dealing with people in shops etc most could respond in English if you don't understand. If you want to improve your German be prepared to politely insist with some to speak German with you. Especially as an English native speaker it's not uncommon for you to talk in German and them to respond in English. At times when you're struggling to understand it can be very helpful but at times it can also come across as quite rude so just keep talking German and they'll eventually get the point.

If you had to apply for a visa, how did this process go for you? (can you include what steps you had to take to apply for the visa)

I didn't need a visa

If you registered for additional supports (learning supports, counselling etc), do you feel the host university offered suitable services for you?

I didn't make use of any of these services however they definitely were there.

Social Life & Networking

Did you make friends from other countries? How did those relationships influence you?

Yes I made friends with locals and was friendly with Germans in my class one but the majority I spent most of my time with were other Erasmus/International students. There was a wide mix of nationalities both within and outside Europe. I found it easier to connect with other exchange students as we were all going through a similar unique experience at the same time, and it was sometimes more difficult to relate to regular German students who

were just going through their normal daily lives. That being said, people in Cologne are renowned for being one of the most friendly in Germany and they were always very welcoming and fun.

Were there any memorable local traditions or events you participated in?

Unfortunately I wasn't in Cologne for Carnival, which it is very famous for, but was there on the 11th of November when the Carnival season officially begins. There was lots of street parties to mark the opening of the festival which begins traditionally at 11.11am on 11th of November. I also visited the 3 day Cologne Pride Festival, called Christopher Street Day in Germany, which is one of the biggest in Europe.

How did you stay in touch with people back home?

Through the normal means - text, phone, Facetime, social media etc

Career & Future Plans

Has your experience abroad influenced your career path?

No not really, I already had a decent idea on what career path I wanted and I wouldn't say it was the study abroad experience that confirmed it.

Would you consider working or living abroad again?

Yes, I would definitely consider it for a short period whilst I am young.

Did you do any internships, research, or volunteering during your time abroad?

I participated in a project called Europa Macht Schule that is run by the German Academic Exchange Agency. It involves Erasmus and International students going into local high schools and presenting an aspect of their home country's culture, history, music, politics etc. to the students. It was a really fun and rewarding experience. I was paired with a lovely teacher in a high school in Cologne who gave me lots of freedom to do whatever I wanted whilst also giving me guidance and help. It also really helped improve my German.

Reflection & Advice

What do you wish you had known before going abroad?

I wish someone had told me not to put too much pressure on things by hoping you have the most incredible unforgettable time. I feel like Erasmus can be quite over romanticised at times so it's important to take it as it comes and make your own experience that feels right to you. Don't just do stuff because you think it's the typical Erasmus thing to do. It's an amazing opportunity to spend some time away from the stresses of normal life, so make it your own but don't get upset if it's not always perfect the entire time.

What was the most rewarding part of the experience?

I would say meeting such a wide range of really great people was the most rewarding experience.

What advice would you give someone thinking about studying abroad?

Definitely just do it! Even if you are hesitant about it, it's only 3-9 months of your life and it goes very quick. You never know how good it can be until tried.

