

Experience report study abroad semester

How was it?

You may have heard this question more often now that you are at the end of your semester abroad. The International Center would also like to know how you evaluate your semester abroad and what you need to know. The experience reports will be published and serve to help orient others going abroad. The International Office would also like to use the contents for advertising purposes if necessary. We would therefore like you to keep this in mind when filling out the report.

1. General information

Please do not mention any personal information (name, e-mail address, etc.) in the experience report.

I agree to the publication of the report and the attached photos:

Yes No

Study program at EUF

European Cultures and Society

Subject combination (if BABW)

Klicken oder tippen Sie hier, um Text einzugeben.

Host country

Ireland

Host university

University of Limerick

Semester abroad (e.g. fall semester 2020/21)

Fall semester 2021

2. Your Experience Abroad

At this point you can share the experience you made abroad. Sometimes it is not so easy to report on such experiences in such a compressed way. We have therefore prepared some questions to help you do this. At the end of the questionnaire, you will also find a free field for you to fill in, in which you are welcome to enter aspects that are not covered by any of these questions.

How did you prepare for the semester abroad?

The most difficult thing to prepare was to find an accommodation as housing in Ireland is generally scarce and all on-campus accommodations were already full at the time I found out I was going to Limerick. Students there usually live in student villages or with their families; shared housing outside of student villages is very rare and therefore virtually impossible to find. There are a few off-campus student villages, but some of them (including the one I lived in) are mainly meant for students of other colleges and therefore very far away from UL campus. I would recommend applying for housing as early as possible.

How did you establish social networks in your host country? Do you have any tips on how this can be achieved?

During the first weeks, many WhatsApp groups were created by international students, so if you have WhatsApp, this is an easy way to meet people. Usually, there are also groups specifically for the different villages so you can meet people that live close to you. Here again, living on campus is definitely an advantage because many spontaneous parties/hang outs took place there. There were A LOT of internationals on campus and although it might feel weird to just walk up to them and start a conversation, I found that this was embraced by most people as everyone was trying to make friends, especially in the first few weeks! However, if you don't want to limit your social circle to internationals only, this shouldn't be too difficult as everyone speaks English anyway.

Did you learn the local language, respectively how important did you think it was for your stay?

The local language is English, which I already spoke. Although, officially, Irish is the first official language in Ireland, most people don't actually speak it. Irish English is of course different from other accents and while you will most likely pick up on some of the local slang, it is not necessary to know it to get along. The Limerick accent is also very easy to understand in contrast to some other Irish accents, so there should really be no problem.

How was the study program at the partner university structured?

(e.g. premises, workload, language of instruction, examination forms, accessibility)

All modules were taught in English. During the first week of lectures, we were encouraged by our academic coordinator to sit in different lectures before deciding which modules we want to take. The registration deadline was on Friday of the first week. However, if you are 100% certain about a class that you want to take, I highly recommend registering early. In many cases, I and other Erasmus students had to rethink our choices because classes were already full by the end of the first week.

The workload varies between modules but in average I would say it is slightly more than at EUF since there are two exam periods (mid terms and end of semester) and I had between two and four assignments in each module throughout the semester. However, essays are usually shorter there (1500-2500 words for the ones I had to write). I only had one exam (multiple choice, online), but this of course depends on the modules you choose.

The teachers were generally very communicative and considerate of international students since there were a lot of us in all the modules I chose.

What intercultural encounters/competencies shaped your stay?

I got to know a lot of international students from many different countries and also made a few good Irish friends, which definitely broadened my understanding of these countries and enhanced my intercultural competencies. Having all these different points of view in one class also enriched the lectures in many ways, be it in open discussions or group work.

One major difference in Ireland is of course that everywhere you look you see signs in Irish (but you rarely here it spoken). Although I didn't learn the language while there, I feel that this enhanced my awareness of the country's past under colonial rule, which generally came up ever so often and is definitely something to be aware of.

Talking to my Irish friends I found it particularly interesting to hear them talk about their families, which are usually much bigger than in Germany (having 30-40 cousins is normal for them).

Oh and they drive on the left side so don't be like me and almost jump on your taxi driver's lap!

Which perspectives on the host country/country of origin have changed and why?

This question is actually very difficult for me to answer since I tried not to come to Ireland with any preconceived ideas and I knew that stereotypes don't represent the whole truth.

At the same time, you do of course notice the many things that are different from what you're used to. One thing I came to appreciate much more now is German public transport. The train network in Ireland is far less developed and buses are always late. I am not exaggerating.

Another thing I noticed very early on was that people there have a very different style, which obviously makes a lot of sense. One thing we noticed in particular was the "Limerick hairstyle", which a lot of guys there have. In one of my modules, the professor actually referred to it as an example of hegemonic masculinity among Limerick males, which I found very interesting (and funny).

One thing that made me very insecure in the beginning was the lack of covid tests in everyday life. I was used to free testing stations everywhere and antigen tests that you can get at the supermarket for relatively cheap. In Ireland nobody gets tested ever unless you show clear symptoms and have to do a PCR test. While I got used to it after a while, I much prefer the German system where (at least in my bubble) regular testing is very normal.

In my experience, the people in Ireland are very friendly and accommodating. I had many nice encounters with strangers and got to know some very nice Irish people there.

What was your daily life like where you were? (e.g. living, shopping, leisure, inclusion)

First of all, commute took up a substantial part of my daily life. For the first month, this was linked to A LOT of sitting around on campus and waiting for time to pass since I usually took a shuttle bus to campus and back, which got there at 8:30 ish and left at 6 pm (if you ever have to kill time, the library or foundation building are great places for that, or just get something to eat). After month one, I found out about a monthly bus pass, which costs 52€ and allowed me to use the city bus more freely, but this still meant I would have to spend 2h a day on the bus, which frankly was very frustrating especially if I spent less time in class than on the bus on certain days. And again, the buses are NEVER on time.

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For groceries, I usually went to Dunnes or Tesco in the city centre because I had to change buses there so it fit easily with my commute. They also had decent enough vegan options compared to say Spar, but really the vegan options in Ireland are highly reduced compared to Germany. Lidl had some good options too and is also much cheaper.

On campus, UL doesn't have a central mensa but there a ton of small restaurants and cafés scattered all over campus. I highly recommend Scholar's Club in the court yard. The staff there is lovely and they almost always have a good vegan main and when they don't, you can always get a wrap or chips.

There are many great pubs in Limerick and if you want to meet other international students, Stable's on campus is a good option. Fridays are international nights there.

What are the unique or special issues in the host country and what were the opportunities for engaging with these issues?

One special issue in Ireland is definitely the housing shortage. As explained above, this made it very difficult to find an accomodation near campus, but living in a completely different part of town also came with its perks. For example, I got to meet a lot of great people who went to other colleges and whom I would never have met otherwise. I also got to see more of Limerick whereas those who lived on campus could go days without having to leave campus. Apart from this, the concept of student villages was also very interesting to experience, though it always felt a bit strange that there are literal walls around them and at least in my case the security was very strict so it really felt like a gated community.

Is there anything else you would like to share? (e.g. anecdotes, criticism, etc.)

Klicken oder tippen Sie hier, um Text einzugeben.

3. Photos

Finally, you can upload photos here, which visualize/represent your stay abroad well. If necessary, add a description. The following questions can help you choose the appropriate photos:

- Does the photo possibly reinforce prejudices or stereotypes about the country?
- Do you have the consensual consent of the persons depicted in the photos?
- "A picture is worth a thousand words!" What does your picture say about the country and your semester abroad?

EXPERIENCE REPORT ON SEMESTER ABROAD



UL campus is VERY green, you will love it.



There's even a small beach on campus (good spot if you're looking for dogs to pet).



Study vibes from Glucksman library with a view over campus.



Exemplary photo from my daily commute. At least the view from the the doppeldecker buses is nice.



King John's Castle in Limerick.



Obligatory photo of the Cliffs of Moher.



Irish nature is beautiful, Irish weather usually isn't.



Woodcock Hill just outside Limerick. You don't need to go far for a nice hike.

Many thanks for your support!