

## Fiachra Robinson Erasmus Experience

This year, for my second semester of stage 3, I went abroad to study at the University of Edinburgh for an Erasmus semester. Orientation started on the 8th of January, and I moved into university accommodation at Fountainbridge with a pair of exchange students from Vancouver. Classes started on the 13th, so there were a few days set aside for everyone at our apartment block who was on exchange to get to know each other. The RAs were great here, and throughout the whole semester, at getting people involved and organising events for people to mix and have fun; things like road trips, museum tours, club nights and movie nights. This meant that I ended up being pretty close with other exchange students, which was great because we all wanted to have fun and do some travelling and touring and stuff like that. I'd definitely recommend campus accommodation to anyone planning an exchange, over booking your own accommodation outside the university!

Throughout the weeks I spent studying there, I had less hours of classes than I would have had in UCD. They had a more hands-off approach, where the impetus was definitely on the students to go home and read over notes and texts, and then come to classes and tutorials prepared for a more in depth discussion. I liked this, as it meant I had more freedom to arrange my schedule and weeks in a way that suited me; working more when I had time, and then freeing myself up for some road trips or nights out when I wanted. It felt like the fewer contact hours definitely meant more freedom and independence for the student! The assignments were all very applied; I had to design a truss system for a Design module, and analyse an old Crannóg structure for Mechanics, rather than just completing an exercise sheet, which I thought was much more engaging and informative. That being said, there was (supposed to be) a lot less of a weighting on coursework; most exams were worth 80% of the total grade or so. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all my exams were cancelled, and so I was assessed solely on the coursework I had completed.

All registration for courses in Edinburgh is done through your Personal Tutor, as opposed to directly by the student online like UCD do it; this meant that there was a bit more leeway in terms of timetable clashes, as I was able to make the case to my tutor that I needed to take a certain class and I was prepared to miss the odd Solids tutorial if it clashed with a Dynamics Lecture, for example. The faculty as a whole were very helpful during my time there.

Culturally, there isn't a whole lot to separate Scotland and Ireland; the welcome events I went to were serving haggis, and there were people playing bagpipes, but besides those two stereotypes that cropped up every now and then I felt pretty much at home there. There's a great historical and cultural connection between Scotland and Ireland I think, and so I found as a whole people were especially welcoming of me, which was very nice; I joined the engineering football team there, and the Indie Music Society, and made some great friends in both of these, who I'm sure I'll meet up with in the future. I found Edinburgh as a whole was a brilliant place to be, as it had the right amount of familiarity and difference; the architecture and history is obviously pretty different and distinct, but in terms of size and character it's a lot like Dublin in many ways, so I settled in quickly.

Overall, I had a really positive experience in Edinburgh. Unfortunately, I had to return home 2 months early just before St. Patrick's Day, as the coronavirus caused the University to close, and the ongoing spread of the virus meant I returned to Dublin and completed my assignments online. Regardless, the two and a half months I spent there was a great experience, I made some great friends and engaged with the community there as much as I could. In trying to organise this exchange, there were some issues late on, where my required modules weren't approved; this

## Fiachra Robinson Erasmus Experience

caused a great deal of stress for me, as I was worried that had I not found suitable modules, I would not have been allowed to go to Edinburgh at all as the school of Engineering in UCD are very particular about matching up modules for exchange semesters. During this stressful time in December and January, my academic mentor Pezhman was extremely helpful; he helped me look through modules at the University of Edinburgh, comparing them to the modules I would have been taking in UCD, and assisted me in getting in touch with lecturers, course directors, and my Erasmus co-ordinator, to try and ensure the situation was resolved as quickly as possible. This really helped to take some of the stress off my shoulders.

I now intend to continue into stage 4 in UCD, starting a Masters of Material Science Engineering; I feel like some time away from UCD was a good opportunity to take a step back and think about how I wanted to move forward, whereas had I remained in UCD for the semester, I may not have had the same level of clarity about what it was I wanted to do next. Even though the Erasmus experience was cut short for myself, I'm very glad I had this experience, as I was able to make a load of new friends, experience a different setting - both culturally and academically - and the change of scene was a great opportunity.