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**Erasmus Exchange program at Trinity College Dublin for Hilary Semester 2018 (Jan. – Apr.); for abroad semester program about “Conflicts, Religion and Peace Building in International Affairs” at The Irish School of Ecumenics**

### Student Report

I was asked by the international office desk at Goettingen to write my own experience with Erasmus exchange program at Trinity College Dublin (TCD), Ireland and here I will try to subtitle this report to three parts: academic, social and logistical experiences. However, I would like to share the pre-process circumstances that had taken place before getting on this journey.

From the very early days of my Intercultural Theology masters program, I heard about the peace studies program at Trinity College from one of the professor's desk, that highly recommend us to get this chance to join that program. She shared that it would be challenging due to high fees and visa (for non-EU student), however she indicated how the program is good. After receiving a full presentation about Erasmus exchange network and all the available academic chances offered, I decided to apply for this abroad semester to enrich my academic background of peace and religion studies. I was blessed that no one from the Faculty of Theology had applied for the same program, so the nomination was easier than expected.

Here, I would like to refer how the Erasmus desk of the Faculty of Theology was supportive from the first moment of applying for the abroad semester, starting from setting the appointment with the Erasmus official representative at the faculty, until the day I returned to Goettingen after accomplishing the program. Also Prof. Gillian Wylie, the Erasmus responsible person at TCD is highly cooperative, however she is always busy, so it is required to catch her up 😊

#### Academic Experience:

The full name of my abroad program is: “Conflict, Religion, Peace-building in International Affairs” that offers 30 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) as a part of Irish School of Ecumenics; one of the academic school at TCD. More information about the available modules and the credit distribution can be found in this link:

<https://www.tcd.ie/ise/international/semester-abroad.php>

The academic teaching in this program – as per my own experience – mainly depends on interaction between students and professors, also among the students themselves. We were required in some modules to be divided to groups to work together for main presentation among the semester weeks, also discussions and dedicated time for questions was a must! In the Christian Muslim Relation module, we were the presenters all over the semester and the professor mainly guided us in the discussion and opened the space professionally for interaction between students.

For me, this is the reason why I decide to move to study in Europe. The informative knowledge and printings could be found either online or in libraries, but the live interaction, encounter with the other and discussion in a diverse milieu is what I seek for in my post graduate studies. I can say that I had perfectly found what I was looking for through this program.

Also, I may refer that all the offered modules in this program do not require neither written nor oral exam by the end of the study; it is only required to submit an essay with common requirements (no. of words, citation style, ...) to be delivered in hard and soft copies to the professors' desks. Some will give you the space to select any topic with the module domain, other will give you a list of topics and you shall be selecting one of them. In all cases, I experienced high flexibility and cooperation from their side.

I shall highlight my admiration with TCD library. It is one of the biggest I have ever seen! The references diversity and their huge online resources. The protocol between Ireland and UK on the educational level allows the student to access nearly 24 online databases that give chance to explore hundreds of scientific magazines from Oxford, Cambridge and other enormous knowledge castles. E-Books that can be read through the library PCs are also very helpful. Don't forget that there is 24 hours rooms for students that can access for studying that contains all required facilities; it is called 1937 building.

### **Social Experience:**

My first impression and experience showed how nice and friendly the Irish people are. They are helpful and feel happy if you ask them about their culture and traditions, as they eager to share it with the others. In this program, unfortunately you may not find a lot of Irish students around as it is an international one, however there will always be Irish students around. As it is also known that 'Guinness' beer is the most famous Irish local beer that is beloved by Irish and even the visitors always keen to visit an old Irish pub to enjoy some live music with traditional musical instruments that moves your feet and take your attention.

Honestly, I had spent most of my time in the library to read and work on my essays, so I hadn't had the chance to explore more about the Irish local life except very few times, however I had made some close and good friends. I advise you to handle your time and try to organize it to save some time to explore their life and visit more cities in Ireland. Consider also that you shall meet different student in each module you will receive as various programs will be involved in the same modules. This may be challenging to make bigger friends circle.

The Global Room in Trinity is a nice cozy space in the administration building that you can pass by anytime of the day, where you can read, eat, receive phone calls, find comfort seats and get to know new people from all over Trinity. They offer nice activities all over the semester time and offer a nice welcome tour in Trinity campus where you can explore a glimpse of the history of this gorgeous place. Also, some cultural evenings are held there were you may encounter new people and have some traditional food & arts. Keep an eye on their FB page:

<https://www.facebook.com/TrinityGlobalRoom/>

In case you are interested in some Christian student engagement, check the Christian Student Union (CSU), as they offer wonderful weekly meetings with keynote speakers from various places in Ireland and UK. Also, Jewish, Muslim and other religious communities offer activities through the whole semester time.

### **Logistical Experience:**

#### **A) Accommodation**

One of the most challenging issues that you may face. Dublin, after 2002 economical agreement, has witnessed a real estate booming prices that lot of international visitors are suffering

from till this day. Not only the prices are high, but it is also challenging to find a place to stay at. Also, many landlords/ladies don't agree to rent their places for short-time contract (some not less than 6 months and some ask for 1 full year!!) which is challenging as the full abroad semester duration is only 3 months. On the other hand, scams and fake ads about good priced rooms always victimise the new arrivals. Take care of that! I had suffered a lot to find a place and moved 3 times in one week! Finally, I was blessed to find a good place with a landlord that accepts short term agreements, however it is 45 minutes away by bus from TCD. If you need a contact with him, don't hesitate to text me back. It costed me 600 EUR per month including all utilities. Also consider that almost all landlords/ladies ask for at least a month deposit prior your stay.

#### **B) Visa (for non-EU students)**

As a non-EU student, I require to apply for a visa. As per the official Irish Embassy website, it requires from 8-12 weeks to issue your visa, so please consider applying as earliest as possible, as for me, I failed to receive one and slightly receive the new one few days from the start day of the program, as I missed the orientation week. Although they don't ask for a final accommodation contact as a visa document, however it's good to have a primary place (at a friend place in Dublin) with a signed letter from her/him, as you may be asked about the first place of your residence at the passport check point at Dublin airport.

#### **C) Living Costs**

Dublin is considered an expensive European capital. Some feedbacks that I received from the people who live there for a longer while, that its living standards are close to London! For me as a visiting student, the most challenging prices were the accommodation and bus transportation (I will refer to 'Student Leap Card' as the cheaper solution later). For the food, the good news is that Lidl and Aldi are available with there. Although it is not cheaper than Germany, however it is the best prices in Dublin. To have a meal, for instance, at Buttery (the TCD kitchen), it costs between 7-8 EUR for lunch, as there are no reduced meals offered by the Uni as the case in Goettingen Uni.

#### **D) Student Card Facilities & Leap Student Card**

It is good to know that the student card you will receive upon your arrival to TCD, shall offer you some privileges as follows:

- + Free access to the Trinity College Sports Centre in campus that offers luxuries sportive facilities; indoor swimming pool, climbing wall, sauna, steam room and main fitness room.
- + Free access to 'Book of Kells' museum and the Old Library, offering you to invite 3 friends of yours for free as well.
- + Showing the card in some restaurants around the campus can give you a discount.
- + Access the 24 hours post graduate study building.
- + Access the online library database.

If your place is far from the TCD campus and you need to take the bus almost daily to the college, you shall head to the Students Union and ask for the Student Leap Card (that costs 10 EUR once receive it). To get on the bus all over the week, you just need to pop up your Student Leap Card by 20 EUR every Monday, so you can enjoy getting on any Dublin Bus infinitely. Pop-up process can be held in most of the shop around the campus (Spar, Centra, ....).