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2017-18 Postcards

Postcards from Abroad

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## Getting the Opinions of Others

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Emily Muth  
Galway, Ireland  
February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018



### Getting the Opinions of Others

It's officially been a month in Ireland now! Unfortunately, one of our Linfield classmates is heading back for home this week. Luckily though, we were able to say goodbye with a group dinner a few weeks ago. Most of us were able to make it and my apartment hosted a spaghetti dinner in our teeny tiny kitchen. It might have been a little cramped but it was nice!

The dinner was a great opportunity to check in with one another, which inspired me to post this blog entry with paragraphs written by other Linfield students in our group. Emily and I, although we share an awesome name, did not know much about each other before this study abroad experience. We had talked about how this was her first time visiting Europe and this is what she said: "This is my first time leaving the United States; however, I have not been as homesick as I imagined I would be. Getting involved in activities on campus has really helped me adjust to living in Ireland. Having a group like the International Student Society as a resource has been amazing! I have been on two trips with them- to the Cliffs of Moher and Connemara. These trips have allowed me to see different parts of Ireland and meet new people from around the world. Being away from Linfield has been an adjustment, but I've been able to find new ways to get involved in my new community."

I would definitely say that one thing that has been so beneficial to me is taking advantage of all the different clubs and societies here. I have been able to take a lesson on traditional Irish dancing, play in a few soccer games and practice three times a week with the club team here, and

try “speed friending.” Kelsey, however, has been to more club meetings than anybody else in the study abroad program! Here’s what she’s said about her experiences: “The clubs and societies at NUI Galway are amazing company! They have activities here for all interests, be it archery, kayaking, hiking, baking, or board games. I’ve spent a good deal of my time with the kayaking club out on the Corrib. Doing capsizing drills in January is a breathtaking experience and certainly makes you grateful that wetsuits are provided with the gear! We’ve also spent time learning about kayaking around the world watching videos of kayakers on rivers from Norway to Mexico and even Washington state. Last week, our evening meeting hosted a guest speaker who is a club alumnus currently acting as a guide for kayaking in Uganda. He gave a really interesting talk about the implications of the new Isimba dam on the Nile river. Club meetings are always followed by a trip to a local pub, and they’re a great way to get to know some fantastic people. If you study at NUI Galway, you’ve got to check the societies and clubs out – they’re sure to have something to interest you!”

Another option here is to get involved with volunteering. Linfield requires you to complete 20 hours of volunteer service over the course of the semester. I have a few hours completed, but Danielle is well on her way to the requirement! She says: “I participated in a volunteer project with the Galway Conservation Volunteer group. Galway was hit with a storm at the beginning of January, which caused lots of flooding and many beaches along the shoreline got littered in trash. During this volunteer activity, we picked up trash along the shoreline that had been carried up by the storm. There was lots of trash brought up by the ocean including plastic, bottles, cans, signs, netting and even a tire or two. This was a really neat experience to be a part of because it wasn’t a normal highway trash pickup, but a continued effort to clean up the county. Also, since we had not yet arrived in Galway when this storm hit, this volunteering opportunity gave me a real idea of the damage that was done.”

One of the biggest benefits you can gain from going to club meetings or volunteering opportunities is getting to know people. Although you can meet so many different people, I think most of us were a little surprised that Ireland is not very ethnically diverse. I think it’s so important to talk with people to get their perspectives, which is why I asked Carla about her opinion about Ireland, and she said: “Many of the students that travel with me are first generation students, but only I stand as the minority. Before going to Europe and meeting the group of students I would be traveling with, I knew I wouldn’t see many faces that had the same skin tone and spoke the same language as me. But coming to Ireland has been one of the best choices I have ever made. I have made great Irish friends that are genuinely nice and helpful and supportive. I have learned thus far to be okay with being different whether it’s how I look and what I wear. If I were given the option to choose anywhere else to study abroad, my option would still be Ireland.” It really is about the people you meet here along the way and how those connections can truly make your time here great. You can meet amazing people wherever you go and all around the world!

Luckily, Ireland makes it easy to discover the world and travel! Mariza, Kaitie, Carla and Danielle have already been to England, Gillian and Preston visit soon, and I go to Norway in a few days! In order to travel, we just need our passport and a student visa. In the first week you’re here, the local immigration office closes so only NUI Galway students get appointments. The building is not mapped correctly on Google Maps, so a lot of us ended up taking taxis. You show up for your ten-minute appointment with all your documents, answer a couple questions, pay 300 euros, and then you wait for your visa to be delivered to the school. We waited about four weeks to pick

up our visas. Luckily, you can travel without this visa in the meantime. (Heads up: this will be the worst picture of yourself that you'll ever see! My face is even partially cut off!)

Before we had our visas, Mariza, Samm, Megan and I traveled to Scotland using just our passport. We saw bagpipes, tried haggis (which has been my favorite food while abroad so far), saw one of Van Gogh's paintings, and explored the grounds of a castle. Megan wrote this about our trip: "Before coming to Ireland, many of us had never even been out of North America. Going abroad has become one of the best experiences of my life. I am able to learn so much about different countries, not only in the classroom. But also, by traveling throughout Europe. Ryanair has great cheap flights where we are able to go to different parts in Europe relatively cheap. Each place that we have gone has been completely different than the next. Ireland is no different in this. Traveling to Ireland from the Pacific Northwest has been a change that I wasn't fully anticipating to begin with. For one, I thought that I knew what rain was seeming how I am from Seattle and live in Mac the rest of the time... Galway rains more, and there is a bigger wind chill here, so I am finding myself bundling up every single day. From the outlets to the different currency to electricity, every country has a different way of working. I have recently learned that a line (when waiting for something) is called a "queue" in Ireland. Also, the paper form of a Euro is called a "note." The people abroad are also so great each country has had people who are more than willing to lend a hand and teach something about their home. Meeting new people has to be one of my favorite things throughout my travels. We are all so lucky to have this opportunity and we are soaking up every second of it. Ireland is a dream and there is still so much more of Europe to see. We all have plans to go many other places before the semester is over!"

Traveling has been such an amazing addition to our already incredible stay in Ireland. Of course, we can't always be traveling, we do have to go to class. I am taking: "Music, Gender and Ireland," "Medieval Ireland: 5th-9th century," "The Development of the Castle in Medieval Europe," and "Indigenous Arts Exploration." Back home, I am a biology major, so it's been really cool to get the chance to take classes I would never get at home. Some people here have been taking classes they would not experience at home, Gillian is also taking a lot of Ireland specific classes and has said this: "I was surprised at how little homework the classes at NUIG require. However, professors make up for this by assigning long essays that require readings throughout the semester. This semester I am taking the time to learn about different aspects of Ireland. My Irish language class has helped me to learn how to pronounce words on signs around town and understand parts of what people are saying. My history classes have taught me about anything from St. Patrick to castles, and I know that when the semester is over I will be more understanding and appreciative of Irish culture and the history behind it." (Also shout out to her amazing artwork attached to this blog post!)

As you can tell, all of us are so grateful to be here. We are learning so much every day and truly experiencing the opportunity of a lifetime!