

Research Internship
15 May 2023 – 15 Nov 2023
APC - University College Cork
Cork, Ireland

As a student of the master's program "Experimental and Clinical Neuroscience", my motivation to complete the internship was a mix of both a compulsory module of completing a 12-month internship and the need to find a research project for my master's thesis. APC in Cork has incredibly ongoing research projects connecting the pituitary stress axis and the microbiome. Both topics interest me a lot. In addition, being able to live in an English-speaking country was appealing, as I didn't have to learn an extra language to attend the university. My contact within the receiving university was Jim McEvoy, a representative from the international student office who contacted me directly after being contacted by my supervising professor. As for the research group itself, I was in contact with Prof Gerard Clarke, my supervisor who was always incredibly helpful and quick to respond.

I didn't have to apply for a spot in the internship through a standardized procedure but rather found it by directly getting in touch with one of the professors at the institute that I was interested in working for. He emailed me back a few weeks later saying they'd be happy to have me. To apply I only required the documents asked for by the ERASMUS office in Cologne stated in the checklist document. I already had an "Unfall-versicherung" and a "Haftpflichtversicherung" from my previous ERASMUS experience. As my program is conducted in English and as I've lived in an English-speaking country prior to this experience, my English skills were sufficient, and I did not require any further training.

At University College Cork (UCC), the procedures were straightforward. In order to receive my student card, I went to the student service centre just like any other student. As for working in a lab and at APC, there were multiple offered tours and welcome events including a mandatory lab induction. I didn't have to pay any extra fees for the 6 months at UCC. Dealing with Irish immigration was a little complicated. Getting an appointment to get my student visa took around 3 months and cost 300 Euros. They also ask that students on student visas leave the country as soon as possible to the date of the end of the internship. Any extension would result in a 300 Euro fee. This was a shame as I had considered extending my

internship by 1 month in order to perfect some of my results but didn't wish to pay the extra 300 Euros.

Finding housing in Cork was by far the most challenging aspect of the study-abroad. Ireland is infamously going through a housing crisis. Despite joining various Facebook groups and even having multiple contacts in Cork, I spent the first three months out of six between sublets until I found a permanent residence for my last three months. Rent in Cork cost way more than it did in Cologne and for a much lower living standard. Groceries and eating or drinking out were more expensive than in Germany too. However, I was able to secure a bar job for the weekends in order to support myself along the ERASMUS allowance. As for getting around. Cork is a very walkable city, I rarely had to make use of public transport. However, getting to any of the nearby towns or any of the hiking destinations, it was incredibly complicated using public transport. This, I learned, is why most Irish students have cars. I was lucky enough to have a friend in Cork with a car who was happy to help me get around when needed.

For my internship I had to report to APC every day from 9-17:30. My daily tasks varied from lab work to researching papers, analyzing data etc. UCC also offered multiple seminars any student could attend. In addition to seminars, different fairs were on offer, such as a career fair or different food fairs etc. Moreover, a lab meeting took place every Thursday for around 3 hours. The data collected during the ERASMUS internship was split into two parts. The first part was analysed and produced a report which was accredited on my transcript. The second part is the data going into my master's thesis which I'm currently writing.

I worked under a personal investigator but was more closely monitored by a mentor, who's a PhD student in his last year. My work centred around a few experimental procedures. Firstly, I worked with ELISA on around 40 plasma samples from mice and 80 from rats to measure corticosterone levels at different time points after the test animals were exposed to a forced swim test, which is a lab model for a stress test. Later, Colon pieces were retrieved from the animals, mRNA extracted, converted to cDNA, and analyzed through qPCR. I was mostly independent in the lab after a few training sessions on each procedure. After the official end of the internship on the 15 of Nov, I've organized to remain in touch with my mentor and supervisor throughout the next few weeks as I continue to work on my data and write my thesis.

The health system provided to students of UCC was like nothing I'd ever seen in Germany. The student health centre offered doctor appointments by phone and in person. Their services were completely free (including contraception) and accessible to all students with relatively short waiting times. The student health centre services were offered throughout the summer break. The staff at UCC were incredibly helpful and patient. They made sure I had everything I needed as a study abroad student.

As a whole living in Ireland was an amazing experience. Cork is filled with friendly and lovely people, very sociable and outgoing. Making friends was much easier than it had ever been for me as a foreigner than being in Germany. While there are fewer activities on offer in the city, it's a city full of students and it never felt empty or abandoned but was rather constantly filled with young people. What also was of huge help was getting a job as a bartender on the weekends. This truly helped me mingle more with the locals, learn the local slang better etc.

The country of Ireland is beautiful and green with loads of hiking options during the warmer days. As I consider my future after my master's, I will be looking at jobs to move back to Cork.

This was my second ERASMUS plus experience. I feel both the University of Cologne and UCC both made the process easy and straightforward. Staff on both the sending and receiving ends were professional, helpful, and friendly. I feel that I've academically benefited tremendously from this study abroad experience, I've also made many new connections in the life sciences field and have had a chance to better explore my career goals. Moreover, I've made so many new friends and feel that I've established a new home for myself in Cork. I'm incredibly thankful that funding opportunities such as ERASMUS exist, as this wouldn't have been financially feasible for me otherwise.