Reflective Journal

Erasmus 2007/2008
My time has passed in Ireland and this is my last assignment I have to submit. In a nutshell it has been a grand time and do not know why it has to end so fast. I still have to sort things out before I leave and I know that I can’t really say goodbye to everyone in a proper fashion as that would take weeks – as I have grown fond of so many people in and around Belfast. But nonetheless I can spare a “wee” bit of my last hours to write this report as I want to tell my fellow Erasmus students how my time in Ireland was spent – a time I will not forget.

**Academic studies**

It was quite difficult to choose relevant courses for me as I had to take classes which were recognized by my home University. Unfortunately almost none of the Erasmus classes were compatible and therefore I took only a few Erasmus classes. Thankfully to Paul Anthony and the PE department I was allowed to take part in PE classes and these were the ones needed for me. So most of my timetable was filled with teaching from the PE sector.

Naturally I made the necessary 20 credits of Erasmus and some of them have been very useful to me.

**Erasmus courses**

* Anglo-Irish Literature
  This is a very interesting course as you learn about different writers of Ireland. If you are into reading you should take this course. There has always been a lot of discussion in class as well as interpretation. At the beginning it was a bit confusing as we had three
different teachers in different rooms but with the help of the other Irish students we were almost always capable of finding the right rooms in time.

One thing you should do as soon as you get to college is to register for the library. Especially for this course it is rather essential as you surely do not want to buy all the books.

Divided Societies

The course is structured to define what we do not know and that is the difference between states, countries and nations – definitely right. The art of teaching was very fascinating as part of the lessons were communicating with people from America and Spain. It was a kind of international getting to know each other in person as well as in cultural form. The only thing which could be improved would be that in our group not one single person from Spain wrote an answer to our enquiries. So probably there should be some talk to the Spanish teacher department.

Comparative Education

This is a two hour course based on self study. It was interesting that after the first class only half of us showed up in the second. As the title refers to you are going to learn about the Irish school structure and one other foreign country chosen by yourself. This class was taught by Peter Finn, the Vice-Principal, and he made quite an impression. Nonetheless no one figured out what we should write our assignment about but Paul Anthony helped us out in answering all our questions about this assignment.
Irish Film Studies

A must for everyone. This is a course to get easy credit by watching movies. It is interesting and fun and not comparable to any classes back home. I would definitely love to have such a course in Austria. At the end you have to write an assignment about how those films have enhanced your opinion about Ireland and believe me, it is easy enough to write something about it.

European Integration

An interesting course held by Mr. McCann. Especially if you are into economics you should take part in it. But you also learn about the Irish background and the economy of Ireland, in short the Irish Tiger.

Academic Writing

This was the first time I have been taught by an American. It is worth it just to listen to him as his dialect is completely different to the Irish one. You will learn about writing style and technique which is quite similar to grammar classes back home. The final piece – the assignment – you have to hand in is something like a co-work. You will be helped by a tutor. This is the place – writing centre - where you should take advantage of. St. Mary’s offers tutors all day and you can simply register and they will help you with your assignments – thx to all of them as I have used them a lot recently.
Reflective Journal

Also an easy credit course as you definitely will have to write something about your stay either for Erasmus or for your home university. It reminds me of the time when you arrived and what I have done all the time since I have been in Ireland.

PE courses

Theoretical

Basically all the theoretical classes have been more interesting than back home as the courses were held in English and therefore more challenging. I’m not going to go into detail but I want to mention that all three lecturers, Ciaran, Elaine and Paddy are everything they stand for. Those are teachers I would wish we would have at home. They are always friendly, sunny and know a joke or two. All their classes have been interesting as well as challenging. Most of the time they would work with power point and explaining it in practical terms as sometimes the theory can become quite complex.

There is one class, or better said one teaching style I want to single out. In safe practice Ciaran split us up into two groups and let us argue about accidents which really happened as pro and against. Those were really exciting and we did not always agree to the judge’s decision. In my opinion this kind of teaching approach is one of the best, as you have to interact actively and therefore remember most of the things which have been done during the course.

All in all I would say that the theoretical level which is being taught in St. Mary’s is far higher than back home in Austria.
Practical

This is probably the one sector which can be reinforced. Back home in Austria we have to learn and exercise a lot more than here. It also goes into a deeper level and you have to keep yourself quite fit to meet all the conditions. Here it is more about learning the basics and how to teach those abilities to the kids.

I have taken part in following classes:

Swimming
Motor Learning
Social and Moral Development
Curriculum
Safe Practice
Biomechanic
Teaching Styles & Coaching Theory
Research Methods
Netball
Structure and Function
Gymnastics

To be honest I have enjoyed the PE classes more than the Erasmus classes but I think that is more due to that I had almost nothing in common with the Erasmus courses. Therefore I am again very grateful that I could participate in such a various programme.
Cultural programme

Most of the cultural programme I did was organized by the school. But Dominik and me also did some further in-depth culture exploration.

GIANT’S CAUSEWAY

A really impressive sight. Definitely worth a visit. The view of the surrounding areas is overwhelming and the sea was beautiful. The steps made for giants are incredible. You feel tiny in comparison to the huge boulders.
The sea water crashing against the rocks and splashing against your feet will be a picture you will never forget.

LONG KESH

The prison where the famous Irish protests have been held e.g. the hunger strike with Bobby Sands. He died due to this protest and his cell can still be visited. Unfortunately almost all of the furniture of his room has been taken away and sold on e-bay. You can go there but to be honest I was not that impressed. The
“stories” were quite interesting but the whole complex reminded me more of my army time than of a prison.

CAVEHILL MOUNTAIN

Probably the most exciting tour organized by Briege and Anthony. The weather was not that “grand”, just usually Irish weather – light rain. But nonetheless we all had fun. The cave was impressive and some of us climbed into it.

Another funny part was that some of the Erasmus got lost during our field trip and had to be picked up at the zoo.
TOUR TO THE SOUTH

I have been in Ireland before. A friend and me, we were working for 5 weeks in the southern part of this lovely island. I was stationed on a “farm” in Ahakista, near Bantry. So I wanted to visit them and the fact that I have a motorbike made it easy. I spent three weeks with them and only left just before the start of the first semester.

It was a lovely time, wandering around, swimming in the sea and meeting old friends. Even the dog “Dumble” remembered me.

IRISH SESSION

The Irish Session in the south is not really comparable with the ones we listened to in Belfast. Down there you can actually take part with whatever instrument is at hand. Even if it is only a glass or two spoons.
SIGHTSEEING BUS TOUR

Dominik and me made this trip to get to know Belfast a little bit better. I did not know that Titanic was built in Belfast and those two remaining Harland & Wolf are still very impressive. The restaurant THAI-TITANIC was also nice to get to know. I think that the Irish like word games as they often come up with such tumbled words.

We also made a tour around West Belfast to see as many murals as possible. Most of them are very impressive. I have never seen something like this before. In Austria there is no decoration on any walls and as we have no brick houses we do not paint pictures on them.
BUSHMILL’S DESTILLERY

The different smells in this factory were delicious as well as disgusting. It depends in whatever room you are. But the whole factory and how it works is quite impressive. As I am a learned waiter I do know a bit about how the distillation of Whiskey works but to see it with my own eyes was something new.

BOTANIC GARDEN

A beautiful garden worth a visit. It is next to Queen’s University so when you are there to visit it, you should also take a wee bit of time and take a short walk, to look at the beautiful flora and fauna in this garden.
Social Programme

TABLE TENNIS

The first thing I want to talk about is Table Tennis. I have tried to find clubs in Belfast but was not really lucky. Of course there are some but not at the level I am playing. So I kept looking and finally found some places to go. After finding the different places I was really happy as I love this sport. I was playing in a lot of different places like Newtownards, Rosepark, Ballyclare and Rockport, with the national team. I also did some coaching in Queens to help out as I was not allowed to play for any team here due to my contract with the club back home. As a matter of fact my club is having problems with some teams and that is why I am leaving a bit early instead of enjoying some more weeks in the Irish country. I definitely regret that, but I know that someday, probably sooner than later, I will return to this beautiful country.

THE EUROPEAN QUIZZ

A social evening with a lot of prizes to win. Unfortunately not for our group although we had a bunch of Irish PE students as a “helping” hand. It was good “craic” and I would recommend everyone to go there as it is lots of fun.
THE EUROPEAN SONG CONTEST

This was a weird evening. First we, Yasmin and myself, did not want to sing at all, but after some convincing from the neighbour country Germany we decided to improve and just sing whatever we could lay our hands on. As I have mentioned it was a bit of a weird evening as there was a bit of a tension between Anthony and the American girls, The Netherlands and Germany, and me and Dominik as he was a bit too drunk. So as my country Austria protests against this contest this year I would do probably the same if I was asked to join for the 2nd semester.

THE USUAL KARAOKE NIGHT AT BEEHIVE’S

Every Tuesday it was Karaoke time with DJ D. He is also a maintenance guy from St. Mary’s so we knew pretty well. We always sung some songs after having a couple of courageous drinks. Some days those parties were arranged by the camogie or other sport clubs. Those parties I enjoyed most as I knew most of the PE students and I all like them very much.

THE BEACH PARTY

A nice party you should attend to if you have the possibility.
HALLOWEEN

That was a unique party as we don’t celebrate Halloween in Austria. Everyone dresses up in a funny way. We were partying long into the night and all of us had a good time.

BIRTHDAY PARTIES

We had 3 birthdays do celebrate while we were here, Sonia’s, Redmer’s and Alicia’s. I have only attended 2 as I have been at home when Redmer had his party.
BROADWAY 32 - WEREWOLF

This was the place where all of us got together. No matter if we were partying or just a simply meeting to go out. A game we played there quite often was Werewolf, also known as Mafia. We always had good fun there and more than once some guys woke up in the house, next morning.

DO’S AND DON’T’S

In general I would recommend that you join all the tours offered by Briege and Anthony. Most of them are free or only a small amount of charge and they places you go to are all worth visiting.

But if you also have the time take a trip to the countryside as there is a big difference between big cities and small villages.
**DO** bring a coat or a warm jacket for the colder days over here.

**DO** bring a good umbrella with you as it is quite windy and rainy

**DO** watch out for Dog Shit. It is everywhere.

**DO** bring at least one adapter.

**DO** buy day tickets for buses instead of singles or black cabs.

**DO** not dry your clothes outside. They will probably be wetter than before.

**DO** go to the Coast. It will be a marvellous experience.

**DO** your shopping at Iceland. That is the cheapest supermarket for frozen stuff and also not too far from your home (Park Centre).

**DO** bring a shirt, tie, trousers and black shoes as you will need them quite a few times – even apart from teaching practice.

**DO** unlock your mobile at home. You can get a sim-card here for free.
DON’T step into Dog Shit!!!

DON’T loose your keys.

DON’T miss the last bus to Belfast.

DON’T forget your camera.

DON’T bring too much stuff with you. Most of the things can be bought here for a reasonable price.

DON’T wear shoes with an English symbol or England written on them. You will not be popular among the Irish population around Falls Road.

DON’T wait for green light at the traffic lights. It may never come.

DON’T forget to recharge electricity. If you don’t you will be sitting in the dark.

DON’T forget the look at your oil level. It is very uncomfortable to spend a weekend in a very cold house.
E. Overall reflection on the experience

All has to come to end. This is my last day and the last page I am writing in Belfast. When I look back at the beginning with my adventurous journey to Belfast by bike I would never have thought that leaving after a couple of months would be so hard. I have made friends not only with the Erasmus people but also with locals and I will miss them for sure.

The Erasmus is an experience you will not soon forget. I have learned about a total different culture and you will definitely profit from it. Apart from improving your English, the Irish accent is a further plus as no one would like to speak too formal, it just doesn’t sound right, would be reason enough to go abroad.

But the people themselves, their way of lives, their thinking and acting is something I have learned to love. It is going to be hard to imagine that back home I have to get up at 6:30 am instead of “half eight”. That is going to be a disaster. Also the nightlife here in Belfast is something unique. Let us just say that this is a partying people.

If I ever get the chance again to go on Erasmus I would definitely do it. It has enhanced my life and gave me a different view of how life could go.

In addition I want to thank some people. As I am not good at this in a practical matter I better write it down.

Briege
She was like a mother to all of us. If you had a problem you just go to her and you can be sure that it will be sorted out. Thanks for all the problem solving and all the tours you have arranged.

Paul Anthony
He is one of the most important figures for Erasmus students. He helped me to get the PE classes recognized and that I can take part in them. Without him I would have missed the most important classes for me.
Ciaran, Elaine and Paddy
Those are the PE teachers who have made my lessons not only informative but also interesting. To be honest, the way of teaching they do is far better than any I have seen back home. Thanks for this experience and also the help I received for doing the assignments.

Andrew Dennison
Probably the most important figure outside of school for me. He was the one who introduced me to the different clubs and made training with them possible. Also his reduction in price off for table tennis stuff for a poor exchange student have saved me a lot of money. Thx a lot.

Irish National Team
Due to you I have improved my game and made a big step towards my comeback in table tennis. Special thx to Na Ning, Darryl Strong, Peter Graham and Phil Wallace.

Civil Service
Thx for the hospitality in your club. It has always been a pleasure playing at your leisure centre. I know that you have always let me win – ;-) – but I think we all have learned a lot by sparring.

Last but not least, the Irish population. It has been a pleasure to be in your country. I have enjoyed it and your friendly attitude will not be forgotten. There will definitely come a day when I return to the Island and then I will be again part of this society.

THX