

Chapter 19

A Study Abroad Experience in Ireland: The Celtic Tiger Before and After the Global Financial Crisis



Dennis W. Jansen

Abstract This chapter describes a study abroad program to Ireland, a faculty-led 5-week program that was taught on the University College Dublin campus. This program included instruction in two courses, one on Financial Economics and one on the Economic Development of Ireland. It included weekly travel to locations throughout Ireland, from an excursion to Galway that included visits to the Connemara region and the Cliffs of Moher in the Burren, to an excursion to Belfast that included visits to the Peace Walls, the various shrines in Belfast, and including travel to the north coast to see the Giant's Causeway. The program consisted of 15–20 students and one faculty instructor, and proved quite popular.

19.1 Introduction

Texas A&M University has an extensive offering of study abroad programs, although this is not shared by all University departments equally. After spending a semester as a Fulbright Scholar at National University of Ireland-Galway in Fall 2010, I decided to try my hand at a study abroad program in Ireland.

Ireland has much to recommend itself as a study abroad destination, especially for someone coming from a (very) large public flagship university in the heart of Texas. A prime consideration is language. Obviously, English is the official language, and the language of common use, in Ireland. This is important to me, a language-challenged scholar, but it is perhaps more important to my potential students. By far, the vast majority of economics majors at Texas A&M University are in the B.S. program, which has no language requirement. Students choose the B.S. program over the B.A. for exactly that reason—they trade a required econometrics course for a required language sequence of courses.

D. W. Jansen (✉)
Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, USA
e-mail: dennisjansen@tamu.edu

Ireland is also somewhat mysterious, a place known but not known well to the representative native Texan, representing the bulk of our undergraduate enrollment. This makes it relatively easy to garner interest in the program. Ireland is also a highly developed nation, and it is safe. There is low crime, very low violent crime, and despite past ‘troubles,’ there is very little fear of terrorism. All of this makes Ireland an attractive study abroad destination to students, and perhaps just as important, to their parents. This is an important consideration for any study abroad program, as the program must generate sufficient demand. Texas A&M University requires a minimum of ten students in order for a faculty-led study abroad program to be approved.

From a pedagogical standpoint, Ireland is different enough from the U.S., and different enough from Texas, so that it provides student participants with the opportunity to experience a different culture, a different society, which is perhaps the greatest benefit of a study abroad program. Certainly, Irish politics and the average resident’s opinion vary quite a bit from Texas, providing students with an opportunity to broaden their horizons and their understanding of how others see us, and how we see others—through the lenses of our own cultures. Ireland provides a gentle entrée into this cross-cultural understanding.

Ireland is part of the European Union, and the Eurozone. The latter fact gives students firsthand experience with foreign exchange and prices in a different currency. This seems obvious and easy, but it is a new experience for most of our study abroad students. More importantly, Ireland is a proud member of the European Union, and the Irish tend to be strongly and loudly ‘pro-Europe’ while simultaneously having a special place in their hearts for the United States. The Ireland-to-U.S. migrations have cemented family ties between our two nations and can partly explain the fascination that America, and especially American politics, holds for the Irish. Moreover, this knowledge of American politics and American society, together with the slightly different prism through which another culture sees the world, provides students with that alternative world view which proves so broadening.

The membership of Ireland in the E.U. also provides a host of potential discussion items for the classroom, including issues of federalism, differences between the political and economic relationships among nations in the E.U. and states in the U.S., and so on. The Irish experience with the global financial crisis and the Great Recession provides another lesson, as the crisis had a strong negative impact on Ireland and led to a period of austerity from which they have since recovered. Ireland’s growth and acclaim as the ‘Celtic Tiger’ in the 1990s and early 2000s provides another lesson, as Ireland has grown to surpass the United Kingdom—and much of the E.U.—in GDP per capita. These large themes can provide the basis for special topic courses or for student papers.

19.2 Academic Structure of the Program

My study abroad program was deemed a faculty-led program through Texas A&M University. Basically, this meant that I accompanied students on the program that I organized. These were strictly Texas A&M University students. I advertised the program on campus, but not externally.

Texas A&M required that I teach two three-credit-hour courses during the study abroad program, and that these two courses contain the same amount of contact hours as a course I would teach on campus in College Station, which is 35 h. The two courses I taught would count as general electives for Economics majors or minors, and as social science courses or general electives for other majors. The opportunity to focus on Ireland as a case study for economic analysis, its growth and development and its financial sector, and to contrast Ireland with the U.S., is a unique feature of this program. I was there the year before, and then just at the beginning of the financial crisis and the Great Recession, and thus my class focused on Ireland's rapid growth and development rather than on Ireland's experience with the Great Recession.

19.3 Courses

I taught two courses. One was a financial economics class that I also taught annually at Texas A&M University, and the other was a special topics course more specific to Ireland.

19.3.1 ECON 489: Special Topics: Growth and Development of the Irish Economy: History, Current Status, Future Prospects

The Department of Economics teaches several courses in economic development, but no course studying the development and economic history of a single nation. This course views Ireland as a case study, and in many ways, Ireland is ideal for this purpose. Ireland has a long history of impoverishment, terrible famines and huge out-migration, and a reliance on remittances from abroad. Post-nationhood status, it was one of the poorest countries in Europe, especially Western Europe. It is a nation that, in the last three decades, has seen its status change to become arguably the richest country in Europe, a nation branded with the moniker 'Celtic Tiger' because it achieved growth rates usually associated with the Asian Tiger economies such as South Korea and Taiwan. During this period, Ireland experienced a significant and persistent in-migration of non-Irish for the first time in its modern history, and Ireland became a source of remittances for other nations such as Poland. Most

recently, it is a nation hard-hit by the Great Recession, facing a situation that, relative to its size, is more damaging than the financial crisis in the U.S.

Simultaneously studying Ireland's economy while sojourning in Ireland provides students with an immersion in the Irish economy, Irish culture and way of life that is not available in other settings. Identifying the determinants of economic growth and development in Ireland, understanding the policy debates, understanding why the Irish focus so much on relations with Europe, the Euro, and gaining a deeper knowledge of how living in a currency union and Free Trade Zone impacts daily life as well as policy debates, were all enhanced by studying in Ireland. Trips to the Connemara region north of Galway exposed students to life in Ireland as it was in past days, a relatively poor agrarian society, bringing into focus Ireland as it was, pre-Celtic Tiger. Living in Dublin gave students exposure to the vibrant and arguably premiere city in Ireland and home of the federal government. They learned first-hand about life in Ireland today, post-Celtic Tiger, and trips to various other locations in Ireland (e.g. Galway, Belfast) provided students with exposure to the great diversity in Irish society. Studying in Dublin allowed access to one of the premiere universities in Ireland, University College Dublin (UCD), as well as possible access to UCD faculty for guest lectures.

The academic objectives of the course were to provide students with an understanding of the gains from trade (the concept of comparative advantage, the terms of trade), exchange rates, exchange rate systems, and determinants of exchange rates (such as purchasing power parity), balance of payments issues (definitions, determinants, the role of a Free Trade Zone), the special case of a small, open economy (definition, impact on policy choices), monetary and fiscal policy in a currency union (impact on policy choices), and the theory of economic growth (determinants of growth, property rights and institutions). When we discussed each of these topics, we took time to apply our tools of economic analysis to Ireland, aiming to see how our understanding of each economic concept helped us understand the Irish experience. Students learned certain facts of Ireland's economic history and the tools to place those facts within a coherent and logical structure to better understand Ireland's stellar growth rates—the Celtic Tiger period—along with Ireland's current situation and constrained policy choices. The class was primarily lecture based, with readings from Weil (2009) and Easterly (2002).

19.3.2 ECON 445: Financial Economics (Study Abroad Version)

This course serves as an overview of financial economics, including financial institutions, asset pricing, portfolio management, risk management, and derivative securities. The course textbook was Bodie et al. (2012). While this course is taught nearly every semester by the Department of Economics, in Ireland it was modified to include an extended discussion of the Euro and Eurozone, and how participation

in this currency union impacts Ireland. Ireland is a good case study of a country participating in a currency union but with several major trading partners—the U.S. and especially the U.K.—that do not participate in the currency union. The course spent more time on European financial institutions, especially Ireland’s financial relationship with London and the rest of Europe, and less time on U.S. institutions. Living in Ireland provided students with firsthand knowledge of life in a nation firmly committed to the Euro and economic integration. Finally, our discussions of the financial crisis focused on Ireland, a nation hard-hit by the Great Recession, more so than the U.S., and on the Irish response to this crisis.

When taught in College Station, ECON 445 students are required to build and manage a semester-long hypothetical stock portfolio, to create an ‘annual report’ detailing the performance of this portfolio, and to present this to the class. When taught in a summer study abroad class in Ireland, this is not practical due to the shortened calendar time of the course. Instead students are required to write a paper comparing the impact of the financial crisis, and responses to the financial crisis, in Ireland and one other impacted country.

Advantages of studying in Ireland include gaining a better understanding of how the financial system in Ireland differs from the U.S., especially how participation in a Free Trade Zone and a currency union impacts financial matters and restricts policy choices. For instance, Ireland’s response to the financial crisis is restricted by its lack of a monetary policy instrument, as monetary policy is determined in Frankfurt at the European Central Bank. In Dublin, students can explore the Irish Central Bank, including its limited role given Ireland’s adoption of the Euro. We examined the Maastricht Treaty and other constraints placed on Irish monetary and fiscal policy as members of the Eurozone. Ireland’s specific, small, open economy characteristics and the impact on Irish financial markets were discussed, and we spent time studying remittances.

Ireland was once a net exporter of labor—outmigration to various nations especially the U.K. and U.S.—and a net recipient of remittances, monies sent by emigrants back to the home country. Ireland, the Celtic Tiger, later became a net importer of labor—a large migration from other E.U. countries, e.g. Poland—and a net supplier of remittances, funds sent home by immigrants to Ireland. Studying these topics in Ireland provided an immediacy absent from studying these topics in the middle of Texas. In addition, students were asked to consider Ireland as one state in the E.U., and compare Ireland to one state in the U.S., e.g. California or Texas, in order to compare and contrast Ireland’s ability to respond to the recent financial crisis with California’s ability to respond to the crisis in the U.S.

19.4 Why Dublin?

I had originally planned to make NUIG and Galway our home base. Galway has much to recommend it as a smaller, more intimate community and something of a

college town. It has a lively music scene and nightlife for students. But in the end, I made Galway a destination for one of our weekend excursions instead of our home base.

Instead, I chose University College Dublin because it is in the capital city and because of the somewhat quirky Irish rail system. The train routes in Ireland basically originate in Dublin, on the east coast, and spread out to the various cities in Ireland like spokes on a wheel. This means that travel from Dublin to the various locales was relatively easy to arrange. Unfortunately, it meant that travel from one of the far locations, say Galway, to another location, say Cork, requires a train ride first from Galway to Dublin, and then from Dublin to Cork. There are no direct train routes from Galway to Cork. This unfortunate feature of the Irish rail system led me to investigate and eventually choose UCD as our home base. Dublin also has the advantage of more things to do, as it is both the largest city and the capital of Ireland. The Appendix contains a list I provided to the students of things to do in Dublin and places to visit in and around Dublin. This information is quite useful to the students as they explored Dublin in the afternoons and evenings of their stay.

19.5 Why UCD?

UCD was willing to provide lodging and classroom access, for a fee, and had the benefit of being located in Dublin. It is not in the city center, as is Trinity University, but it is in a suburb about 10 min by bus from the city center. UCD is a modern university campus with many amenities and with a familiar feel for students used to an American-style campus.

At UCD we were able to arrange for use of a standard small classroom equipped with the usual facilities. This was negotiated as part of our dorm rental agreement.

19.6 Excursions, Guest Speakers, and Other Activities

The program lasted 6 weeks. Class was held during weekdays, and excursions occurred almost every weekend. On class days we would often meet for 2 hours per class, with a number of breaks during the class time. What follows is my activity list for 1 year of the program. The activity list in the second year was almost identical.

- **Week 1.** First weekend, arrive and settle into housing at UCD, tour UCD; tour Dublin. (Guinness Storehouse; Literary Pub Crawl tour; Dublin Historical Tour; Trinity University, Bank of Ireland.)
- **Week 2.** Second weekend, excursion to Wicklow Mountains and Glendalough. Travel by public tour bus. Depending on availability, we would schedule a local Irish expert to discuss aspects of Ireland's culture, history, and society. This would occur during class time.

- **Week 3.** Third weekend, trip to Galway by train. Local transportation in Dublin by tram. One night in Galway hotel. Visit Cliffs of Mohar by tour bus on arrival day. Visit Connemara region by tour bus on departure day.
- **Week 4.** Fourth weekend, visit Belfast by train. Long weekend. Hotel in Belfast. One day for Black Cab tour of Belfast, including Peace Walls and various shrines to events during The Troubles. Second day for tour along the north coast, including the Giant's Causeway.
- **Week 5.** Open. Long weekend. Optional travel for students—most took advantage of the opportunity to visit another city or cities in Europe. Examples include London, Amsterdam, Paris, even Rome or Barcelona.
- **Week 6.** Departure follows.

In addition to weekend activities, there were activities scheduled during the week, and almost always activities for the late afternoon or evening. Some of these are listed as Week 1 activities above, but other activities include the following:

- Tour of the Irish Parliament, the Oireachtas. (Arranged by staff at UCD.)
- Visit Dublin theatres.
- A hurling match or a Gaelic football match. (Possibly also a rugby or soccer match).
- The Dublin greyhound racing track. (Evening event I attended with interested students.)
- A pub or other location to see Irish set-dancing.

19.7 Lodging and Meals

Lodging in Dublin was easy to arrange; we stayed in University College Dublin dorms. These are modern apartment-style rooms with in-suite facilities for each room. This constrains the study abroad program to begin after the UCS spring semester is over, but that did not impose a severe restriction on planning the program.

An important benefit of this lodging arrangement was the close contact our students had with study abroad students from other universities in the U.S. and students from other countries who were also staying in UCD dorms that summer, as well as some Irish UCD students spending the summer on campus. This contact with other students was also part of the broadening and learning experience of my study abroad program.

Similar dormitory housing would have been available at NUIG as well. Irish universities were willing and able to arrange to rent out their unused dorm space for American summer study abroad programs.

Meal service was arranged after a bit of give-and-take with UCD. They offered several choices of meal plans involving either a fixed number of meals (such as breakfast every day) or more expensive flexible plans. We chose a plan that included

breakfast for every student and allowed students to seek lunch or dinner on their own, either on campus or in the community. This worked well, as students did not feel they were tied down to UCD for lunch and dinner meals.

19.8 Transportation: Ground and Air

Ireland has an extensive bus service between cities and to various tourist locations, and good train service to and from Dublin. Public transportation to most activities is feasible and desirable. Locally there is bus service from the Dublin city center to the UCD campus located in the southern outskirts of Dublin. The bus travel time is about 10 min outside of rush hour. Dublin airport is the main airport in Ireland and there is bus and taxi service to the city center. An alternative is Shannon airport on the west coast near Limerick and not far from Galway.

Students made their own arrangements to arrive at Dublin's airport. I provided an extensive document outlining transportation by coach from the airport to a bus stop at the edge of campus. I included both a route map for the coach and directions to get from the bus stop to the dorms on the UCD campus. I also included a map of the UCD campus with building names in case students were lost, and my cell phone was available to them as well. The appendix provides a short guide to transportation around Dublin.

19.9 Program Cost

This program was relatively inexpensive by the standards of Texas A&M University study abroad programs, mostly because I did the planning for excursions and negotiated good rates for lodging and meals with UCD. That said, the program was costly. In 2012 the cost was estimated to be \$6800. This included tuition and fees for the two classes (\$1700), estimated airfare (\$1100), estimated meal expenses (\$640), travel documents, textbooks, etc. (\$220), lodging (\$1300), excursions and in-country transportation (\$580), health insurance and etc. (\$150), a study abroad administrative fee (\$360), and \$400 to cover faculty expenses. That last charge was to cover my airfare, meals, and lodging while at UCD. Texas A&M University paid me a summer salary for organizing and teaching in this program, but the students were required to cover my travel, meal per diem, and lodging expense.

The estimate of \$6800 probably severely underestimated actual student expenditures. Most students spent many evenings socializing in restaurants and pubs, and participated in many of the optional weekday events. Almost all students took advantage of their location on the edge of Europe to travel to another country on our 'long weekend' near the end of our time in Ireland, and this surely incurred additional expenses.

19.10 Summary of Experience

I thoroughly enjoyed my two summers taking students to Ireland. I welcomed the opportunity to show them the country, and I found that I very much liked getting to know them. There were 14 students with me in 2011, and just over 20 in 2012. These were students who spent part of almost every day with me for 5 weeks or more. In many ways this was the most enjoyable undergraduate teaching experience of my career. Almost all of my undergraduate teaching has been to fairly large or very large classrooms, so having a ‘liberal art-type experience’ while teaching for Texas A&M University’s Economics Department was a treat, an experience to cherish. I would probably have continued the program for several more years if budget cuts had not led to a 70% reduction in my compensation for running the program. It turns out that such an offer was well below my reservation price!

The students who participated in this program were very enthusiastic about the opportunity to study abroad. They bonded with each other, and they bonded with me. My 2011 class proved to be my best advocates, and were great recruiters for my 2012 class. Both classes have largely kept in touch over the years, certainly in much higher proportions than any other undergraduate class I have ever taught.

Our travels around Ireland were especially popular, including our trip to Galway and our exploration of the Wicklow Mountains. The most interesting trip was no doubt our trip to Belfast. The ‘Peace Walls’ and shrines to those fallen in The Troubles were eye opening to me, and to the students. I am sure all of them were moved by the experience.

Through this program I feel like I provided the ‘transformative experience’ that Texas A&M University desires in its study abroad programs.

Appendix

Transport Around Dublin

Dublin has a good bus system. It has a train—the DART (Dublin Area Rapid Transit), with stations at the city center and places outside the city such as Malahide, Howth, Bray, Dun Laoghaire. There is also a tram (or light rail system) called the Luas, with a red line that runs from the city center to the north side, and a blue line that green line that runs from the city center to the south side. Taxis are usually available in the city centre. They can be expensive. Taxi ranks are found on O’Connell Street, Middle Abbey Street, and St. Stephens Green. Here are some useful Dublin transportation websites:

1. Dublin bus: www.dublinbus.ie
2. Bus guide: <https://www.tripsavvy.com/taking-the-bus-in-dublin-1542307>
3. Luas: <https://luas.ie/>

4. DART: <http://www.irishrail.ie/>
5. UCD's 'Hit the Road' website: <http://ucd.hittheroad.ie/>¹

Some Things to do in Dublin

- Parks
 - St Stephen's Green Park
 - Merrion Square Park
 - The Iveagh Gardens
 - Dubh Linn Gardens at Dublin Castle
 - Phoenix Park (houses the Dublin Zoo)
- Theatre and concerts
 - Abbey Theatre (Ireland's National Theatre)
 - Gate Theatre
 - Gaiety Theatre
 - The O²
 - Bord Gáis Energy Theatre
- Films
 - Screen Cinema
 - Savoy Cinema
 - Irish Film Institute
 - Stillorgan Cinema
 - Cineworld Dublin

Some Places to Visit in and Near Dublin

- **Howth**—reachable by DART or bus. A small fishing village. A pier, beautiful scenery, cliff walks, great restaurants, an open air market on weekends.
- **Dún Laoghaire**—reachable by DART or bus. A seaside town.
- **Bray to Greystones Cliff Walk**—DART to Bray, 6km cliff walk to Greystones.
- **Croke Park Stadium**—the home of Gaelic Games: football, hurling and camogie.
- **Temple Bar**—city centre. Cobble streets, pubs with traditional music, nightlife.
- **George's Street Arcade**—a shopping centre located in the city centre.
- **Christ Church Cathedral**—located in the city centre.

¹Shows how to travel from UCD to other locations in Dublin using the bus, Luas, or DART.

- **Guinness Storehouse**—walkable from the city centre, or take a bus.
- **Kilmainham Gaol**—Take the 79 or 79A from Aston Quay. Historic gaol that held prisoners during the Easter Rising (1916), the War of Independence, the Irish Civil War.
- **Cow's Lane Market**—outdoor market on Saturday.

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