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## Faculty-Led International Business Seminar in Dublin, Ireland: An Account of Personal Experiences and Reflection of the Difference in Work-Life Balance Between Ireland and the United States of America

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**Faculty-Led International Business Seminar in Dublin, Ireland: An Account of Personal Experiences and Reflection of the Difference in Work-Life Balance Between Ireland and the United States of America**

**By**

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**An Honors Thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of Science in Business Administration in Accounting**

**Sam M. Walton College of Business  
University of Arkansas  
Fayetteville, Arkansas  
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## **Preface:**

This summer, I had the opportunity to study abroad in Dublin, Ireland, as a part of the University of Arkansas Faculty-Led International Business Seminar in Ireland. Traveling with fellow University of Arkansas – Sam Walton College of Business students allowed me to build genuine connections. Led by Professor Katie Terrell and Dr. Charles Leflar, each of us was provided with a unique chance to gain hands-on experience in International Business affairs, specifically Accounting. While abroad, we learned about international business strategies and practical details that help a business thrive.

We visited PwC, Ernst & Young, and Deloitte during this program. Each office provided us with an exclusive look into the world of accounting, the inner workings of the company, and individual seminars that were highly personalized; we met with company executives over Zoom, were provided with food and entertainment, and were allowed to meet with some of the office partners during an after-work social. Traveling abroad also allowed me to explore diverse topics and pair culture and history with business. Immersing in Irish culture was highly enforced, as we were tasked with visiting at least ten different historical landmarks in Dublin and writing about our experiences. Moreover, we were given an organized schedule of various cultural Irish activities on the first day. The study abroad trip to Dublin, Ireland, was to enhance students' understanding of business topics in accounting and to apply cultural experiences to international business affairs.

The academic insights, visits to iconic landmarks, and cultural immersion granted me knowledge that no classroom could administer. I am immensely proud to have been part of this program and grateful to all who put the time and effort into making this experience abroad one of a kind.

## **History:**

Ireland is rich in green grass, rolling hills, fairytales, Guinness, and history. As deemed by the famous Irish author James Joyce, Ireland was long considered the “afterthought of Europe” (Kilfeather, 2005, p. *ix*). However, times have changed. Since Ireland proclaimed independence in 1919, a country's once "afterthought" became an unrivaled force in history, culture, and pride. The history of Ireland as a country pre-dates the United States by thousands of years. The island is in the Northern area of the Atlantic Ocean, surrounded by the North Channel (Irish Sea). It stands separate in the east from Great Britain.

The first significant finding of life is considered to have been discovered "not later than the early seventh century” (Kilfeather, 2005, p. 22). Much of the geographical makeup has changed drastically since those first settlers. However, the country's origins are rooted in the many changes since its founding. The rich heritage of cultural traditions in Ireland is attributed to the many battles fought for independence against the British and the suffering caused by the Great Famine, which led to the conglomeration of many diverse nations presiding from Irish descent. In the mid-nineteenth century, before The Great Famine, Ireland was known for the extreme poverty of its people. Personal accounts from a Scotsman named Douglass describe the people of Dublin, “[in] extreme poverty and wretchedness of the poor was frequently with which [he] met little children in the street at a late hour of the night covered in filthy rags” (Kilfeather, 2005, p. 122). From 1845 to 1852, the Irish suffered in agony from a potato famine, their primary source of sustenance caused by a blight disease. The roots and leaves of the potato plants were destroyed by the disease, causing the crop to fail. The people of Ireland pleaded with

their neighboring country and conquerors, the British, to send them a means to survive. However, Great Britain did little to aid Ireland and was content with letting a tremendous amount of Irish people suffer and eventually die. Many people in Ireland walked to safer places and ports, hoping to get food or leave the country. Around one million people died from disease-related illnesses and starvation, and more than one million people fled the country in hopes of finding a better life in America. This caused the Irish population to fall by 20-25%, leaving the land desolate and desperate. The increased population in America brought about by the immigrating Irish contributes to the Irish heritage reflected in many Americans today. "The ethnic ancestry data from the 1980 Consensus indicate that 4.1 million immigrants came from Ireland between 1820 and 1920...[and] the 1980 Census enumerated over 40 million Irish-Americans" (Hout & Goldstein, 1994, p. 64-65).

The outcome of The Great Famine continues to haunt the Irish people. It is memorialized nationwide through statues, landmarks, songs, etc. After the famine, Ireland pushed for some form of recovery yet did not forget the lingering desire for independence as a nation. British rule in Ireland dates to the Anglo-Norman invasion on behalf of the English king, Henry II, in the twelfth century. "King Henry was slow to mature, but as he did, he began to feel that Tudor sense of the omnipotence of the State and the danger from 'over-mighty subjects' which was the keynote of the new monarchy" (Curtis, 1936, p. 168). Irish nationalism was likely to be ignored and discarded as insignificant, with the superiority complex adopted by English monarchs. British control over Ireland had spanned several centuries. Although Ireland repeatedly rebelled against its rule, its fight for freedom never prevailed.

After the First World War, Irish resistance against Great Britain began to build. With the revival of Irish-American nationalism, Ireland stood a fighting chance to finally gain independence. The Irish War of Independence was fought between the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and British forces. In 1919, "revolutionary assembly formed, claims sovereignty, is suppressed by government but retains master-insurgency policies to further alienate nationalists. [In 1921] military stalemate leads to truce, negotiation, and compromise treaty delivering functional independence" (Hart, 2003, p. 3). Finally, gaining independence granted Ireland the freedom to flourish as a unified nation. However, the Northern area of Ireland remains under British rule. It has caused a divide among the people in Ireland's Southern and Northern territories. Given the circumstances, the small island in the North Atlantic is characterized by the vast history and cultural traditions that make up what we call Ireland.

### **Study Abroad Activities**

The study abroad program consisted of four weeks of learning through cultural immersion, tours, classes, travel, and personal experiences. I was granted the opportunity to travel abroad to a foreign country with fellow University of Arkansas students. While abroad, I learned about international business affairs with Irish professor Dr. Sean Cassidy at the University College of Dublin. I also participated in local Irish activities, including hurling, Gaelic football, scenic tours, Irish dancing, baking, and more. The purpose of the study abroad trip was to provide the students in attendance with the chance to immerse in another culture while learning about the differences between office structures in America and Ireland. Although the trip was staff-led, we could choose how we would like to experience Ireland when a tour was not planned. Building relationships with the locals opened my eyes to the stark differences between Ireland and America and caused me to reflect on my desires in life going forward.

The following subsections detail my weekly activities in the program.

*Week 1 – Tours, Classes, and Cultural Immersion:*

The first week abroad consisted of tours, classes, and cultural immersion. The first few days in Ireland were spent familiarizing ourselves with the University College Dublin campus (the location of our lodging; Figure 1A, 1B) and the city of Dublin. The college campus was beautiful, and the layout was quite like that of American universities. The significant difference I noticed was the lack of Greek Life (interfraternity councils). Without Greek Life, the students had a greater sense of community. Moreover, at American universities, it is common for students not involved in Greek Life to feel as if they are isolated from living the ‘classic’ college experience.

However, at the University College of Dublin, there is a much greater sense of community even without the presence of interfraternity councils. The college offered many amenities promoting student engagement and comfort, including a grocery store, movie theater, large gym, sports fields, public transportation services, and a pub. All these amenities were on-campus, allowing students to feel more comfortable while away from home. Moreover, the quality of services and goods provided to the students on campus was much better than that of most American universities I have visited. Overall, I immediately felt comfortable, safe, and welcome on campus, even though the environment was new.



**Figure 1A:** *The University College of Dublin*  
(Photo by Author)



**Figure 1B:** *The University College of Dublin*  
(Photo by Author)

The city of Dublin (Figure 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D) was much different than I anticipated. I have visited several major cities in the United States, including New York City, Boston, and Houston.

Dublin was quite different from what I was used to. For one, Dublin is much smaller than major cities in the United States regarding population and square footage. Second, there are no skyscrapers, which makes the city feel quaint. Third, Dublin is rich in history, with many structures, statues, and even pubs older than those in the United States. Another area of difference between America and Ireland that stood out was public transportation as the primary method of travel throughout the city and neighboring towns. Most of Europe relies on public transportation for everyday travel because it is more convenient than owning and driving individual cars, and the cities and neighboring towns in Europe are much closer in proximity than areas in the United States. Becoming familiar and comfortable with Dublin's public transportation system was necessary if we wanted to travel anywhere off-campus. At first, relying on a bus and learning the schedule seemed difficult, but navigating it was relatively simple. By the third day in Ireland, I felt confident navigating simple travel routes.



**Figure 2A:** *Taoiseach Residence*  
(Photo by Author)



**Figure 2B:** *O'Neil's Tavern*  
(Photo by Author)

On the third day, we had a class with an Irish professor, Dr. Sean Cassidy. The first lecture covered how Irish history and culture relate to business on a global scale. The talk was highly informative; it expanded my knowledge of Ireland and related international business aspects to specific Dublin companies. Immersing in the culture outside of class was greatly encouraged. Moreover, we were required to engage in at least ten cultural activities not included in the daily itinerary before leaving. We visited Dublin Castle, Trinity College, and Teeling's Whiskey Distillery (Figure 4), all within the first week to learn more about Dublin. To end the week, we had a special visit with employers and employees at the PwC office in Dublin, Ireland (Figure 5). The visit consisted of a dinner with shareholders, a personalized tour of the office, and a one-man performance of the world-renowned Irish novel *Ulysses* by Irish author James



Joyce. All the activities I participated in within the first week of being in Ireland submerged me into the culture, allowing me to feel more comfortable while abroad.



**Figure 2C:** *Grafton Street*  
(Photo by Author)



**Figure 2D:** *River Liffy*  
(Photo by Author)



**Figure 3:** *St. Stephen's Green*  
(Photo by Author)





**Figure 4:** *Teeling's Whiskey Distillery*  
(Photo by Author)



**Figure 5:** *PwC Office in Dublin, Ireland*  
(Photo by Author)

### Week 2 – Deep Dive Cultural Lectures:

During the second lecture, Dr. Cassidy presented an open-floor discussion about the motives that drive profit in the U.S. economy and the components that characterize U.S. culture. The concept of having an open discussion in class was new to me, considering most of my classes in college have consisted of listening to a professor speak about a topic while the students furiously typed notes on a laptop. While I have had a couple of classes where open discussion is allowed, rarely is it regular or encouraged in many courses. Another aspect of Dr. Cassidy's lecture that differed from the courses I took in college was the lack of PowerPoint presentations. Although PowerPoint presentations are helpful or necessary for some courses, I have noticed that many students struggle to pay attention when slides are used. Whether students have a tough time focusing due to being on their laptops, the lack of engagement correlated to PowerPoint, or the ability to check notifications from their cell phones, I have noticed that students are less engaged when technology is present during class. One reason I appreciated Dr. Cassidy's class and felt I could learn quickly was due to the lack of technology integrated into the lecture material.

During the lecture, many students agreed that the United States culture was fueled by individualism and freedom, which relates to the motives (increased GDP, capitalism, businesses, etc.) that propel the U.S. economy. To better understand this concept, we compared cultures worldwide to the United States and Ireland. We discussed their driving motives in fine detail. This lecture taught me the vast difference between cultures worldwide and the importance of awareness of culture in international business. The next day was our last lecture with Dr. Cassidy. He covered another in-depth discussion about cultural intelligence and how it pertains

to success in business, then talked about the importance of the European Union and how most countries within the European Union conduct business.

What I found most important about the lectures was the mention of cultural differences between countries and the benefit of having cultural intelligence when conducting business. Although diversity, equity, and inclusion are highly promoted in American corporations, most Americans need to be made aware of what it means to be culturally intelligent. This lack of understanding is reflected in the American school system. In American public schools, students must learn American history and world history; however, I have noticed that most schools focus on supporting STEM fields rather than fine arts. Based on my relationships with international students, European school systems support most fields of study equally.

Moreover, history and art are integral areas of study in primary school. It was also apparent that people I met from other countries, whether they were tourists in Ireland or natives, knew more about American history and current news than I did. I not only felt ignorant but also felt frustrated. I am frustrated at myself for not knowing basic facts about my country. However, I am also frustrated at the United States for not encouraging its citizens to be aware of what is happening in America and the rest of the world.

The rest of the week was filled with more cultural activities, and we traveled outside Dublin. We traveled by private bus to various locations, including Hook's Head Lighthouse, finished by monks in 1240 AD, a small coastal town called Wexford, and the Irish Historical National Park. Visiting locations outside of Dublin allowed me to learn more about Irish history. For example, Hook's Head Lighthouse (Figure 6) is the oldest standing lighthouse in the world, which is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The most important thing I have taken away from the cross-country travel and lectures is the importance of history. Ireland is a country rooted in its rich heritage, which has been descended from its history. An appreciation of the past drives the culture of Ireland and establishes a powerful sense of pride among the Irish people, so knowing and understanding Ireland's past is integral.



**Figure 6:** *Hook's Head Lighthouse*  
(Photo by Author)

### Week 3 – Exploring the Countryside:

On the third week of the study abroad trip, we traveled west of Dublin to learn more about the country. We traveled to multiple locations out west, including Galway, Aughnanure Castle, Kylemore Abbey West, Kilgeever–Clashcame, Westport, Slievemore, Lahinch, and Inishmore Island (Figure 7A, 7B, 7C, 7D, 7E, 7F). Traveling to all these sites allowed us to enjoy Ireland from a unique perspective. While learning about the history of the city of Dublin was informative and essential, traveling out west diversified my experiences in Ireland. The first place we stopped in to stay overnight was Galway. Although Galway is a larger city like Dublin, the culture is still unique. The other sites (Aughnanure Castle, Abbey West, Kilgeever – Clashcame, Slievemore, Lahinch) were brief stops along the way to Galway. Although little time was spent at these locations, visiting them was still crucial to the trip because it taught me even more about Irish history and culture. For example, Slievemore is a deserted village out west with eighty to one hundred stone cottages abandoned along the Slievemore mountain.

Irish farmers who were forced to leave and seek asylum during the Irish Potato Famine used to occupy the abandoned cottages at Slievemore, and "it is estimated that it supported one-tenth of [Achill] island's population at the time of the famine" (McDonald, 1998, p. 77). Sadly, hundreds of the families traveling east in search of food and safety died from starvation, disease, and hypothermia. Generations of Ireland's history are characterized by loss, which directly translates to the strong respect Irish people feel for their ancestors. Although America's history correlates with solemn endings and loss, there is not as great reverence for ancestors as in Ireland. One reason Americans are less inclined to care for the older generation is the decline in familial sanctity. Dr. Cassidy mentioned that the 'American Dream' describes people's desire to strive for individual success. However, the push to focus inwardly has negatively impacted Americans as people become more selfish and disregard others, including family members. The rise in individualism could lead to decreased population turnover in America. It will ultimately affect the economy of the United States in the long term. "Despite the recent decline (in native-born Americans), foreign-born mothers continue to give birth to a disproportionate share of the nation's newborns" (Livingston & Cohn, 2012, p. 2). However, many other countries and cultures, such as Ireland, India, and Mexico, maintain familial sanctity and have experienced an increased birth rate that will eventually out-match the American population.

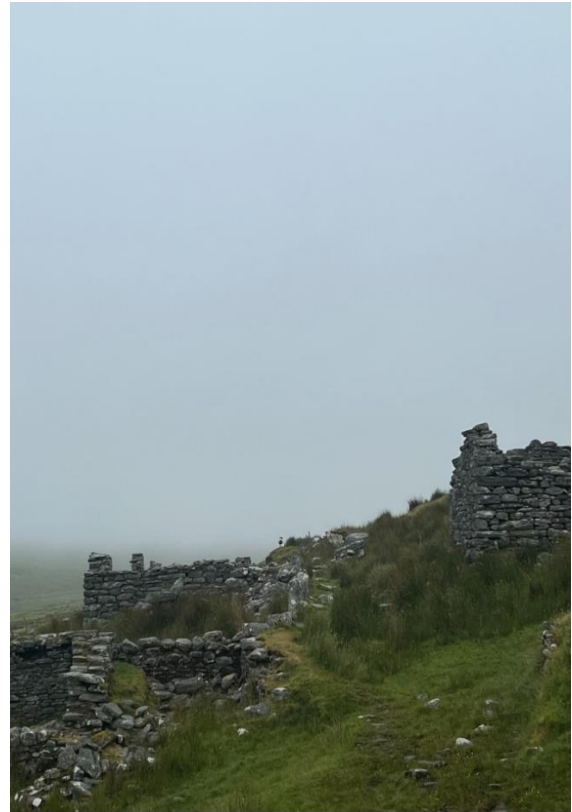
We were only in Galway for a night before heading to a small urban town called Westport. While at Westport, we enjoyed a night out meeting with locals and headed to bed early since we were traveling to Inishmore Island the next day. Inishmore is an island off the bay of Galway, and you must travel by ferry to get there. The ferry ride was three hours long and rough, but once there, we received bicycles to use while traveling around the island. The island "has a total area of around 31 km<sup>2</sup> (12 sq miles) and measures 14 km long by 3.8 km wide, [and] a population of around 900 people" (Revell, 2023, p. 1). One of the most exciting sites we could see was an area along the island's coast that used to house a Viking castle. Another intriguing aspect of Inishmore was the reliance on older methods of transportation and communication. Considering the small island, a limited number of motorized vehicles are allowed in Inishmore. It was refreshing not to experience traffic or the loud noise of vehicles and simply travel by foot or bicycle.

In terms of communication, many native islanders spoke Gaelic as their primary language to preserve and honor Irish history. It reminded me of the Native American tribes that still speak their native tongue to preserve aspects of their culture. However, the difference is that all Irish primary school students must learn Gaelic until they receive their diploma and leave for

university. Learning another language from elementary school to high school is not required by all American schools. The English language is universal, so it is common for Americans to be complacent with knowing just English and feel it unnecessary to broaden their linguistic skills. However, I believe that learning another language is an integral skill people lack. Being multilingual expands an individual's understanding of the world, and "knowing a second language means a whole new literature is in your hands"(University of the Potomac, 2024). The island itself felt archaic, and being able to spend two days at Inishmore was a privilege. We spent four days out west until our time was cut short, and we traveled back to Dublin.



**Figure 7A:** *Kylemore Abbey*  
(Photo by Author)



**Figure 7B:** *Slievemore; The Deserted Village*  
(Photo by Author)





**Figure 7C:** *Inis Mor Island*  
(Photo by Author)



**Figure 7D:** *Inis Mor Island*  
(Photo by Author)



**Figure 7E:** *Cliffs of Moher*  
(Photo by Author)



**Figure 7F:** *Aughnanure Castle*  
(Photo by Author)

#### Week 4 – Final Thoughts:

For the last week in Ireland, we had no agenda except for a final term report. We could travel around the country, visit historical landmarks, or simply relax. The final term report was initially supposed to be a ten-page paper. However, Professor Terrell and Dr. Leflar felt that there may be better ideas than a ten-page paper, considering the rise in cheating through ChatGPT. Rather than requiring us to draft a paper, the professors assigned a twenty-minute oral report about an Irish topic of our choosing.

The topic that I chose to research and discuss was how the Guinness Factory drives business in Dublin, Ireland. I utilized online resources and personal experience in Dublin to gather information about the topic and provide facts to support my claim. Guinness serves its product worldwide as a privately held company, making it a staple in Dublin and Nigeria. Employing thousands of employees, the Guinness Storehouse Factory “at St. James’s Gate continues to be a heritage center for Guinness” (Corcoran, 2009, p. 146). The oral report was more of a conversation than a strict presentation, which was beneficial because it opened the topic to more discussion about how the Guinness Factory is not just influential as a product but also as an idea. In a novel (2009) by Tony Corcoran, *The Goodness of Guinness*, the author describes the act of drinking Guinness as an experience that transcends the basic idea of alcohol consumption. Instead, drinking a Guinness in Ireland is an experience that immerses you in Ireland's rich history.

Moreover, "the label displays the O’Neill harp, which symbolizes the music of the castles and stately homes of ancient Ireland. The sound of Guinness being poured is a symphony of sweet sounds that heralds the pleasure to come” (Corcoran, 2009, p. 11). Based on my experiences at the pubs in Ireland, Guinness truly has the power to bring people from all over the world together.

The oral report broadened my thoughts on Ireland as a country and culture and provided insight into the differences between the United States of America and Ireland. During the last week, most of us revisited local areas we grew to love and spent as much time together as possible before we had to part ways. Traveling abroad allowed me to learn more about another country's rich history and culture, which pushed me to analyze the vast cultural differences between America and Ireland.

#### **Reflection:**

During my trip abroad to Dublin, Ireland, I immersed myself in another culture rich in history and pride. In a way, I was reminded of the United States of America, the way Irish people took such pride in their country and fought for their independence. However, after spending a month learning about the culture and building relationships with local Irish people, I noticed vast differences between Ireland and the United States, the starkest of which is the approach to work-life balance.

I visited three of the "big four" accounting firms during my trip: PwC, Deloitte & Touche, and Ernst & Young. The “big four” accounting firms are notorious for implementing long work hours, full-time commitment, and little to no work-life balance. However, through my brief experience visiting three of the “big four” accounting firms in Dublin, the work-life balance seemed integral to employment. For example, PwC offices worldwide encourage entry-level employees to take time off to study for the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) Exam in hopes of passing and receiving their license. To assist with their study hours, PwC allows 40 hours of

paid time off for employees to study. Where most offices in America differ from the Dublin office is the attitude behind allowing time off. I have talked with employees at the PwC office in Fayetteville, Arkansas. They say that while the paid time off to study seems beneficial, there is still overwhelming stress to complete unfinished work to stay caught up. Some employees at the PwC office in Dublin said the paid time off to study was strongly enforced. The employees were encouraged to focus on passing the exam rather than stressing about missed time.

While this is just one personal account exemplifying the difference in attitude towards work-life balance, an article by Professor Andrew Oswald (2002) compares job satisfaction and work-life balance in the U.S. and Europe. In the article, Oswald claims that Americans relate work-life balance to granted flexibility in time spent with their families. To put into statistical perspective, “85% of American workers say they want some more time with their family... [and] 49% of workers say they are ‘satisfied with their jobs.’” (Oswald, 2002, p. 2-5). Not only are people dissatisfied with their profession, but data suggests that there has been a steady decline in job satisfaction from the 1970s to now. “1970s: 56% of Americans were extremely satisfied at work, 1980s: 52% were extremely satisfied, 1990s: 47% were extremely satisfied.” (Oswald, 2002, p. 6)

Professor Oswald examined job satisfaction based on multiple variables: age, gender, job sector, geographic location, commute time, security, etc. Based on the Eurobarometer Survey from the late 1990s of job satisfaction results, Denmark and Ireland came at the top. At the same time, the United States scored considerably lower. These results ask, “Why is there a decline in job satisfaction in the U.S., and how does Ireland differ to remain on top?”

While abroad, I also learned about international business perspectives through lectures by Dr. Sean Cassidy, a Professor at the University College of Dublin. The lectures were more of a discussion between the students and Dr. Cassidy about how countries conduct business globally and the unique cultures that characterize these countries. We also analyzed how cultural tradition can influence business decisions. Through these lectures, I could compare The United States cross-culturally with Ireland. Naturally, similarities between the countries exist, but the differences stood out the most to me. The most noticeable difference I gathered from Irish culture compared to American culture is the absence of a lifestyle driven by individualism and a false sense of busyness.

The “American Dream” was an ideology used by individuals to drive success. While the idea behind achieving the “American Dream” fueled the fire for many successful Americans, it has evolved into an idea that drives many Americans to focus on profit maximization. Although the Irish government is like America's in striving for economic success, many American citizens center their livelihood on individual accomplishments. During the class lecture with Dr. Sean Cassidy, he asked whether Americans are focused on living by a status quo. After debate, we all concluded that too many people in America are more concerned with their professional status rather than implementing work-life balance. In Ireland, those working are often found at a pub, having a Guinness with friends after a long day. Rather than going out to get drunk, people centered their trips to pubs around enjoying one another’s company. Moreover, I never saw an Irish person in a pub scrolling on social media or taking videos on their phones. Instead, their time was spent in conversation with others, highlighting the profound difference between American and Irish nightlife culture.

Even after just a few weeks of traveling, I noticed how Irish people viewed their time as precious. While I know that notion does not apply to every individual living in Ireland, I argue that most people in Ireland are focused on enjoying the slow moments that life provides. On the



first day (Monday), walking in St. Stephens Green Park, I saw hundreds of Dubliners lying on the grass, enjoying the sun's warmth. Whether the people in the park were taking their work break, on holiday, or tourists, I have only seen a handful of students on-campus in America lying on the grass enjoying the sun. Even on beautiful weekdays when I wish to be outdoors, I spend my time in class or studying at the library. Moreover, most students who skip classes or choose not to study on sunny days are spending their time inside watching T.V., playing video games, or on their phones.

Being a part of a generation that constantly consumes information makes it extraordinarily difficult to filter what I should spend my time doing. However, attending college and studying abroad has opened my eyes to understanding how much of my time is wasted on tasks that lack substance. In Ireland, it was apparent to me that time should be cherished, so I have made it a goal of mine to look up from the screens that distract me and spend my time living in the present, enjoying the world around me.

Studying abroad has taught me more about cultural importance, history, and the lifestyle I intend to pursue. Being surrounded by Irish natives who highlighted the importance of community opened my eyes to the type of future I want. Rather than being pressured to compete for the most prestigious career or filling my time with meaningless tasks to maintain a status of busyness, I am more deliberate with the time I have.

To help me achieve my goal of spending as much time with those I love, I have limited the time I spend completing tasks that do not align with my morals. For example, rather than wasting time scrolling through my phone, I have deleted all forms of social media from my technology devices. In doing so, I have found relief from the pressure to present my life in a false light. I have also learned there is power in saying no to tasks that distract me from my ultimate life goals. Going forward, I intend to use my experience abroad to fuel my desired lifestyle—a life driven by enjoying time with the ones I love.

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