

1. Preparation

The first step towards a semester abroad with Erasmus+ is the application process. The University of Bremen uses the *Mobility-Online* tool for the organisation of all the bureaucratic matters. The application process starts with the registration and the completion of the application data. You will need to upload the following documents to the *Mobility-Online* webpage:

In order to go through the application process, it is necessary fill in the application data and to upload the following documents to the *Mobility-Online* webpage:

1. Curriculum Vitae
2. Letter of motivation
3. Transcript of records
4. Language certificate
5. First Online Language Test (OLS)
6. Enrolment Certificate

In preparation, it is important to adhere to the deadlines set by the Erasmus program for the documents to be submitted to *Mobility-Online*. The most important documents are:

1. The Learning Agreement - Before the Mobility
2. Grant Agreement
3. The Learning Agreement – During the Mobility

The website and the Erasmus coordinators will remind you of the due dates via E-mail.

Before you go abroad there is a mandatory Erasmus information event where the most important questions regarding exchange and Erasmus support are clarified. There you can also get a brochure in which the vital dates and contact points can be found.

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If you have any further questions, the Erasmus university coordinator at the University of Bremen, Ms. Barbara Hasenmüller (barbara.hasenmueller@uni-bremen.de) or the respective Erasmus representative from the departments will be happy to assist you. If you would like to speak to her in person you can find her in the *International Office* in the *SFG building*. For my department (FB 10: Linguistics and Literary Studies) in 2019/2020 **Dr. Henrike Evers is in charge for any concerns regarding Erasmus Program, however, an updated list of departmental coordinators can be viewed on the Erasmus homepage (→ <https://www.uni-bremen.de/erasmus0/>).**

I would suggest waiting for information provided by your host university, on the start of the so-called fresher's week and the dates for the first Erasmus activities, to plan your departure. Depending on your choice of accommodations search, you might want to book a flight one or two weeks early to get settled. The choice of accommodation is vital for any further organisational steps you are about to take (→ 5 [Accommodation](#)). It is important to take some preparation time before the start of the semester to get accustomed to the new conventions of your chosen destination and the institutional facilities. You can compare flights via Google flights and choose the one most fit for your requirements. **If you feel unsecure by booking a flight online I would recommend to book at a local travel agency. They**

can also assist you, if you need to make any changes for your flight. Unexpectedly the prices are sometimes even lower than on the internet.

2. Formalities in the host country

As the visa requirements are depending on the passport you are holding and on the country you would like to go to, it is very important to check them prior to your flight. If you are a resident of the European Union and want to travel inside the EU you would only need your residential permit.

Please be aware that only the Federal Foreign Office and the consulates are authorised to make any precise statements about this topic. As a resident of the European Union a residential permit won't be necessary for other countries inside the European Union. For countries outside of the European Union a residential permit or visa, or both may be necessary. A residential permit and a visa are similar yet not the same document. The only authority who can definitively tell you if you do or do not need a visa is the embassy or consulate of the country that you plan to visit, so do check with them prior to your visit. You can find further information on Visa and residence permits on:

→ https://studyabroad.jwu.edu/index.cfm?FuseAction=Abroad.ViewLink&Parent_ID=B8F9C9AF-5056-BA1F-72AE4CF7CF0C9134&Link_ID=B9AAD4F3-5056-BA1F-749A70E2D7388529 .

At the time of my exchange, Ireland was still part of the European Union, yet this could change.

When dealing with authorities, it is important for you to know whether you know the official bureaucratic language of your destination country. Some countries like Ireland have English as their main official language, yet also have a second official language (e.g. Gaelige). In Ireland, this should not be a problem.

Before you go abroad you should check back with your bank to see if you are able to get a credit card (e.g. Visa, MasterCard, etc.), because most transactions abroad can be committed via card transaction. If your bank account does not provide you with a credit card you could also get a bank account in your country of destination. Please keep in mind, that you will require a signed special permit from your university to open even a temporary bank account. Check back with the Erasmus-coordinators at your destination University for more information.

You may also want to think about other financial support options while you are abroad, because the financial support provided by Erasmus will likely only cover your most basic needs. Depending on your University's arrangement you will also have to check whether you need to pay tuition money. In my case I only had to pay my hometown University's tuition and even got a study-abroad discount. Ask your Erasmus coordinators for further information on that topic.

3. General information about the partner university

Compared to German cities, Maynooth is a relatively small city that is located in the county of Kildare in the east of Ireland. Dublin is only 45 minutes away on the bus routes 66/67 or 20 and 115. The Airport Hopper connects Dublin Airport with the city. Ireland is a very uncomplicated country in terms of public transport. You can get from Dublin to Belfast, Cork, Galway or other places in Ireland for 10 €, yet the bus schedule is treated as more of a recommendation. Depending on your choice of bus line you might want to use Bus Eirann's Real Time Information or getThere.ie as Google is not always reliable. (→ <https://www.buseireann.ie/inner.php?id=403> ; <https://getthere.ie/>)

The University of Maynooth is special in that way, that you do not get a flatrate transport ticket from the University. Therefore, you should get your Leap Card at the Student Union during the very first few days. This will save you a lot of time, money and trouble, as the Leap card is a national recognized

prepaid card that allows you to travel by public transport with bus, train and the 'Luas'. You can top it up in special stores all throughout Ireland, e.g. Londis at north campus or via NFC and the Leap Card App.

The university campus of the NUIM is divided into two parts: the modern north and the older south campus. Most of the lecture halls are located on the north campus. There you can find a small supermarket (Londis), the campus bookshop, the Students Union and the Sport halls, as well as a gym. Admission to the gym is free for all students of the NUIM, including Erasmus students.

Foodwise the north campus has a Starbucks and a small restaurant in the Phoenix Building, and the Students Union provides a few lunch options, but there is no canteen. You can get more information on the meal plan online or within the welcome pack which you receive when you participate in the first official meeting.

The southern campus has *St. Patrick's College*, the beautiful *Campus Cathedral*, the library (with a Starbucks), the *Aula Maxima* and the *International Office*.

The *International Office* is where the main contact person for Erasmus and international students on campus is seated. Jenny Coonan (as per 2019) openly responds to any questions and sends all informational emails concerning the Maynooth Erasmus Program. The opening hours of the *International Office* can be found on → <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/international/contact> . Upon arrival the first things you will need are the aforementioned *Leap Card* and the *Student Card*.

The campus might seem overwhelming at first sight, yet it is very clearly structured and after a few days you easily know your way around and where to find certain rooms and buildings.

Maynooth itself has one small shopping mall, called Dunes Store, manor mills, an Aldi, a Lidl and a large Tesco. Some Restaurants and great pubs can be found on the main street. I would suggest visiting a pub like O'Neill's or the Roost at a Wednesday evening, as Wednesday is Ireland's party day of the week, listening to some Irish music, ordering food and trying the Orchard Thieves or the Bulmer cider and you are guaranteed to have a great time. Pubs in general can be found all over Ireland; they are anchored in the Irish society, and not only used for drinking but also just general after-work entertainment. Even the students Union has their own bar on campus where you can watch sports and play pool. Aside from the pubs, Maynooth has a few very nice cafés and restaurants that are worth visiting.

The orientation week for newly arriving students consists of a mix of information and Entertainment events for Erasmus students during which you can get to know the city and the campus begins just after the arrival. During the first days after arrival you will be asked to go to one of the gyms in the Phoenix Building to receive your room card if you have one have got on-campus accommodation. Any signatures can then be found in the following days can be picked up in the *International Office*.

Campus life is very diverse, and the university offers many different leisure activities. A few weeks after the start of the semester the *Student Fair* takes place, where all clubs and societies present themselves. The university offers not only interesting sport clubs like cheerleading, canoeing, airsoft and powerlifting but also caters to general interests with a wide range of societies such as the *Harry Potter* Society in which one can discuss the beloved book and movie series or *Mars FM* the campus radio. Some societies even organize themed festivals that are open to all students. Erasmus and international students are very welcome. These clubs and societies are a great way to socialize, help others and to get to know the culture, the country and the students surrounding you.

The campus internet network is called *eduroam* and works with your German home university's access data. There is security personal on campus, which regularly routes in the evenings check. They can also help 24/7 to unlock your apartment door if you forget your card.

The main organisational tool for courses and exams is called *Moodle*. Your Acceptance letter will be followed by an informational e-mail that includes your login and registration data for *Moodle* and *Microsoft 365*. The University gives you a one to two term subscription for free, so you have full access to *Microsoft Word*, *PowerPoint* and *Excel* during your stay.

The seminars start the following week. this week can be used to make any changes to the timetable. You only get this officially when you are registered and have access on Moodle, so you have to get the information you need before you start search for yourself the first week via the website and the link mentioned above.

4. Course selection / course offer / restrictions for ERASMUS students

After receiving my Erasmus support at the end of March and confirmation from my host university in Ireland in June, I was finally able to start choosing my courses. The Erasmus coordinators will inform you of the deadline for the course registration by email. However, you can still change your course selection in the first two weeks after the start of the semester. The Learning Agreement - Before the mobility is therefore only a provisional choice and not a final one.

Unlike at the University of Bremen, there is also half CP at the University in Maynooth, so a course can also earn 2.5 points. Generally, you get 5 CP per course. The University has a very broad selection of fields the students can choose from. There are some modules, like the Irish Cultural Heritage module that are specifically targeted towards exchange students and even provide you with an official certificate upon successful completion.

The Erasmus program limits the number of achievable points to 35 CP. The University's website provides a nice guide for incoming Erasmus students including a list of available courses from 30+ departments.

(→ <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/international/study-maynooth/available-courses>)

The course selection and organisation are managed through the aforementioned online platform Moodle. Here secondary literature, course materials and presentations for the seminars as well as essays or other tasks are uploaded. You can gain access to Moodle few days after arrival by sending an email to the University administration. After the official Welcome event in the first week of the semester, you get a form with which you can change or drop courses, that needs to be signed by the module coordinator and submitted the Students office. This document and the confirmed module form are then to be brought along to the official registration in the second week of your stay. Your choice of modules is then adjusted. Your time slot for registration is also sent to you by email.

I took the opportunity to get to know Ireland better through excursions with my courses and therefore enrolled in the Irish Cultural Heritage module, which includes four courses with 5 CP each. To broaden my horizon, I also chose some courses from the Media Studies department, that I do not study at home, which was also possible. The lecturers responded very well to us students and were always ready to discuss any problems that arise with us during their office hours. The instructors were all very friendly, helpful and accommodating. Great importance is attached to the well-being of the students. For Erasmus students usually have different requirements than those for Irish students can then be discussed with the lecturers. I can only say that the choice of assessment differs from module to

module. Most Erasmus students go home shortly before Christmas and will not come back for the usual exams in January. The lecturers are aware of this, which is why they will give the students the opportunity to write an essay as an examination. The workload for Erasmus student is limited. The courses did, therefore, not have an exam but instead preferred written submissions and presentations.

5. Accommodation

The University of Maynooth helped me a lot in my search for accommodation. Shortly after the official acceptance of the Irish university, I received another email with information about on- and off-campus accommodations. There are four different on-campus accommodations: Courtyard, River, Village and Rye Apartments. There are double and single rooms, with shared or private bathrooms. For the most part, the kitchen will also be shared, for example, in the River Apartments with four other students. The rent for one semester range between 1185€ and 2825€ with a surcharge of 450€. More information can be found on the Maynooth University website.

(→ <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/accommodation/accommodation-campus>).

However, because they are so close to campus, the on-campus accommodations are all very popular. You may need to seek off-campus accommodation. You can find it yourself or the Home Finder Service of the university supports you. I stayed in an off-campus accommodation that was a 30-minute bus travel away from Maynooth. This was very unfortunate, and I would recommend that you seek accommodation close to or in Maynooth, it really relieves a lot of stress as you are not dependent on public transport.

When looking for an apartment, look for something between 450€ and 700€ per month, as that is the common range for college rent-outs. Also keep in mind, that Irish people do not like to heat for some reason, so you might want to buy a warm water bottle or ask your landlord or landlady prior to your stay if you can use the heaters.

6. General information

Ireland is four times smaller than Germany. During your exchange you will have time and opportunity to get to know the country and many of its people. For example, in two and a half hours you are in Galway, Limerick or Belfast. So why not take a weekend trip to the *Cliffs of Moher*. My group of friends and I took the chance to go whale watching in Cork and visited the Christmas market in Galway.

In my fall break, which was one week long, I travelled along the east coast of Ireland and visited the seaside. My trip ended in Drogheda, where I spent three days and got to celebrate Halloween the traditional Irish way during the *PUCA* festival celebrations in Drogheda, Athboy and Trim. The area also has some beautiful landmarks and attractions. My favourite was probably *Trim castle*.

Dublin is the capitol of Ireland. It is not only Ireland's biggest city, but also the most crowded one. It is also the focus of Ireland's leisure and night life activities. Aside from an estimated 3 000 Doughnut-stores, the city has a lot of bars, restaurants and leisure activities to offer. The most well-known hangout is the iconic *Temple Bar* which is located in the Temple Bar district. It is a fact that every respectable tourist must at least once enjoy a pint of *Guinness* in there.

The main attractions are the *National History Museum*, the *National Gallery*, the *St. Patricks* and *St. John's cathedral*, the *Chester Beatty Library* and, of course, *Dublin Castle*. The Heritage Card will bring you many discounts, not only in Dublin but also throughout Ireland. You can find a variety of keepsakes,

souvenirs and postcards at *Carroll's*, where they might be more affordable than inside the museum shops.

7. After your return

After your return there are only a few steps you need to consider.

- The recognition of course achievements is to be made at the *Zentralprüfungsamt (ZPA)* where you must hand in your *Transcript of records* from the Exchange University.
- The already signed *Confirmation of Erasmus+ Study Period* form needs to be submitted at the *International Office*.
- You also must write a 3-page minimum Erasmus+ experience report and submit it to the *Mobility-Online* webpage.

8. Conclusion

I am very lucky that I was given the opportunity to spend my semester abroad in Maynooth. Studying in Ireland was very interesting, and I liked all my chosen modules. The lecturers were very helpful and friendly, the campus is very simple and clear. The range of sport clubs and societies offered is great. This, the welcome events, the student guides and my Erasmus friend group really helped me through the homesickness and guided me through upcoming rough patches.

Maynooth is a beautiful small town that caters to all the basic student needs. I really liked its proximity to Dublin, because you can easily do a day trip to the major European capitol. People in Ireland are very welcoming, open and patient. When they realize that you are not a local, they are all the happier to get to know you and show you around.

Personally, this semester gave me a new perspective on my work life. I went abroad as part of my studies with the goal to conquer new achievements. Yet, while I found that the exchange did not really advance me academically, it trained and assured me immensely in my capabilities. It helped me to expand on my cultural knowledge, broadened my horizons and encouraged me to investigate other fields of study, while gaining more confidence in my fields of knowledge, which will surely come in as an advantage in my future. My advice to you would be to not only see this exchange as an academical challenge but to see it as a motivation to try yourself out and to step out of you comfort zone. The contacts that you will gain on your way could influence your political views, your professional considerations and life beyond this exchange.

Living in another country can teach a lot about our own habits. That is why I can only recommend this experience to everyone who has the opportunity. Be brave and live your student life to the fullest!