In Semester 1 of 2010, I studied at University College Dublin (UCD) and what an experience! Hands down I would recommend going on exchange to anyone and everyone, as it will be one of the best things you’ll do in your life.

UCD requires 6 subjects per semester and although this seems like a lot, the course loads aren’t as heavy as at UQ. Doing 6 subjects allowed you to choose a wide variety of subjects relevant to your degree and also gave the opportunity to take some electives. Many of my friends took courses about Irish language, culture and history and thoroughly enjoyed them, so if possible, I would recommend doing some Irish subjects.

But exchange is not just about studying (if anything, it sometimes seems like the least important). Throughout the semester I met so many amazing people and now have friends all over the world. Getting to know people came with such ease as there are so many international students all looking for the same thing; to travel and experience new things (while having a bit of fun). I definitely recommend living on-campus as it’s a great opportunity to branch out and meet people, plus the spirit-of-the-moment parties weren’t bad either.

Ireland itself is one of my favourite countries. The Irish have to be the nicest people on Earth … and always keen for a party as well. Dublin is a great city with a lot of sights to see and pubs to drink at. Definitely do a tour of Kilmainham Gaol and spend a night or two at the ‘Stag’s Head’ in Temple bar or the ‘Bernard Shaw’. You can’t really go wrong with a pub in Ireland. The countryside is beautiful also, so make the most of it and see the rest of Ireland. The Cliffs of Moher were amazing and if you can get

The Cliffs of Moher (I’m second from the left … mid air)
a jumping photo when everyone is off the ground … I take my hat off to you. Being in Europe was also great. You could fly a mere two hours and be in a totally different country with an incredibly different culture and language. Exchange gave me the opportunity to take it easier with my studies and travel most weekends. Make the most of the location!

There were times when I was homesick but you find yourself keeping so busy; between the ongoing socializing, travelling and cramming before exams, it was hard to fit in! The hardest thing was definitely leaving when my semester was over. It was really hard to leave UCD and the friends I had shared so much with over the semester. Exchange was such a great experience that it was really difficult to accept that it was all over. What’s hard to realise at the time, though, is that the people you meet there are still going to be your friends even when you’re countries apart. I still keep in contact with those I was closest to and look forward to meeting up in the future.

My exchange has been the best life experience so far. Never have I met so many different people and travelled to such beautiful places than in the past 6 months. I would do it all again in a heartbeat. It really gave you the chance to let yourself go, develop as an individual and meet people who could change your life.