

Throughout my freshman and sophomore years, I was told repeatedly how everyone should study abroad during their college career and how much study abroad programs have changed people's lives. I had always wanted to travel and studying abroad sounded like an amazing opportunity, however I never thought I would be able to afford it. I almost lost hope, but my heart was set on studying abroad with the College of Education, so I started looking for any way to make it possible. Receiving the Jepsen International Scholars Award helped to make my dream a reality. I was able to take advantage of this invaluable opportunity to step a little bit outside my comfort zone and experience something new. I am immensely thankful that I was given this amazing chance to travel to a country I have always wanted to visit and to learn and grow so much through this experience.

This summer I traveled to Ireland with 20 other students in the College of Education for three weeks, and it was by far my best college experience to date. Throughout our trip, I got to see and learn so much. We explored Dublin and visited museums, parks, breweries, castles, cathedrals, and so much more. We took trips to other cities around Ireland, which were all rich with history, culture, and breathtaking views. We spent time in many different restaurants and pubs where we got to talk to locals as well as meet people from all over the world. Every second was spent learning, discovering, laughing, taking pictures, and immersing ourselves in the culture.

Periodically throughout the trip we were given the opportunity to visit a variety of general and special education schools around Dublin. We were able to talk to the principals about the Irish education system and how each school functioned. We were given tours around the schools and actually got to go into many classrooms. We also got to interact with some of the children and ask them questions about schooling in Ireland as well as answer their questions about the United States. Being able to talk to Irish students, educators, and administrators and getting to experience the Irish education system firsthand was an invaluable experience. I learned a lot about education in general and the way other countries' education systems are different than ours, both in positive and negative ways. I think this was incredibly important because it taught me a lot about who I want to

be as an educator and what I want to take with me from those Irish schools to my future classroom. I also learned a lot about special education, low-vision and blindness, diversity, and multicultural teaching, all of which will be incredibly important in my future career as an educator.

Although I was only abroad for three weeks, this experience changed me in more ways than I can describe. I learned more than I ever expected about the world and about myself. I met some amazing people, both those who traveled with me from ISU as well as those I met in Ireland. This trip made me more curious about the world, particularly different cultures, history, and the education system. I have definitely become more open-minded and have diversified my worldview, which I believe will be invaluable in my future. Traveling made me a more confident and independent person, and I feel as though I am already more equipped to have my own classroom where I can celebrate my students' differences and cultures.

I highly suggest everyone at least look into studying abroad during their college career. Whether it is a weeklong or yearlong program, it will change your life. There is something indescribable about traveling to another country, and you will learn things that you cannot learn just by reading or hearing about it. There is something entirely different about actually experiencing these things firsthand that can change your whole perspective on the world. I would not trade my experience in Ireland for anything, and I am forever grateful that I was given this opportunity.

■ Taylor Brew



