The Salzburg Global Seminar, which I attended in September of this year, sought to address the social, cultural, economic, and political role that cities play in the lives of their inhabitants, their culture and the world. With its focus on urban sustainability, it worked to theorise the ways in which cities can reduce their carbon footprint and lead the way in a holistic approach to sustainable living, across the environment, the economy, and society. I was delighted to receive Research Committee funding to attend the conference, as it allowed me to bring together my research interests and teaching output in driving forward curriculum development in the Study Abroad Department at DBS.

My background is in interdisciplinary urban research, with specialisations in American and Irish urban history and culture. My research trajectory from my earliest projects to the present has been one of transition from a literary and cultural focus on the city, through a more rigorous interdisciplinary framework on urban development during my Ph.D., to a publicly engaged and invested involvement in the study of the city. My Ph.D. research at the UCD Clinton Institute focused on changes in attitude to urbanity in the United States at mid-century. My project examined the cultural footprint of the New Yorker magazine during its golden era from 1948-76, exploring the influence it had in determining the urban identity of New York City as ideas of urban affiliation and branding came into being. The research included analysis of neoliberal governance, the rise of authenticity, and inequalities in urban representation, focal points which have since directed my engagement with the development of urbanity in Dublin. My Ph.D. was funded by the IRCHSS (postgraduate scholarship), and I was invited to publish two articles during the course of my research. I participated in over twelve national and international conferences, including British Association for American Studies conferences, a European Science Foundation conference on “Home, Migration and the City” in Sweden, a conference to re-envisage the legacy of Jane Jacobs at
Hafen-City University in Hamburg, and I convened a special panel on cosmopolitan liminality at the American Comparative Literature Association in Long Beach, California. My article on the misappropriation of the legacy of Jane Jacobs will be published by Ashgate as part of a volume re-assessing her work (forthcoming 2013).

In my work with the DBS Study Abroad department, my research has been extremely useful in helping to develop an innovative curriculum, particularly for the College Writing course offered to visiting students from the United States and beyond. This course, which operates with the sub-heading, “Self, Society, and Sustainability,” is a cutting-edge academic programme which introduces students to concepts and skills required by university education. Through a blend of practical writing teaching, supported by intensive workshops and one-on-one sessions, and innovative module content, the course is responsive both to developments in the burgeoning field of writing for academic purposes and in the academic disciplines of philosophy, urban planning, cultural studies, and sociology. The added core focus on sustainability reflects priorities at Northeastern University, a central partner in the development of the programme, and FIE (the Foundation for International Education), and my research in the area has positioned me to help enhance the teaching of sustainability at DBS. A symposium around Sustainability has been planned for 2014, and I will play a role in bringing this event together, using contacts and concepts developed through my engagement at the funded conference in Salzburg.

The Salzburg Seminar has been in operation for 11 years, bringing together scholars, activists and other interested parties to discuss pressing issues related to fields of culture, literature, history and politics. This year’s seminar on Cities and Sustainability drew together participants from academia, architecture, planning, design, government, and the arts. Unlike a traditional conference, the seminar revolves around formal lectures and working groups, bringing participants together to grapple with issues central to the challenges facing urban areas internationally. Key lectures at the seminar included internationally renowned urbanist Richard Sennett of the London School of
Economics, who spoke about his work in developing cities in South America and the challenges they’re facing, and world-class economist Saskia Sassen, who applied her global cities theory to the question of sustainability and urban potential. Working groups considered questions of the ideal city of the future and the challenges of the civic sphere in contemporary cities. I spoke about the opportunities for Dublin in embracing urban possibilities in our economy, our society and our city environment, and was lucky to receive a number of very insightful suggestions which have since informed the direction of my work. I have been working on an academic article on representations of Dublin in documentary television, and will use the insights drawn from the experts in Salzburg to refine my analysis of the contemporary city. I will also work closely with my DBS colleagues to make sure that the cutting-edge discourse evident at the Seminar is translated into our upcoming teaching. We are planning, for example, to re-develop the current College Writing curriculum to encompass a further focus on sustainability and the built environment, and my experience at the Seminar will be crucial to the framing of any future curriculum.

I would like to thank my colleagues for all their support and encouragement, but most particularly my Department Head, Mr. Michael Kielty, who gave his time and expertise to help me apply for and attend the Seminar. Crucially, I would like to express my gratitude to the Research Committee for supporting my attendance at the Seminar, which was such an unparalleled professional opportunity. I will work to make sure that the experience is of direct benefit to teaching and research at DBS.