Irish Studies Conference Draws International Educators, Scholars and Students

John B. Roney, Sacred Heart University
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Keynote speaker Dr. Eamonn Wall

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Educators, international scholars, students and historians from the region and from universities across the United States recently gathered at Sacred Heart University for a conference dedicated to Irish history, literature, economics, politics and religion. The New England meeting of the Regional American Conference for Irish History, held annually, made its way to Fairfield for the first time, thanks to a collaborative effort led by John B. Roney, professor and chair of Sacred Heart’s Department of History.

“I’ve attended Irish studies regional conferences and believed we offered a great central location with the space, resources and interest to host it here at SHU,” said Roney. “We also had great natural synergy in Irish Studies because of our partnership with the Diseart Institute of Irish Spirituality and Culture, located in Dingle, Ireland, and with many fellow scholars from the National University in Ireland Maynooth.”

Roney contacted his peers in Ireland and across New England and then pulled together a cross-disciplinary international team from SHU, representing sociology, history, media, religious and language studies, marketing and more. Following approval of their proposal from the Conference’s committee, he put out a call for papers and received 44 commitments, including four from SHU students. Other SHU students also helped with conference logistics. He and the conference committee decided to focus their scholarly efforts on the history, politics, people, writing and dynamics of western Ireland, with a conference theme of “The West.”

“Not unlike the attraction and growth of our American West, with its reputation for attracting ‘rugged individuals,’ Western Ireland experienced a similar expansion and identity,” Roney explained. “When Ireland sought its independence from Great Britain, many writers, artists and young people who were hungry to better understand their Irish roots traveled west to find the ‘real’ Ireland. This area continues to attract tourists from around the world and was a good creative and historical fit for our goals.”
The conference attracted scholars and teachers from National University of Ireland Maynooth, and Queens University, Belfast, as well as from Northeastern universities such as Tufts, Villanova, St. John’s, University of Connecticut, University of Massachusetts, Bridgewater and Framingham State Universities, George Washington University and New York University, many of whom also presented papers.

“The conference was fun, interesting, informative and a great success for all participants and for Sacred Heart,” Roney reflected. “We also invited Peter Ryan, Deputy Consul General of Ireland, New York City, who joined us on Saturday. The results, beyond general goodwill, learning and enhanced professional camaraderie, include opportunities for additional research, expanding partnerships and renewed enthusiasm for Irish studies.”

Roney also mentioned that he will be involved in a book publishing opportunity through Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, which will focus on the Conference theme. It will include an introduction from him and several of the papers presented at the Conference by Irish and American scholars will become chapters. The book should be completed by late 2013.

To view photos from the conference, paste the following link in your browser:
http://www.flickr.com/photos/sacredheartunivpix/sets/72157631953975202/