# Learning to Identify the Foreign in Developed Countries: The Example of Ireland

**Colin Ireland**
*Arcadia University*

With the growth in recent years of American undergraduate students studying abroad, there has been a commensurate increase in overseas destinations. A quick look through *Open Doors* reveals that the majority of American study abroad students still come to the developed economies of Western Europe and/or to English-speaking countries such as England, Australia or New Zealand as their favored destinations (Open Doors 2008). When compared to the growing popularity of study abroad programs in Asia, Africa or Latin America, the globalized economies of the developed countries seem less "foreign" to young Americans than destinations in other parts of the world.

The sense of a lack of "foreignness" is compounded because many Western European universities offer study abroad programs through English in order to attract not only native English speakers but also large cohorts of foreign students who use English as a *lingua franca*. While it is certainly true that destinations in Asia, Africa, or Latin America—where students may have to function in a second language and where the standard of living differs from the West—present American undergraduates with challenges of adjustment, it is a mistake to assume that Western Europe, or English-speaking countries like Canada (Beach and Sherman 2000), Australia (Curthoys 2000) or England (Edwards 2000), do not present U.S. students with deep lessons to learn and foreign differences to negotiate.

Among the responsibilities of international educators is to help students begin the process of identifying the foreign in their new environments in order to learn from it. The major obstacle for Americans studying abroad in developed economies, especially in English-speaking countries, is to become sensitive to the subtleties of foreignness.

This perceived lack of difference in many of the foreign destinations to which American undergraduates travel is nearly always superficial. The tendency to downplay the differences between the United States and other developed countries is encouraged by an American mindset that looks for what we all have in common, to look for shared characteristics first. But the differences in these destinations, despite superficial similarities, are often profound at many levels:

historical, political, social, cultural. In order to fully experience the foreign and learn from it, the student must learn to identify difference, negotiate it, learn to embrace it, and come to appreciate it.[1]

In the case of Ireland, this lack of foreignness may seem exacerbated by the high percentages of "heritage" students choosing it as a destination. For advisors who have not worked much with heritage students, it may seem that the student has chosen to study in a place that is already familiar. Although heritage students readily declare their Irish backgrounds, they frequently admit that they know little about their Irish ancestors, where they came from in Ireland, why they left Ireland, and how long ago they left to come to the United States. Heritage students quickly realize that familiarity with an immigrant community in the U.S. is simply another version of their shared American experience. Their knowledge of the ancestral homeland is too frequently built up of stereotypes and romanticized accounts that are continually reinforced in their American environs. The locals in Ireland treat them simply as "Americans" and heritage students frequently find themselves on steep learning curves.

The purpose of the present essay is to highlight how an English-speaking country with a developed, open, globalized economy in Western Europe—in this case, Ireland—can be used to teach American undergraduates how to identify, appreciate, and learn from the foreignness they inevitably encounter when they travel beyond the boundaries of the United States. American students must leave behind the mindset of a superpower and become sensitive to the strategies that a small, relatively powerless nation must adapt in order to survive and thrive economically, politically, and militarily in the community of nations. They can participate in a society and culture where both the spoken and written word wields real power and where storytellers, writers and poets are venerated. They enter an ancient culture that has maintained a remarkable continuity for millennia despite significant linguistic, political and social disruptions; that has suffered the loss of a language and its literature; that has been subjugated by a powerful neighbor and recovered its independence; that for centuries has had its population dispersed worldwide and yet retained a sense of identity.

## The "Celtic Tiger" Economy

American students of business and finance often see Ireland as a good destination because it is English-speaking and offers a clear window into the European Union. The recent economic success of Ireland, frequently referred to as the "Celtic Tiger," makes Irish cities and large towns seem initially familiar to young American undergraduates when they first arrive. American students feel comfortable in the restaurants, coffee shops, large department stores and in their

exposure to the popular media they encounter there. Even the recent economic downturn is familiar, based as it is in Ireland on an over-reliance on property markets and a building boom that has gone bust.

Dublin is full of modern buildings made of glass and steel, especially along the River Liffey quays. And even with an economy that has ceased to boom, the city's skyline is still filled with cranes as many construction projects struggle ahead. Standing at street level and watching the frenetic traffic and rushed crowds move by feels cosmopolitan and similar to American cities. The streets of Dublin nowadays reveal a mixed population with immigrants from Eastern Europe, China, Africa and south Asia obvious to the ear and eye. American students will hear many languages spoken in any Irish city or large town. And as the locals scurry past internet cafés talking on their cell phones, the casual observer is aware that s/he is in a well-connected country where globalization has found a comfortable welcome.[2]

In 2004 *Foreign Policy* magazine ranked Ireland as the most globalized nation in the world (Kearney 2004). The United States was ranked seventh in that same list. But a close analysis of the criteria used to create those rankings quickly demonstrates that a "globalized" Ireland and a "globalized" United States are very distinct entities. The most recently published globalization rankings by *Foreign Policy* for 2007 show very clearly the differences between Ireland and the United States. Although Ireland had slipped to fifth place in the 2007 rankings while the United States remained at seventh, the differences in the criteria between the two countries reveal a lot (Foreign Policy 2007). There are four major criteria used to rank each country's globalization: 1) political engagement, 2) technological connectivity, 3) personal contact, and 4) economic integration.

The United States excels in only one of these four categories, that of technological connectivity (Foreign Policy 2007). The United States is clearly superior to Ireland in this category. This means that, practically speaking, American students typically equate globalization with technological advantages such as ready internet access and are disappointed to find Ireland is simply not as well connected as they are accustomed to being back in the United States, whether in their own homes or at their universities.

Only in the category of political engagement does the United States compare well with the other top twenty countries in the globalization rankings (Foreign Policy 2007). Even here it is surprising that it does rank as a clear leader given its military and financial clout. This reflects not only the other top twenty nations' involvement with worldwide organizations like the United Nations, but also, in a European context, their participation in and engagement with regional

and local political organizations like NATO, or the European Union or the more recently formed Union for the Mediterranean.

Compared to any of the top twenty countries in the globalization rankings, the United States compares poorly in both the personal contact and economic integration categories. For this latter criterion, any small, economically successful nation must be, by definition, well integrated economically or it cannot succeed. Simply by virtue of its size, the United States can remain a poorly integrated nation economically and still rank high for globalization. That is not an option for small, economically integrated countries with open markets like the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark or Ireland.

Ireland's global interaction is shown by the domestic debate that is frequently framed as "Boston or Berlin," in which economists argue either for Ireland adopting a model based on American ("Boston"), right of center, or European ("Berlin"), left of center, approaches to the economy. This lively, on-going debate makes Ireland an exceptionally interesting place for American business students to understand the European Union, and gives them a conduit through which to view the relationships between North America and Europe. We will return to this topic in another context.

## Social Networks

For many American undergraduates, including heritage students, the most striking contrast between the United States and Ireland in terms of globalization comes in the category of personal contact. Not only are Americans notorious as a nation for not possessing passports but, due largely to the size of the country, they seldom travel beyond its borders and then they travel, usually, as tourists on short-term visits. Most American students, as they get to know Irish students, are amazed to learn how many of the Irish have spent summers working in resorts in the United States, or in Europe. A high proportion of Irish university students will take a year off and travel the world, literally, working for several months in places like Australia to build up their savings, and then continuing their round-the-world journey. The American students are equally amazed to realize how many Irish students have relatives and members of their extended families, that their immediate families in Ireland have maintained contact with, as they make their worldwide trips through countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Australia or South Africa. This international connectedness of the Irish extends beyond the purely familial into business and politics.

Despite the initial comfort levels experienced by American undergraduates, they quickly realize that Ireland cannot be like the United States.

One of the obvious differences between Ireland and the States is size. Ireland, at 32,599 square miles, is roughly the size of Maine (33,128 sq. miles), which is slightly larger, or South Carolina (31,117 sq. miles), which is slightly smaller. American students are often surprised to realize that the typical Irish campus is deserted on weekends because such a high proportion of Irish students can go home on weekends, regardless of where they are from on the island. American students, of course, are accustomed to their own campuses being quite lively on weekends.[3]

The tendency of Irish students to go home on weekends teaches American students an important social lesson. Americans are often surprised to find how connected Irish students are to their families and the communities they come from. Returning home on the weekends allows Irish student to hold part-time jobs at home, engage in the local social scene, stay connected to family and friends, as well as to have their laundry done by their mothers and to get some home-cooked meals before returning to campus. American students are accustomed to hearing their politicians, pastors and clergy talk about "family values," but in Ireland they see the concept in practice, and not simply as a nuclear family, but as an extended family across the generations. This "connectedness" of Irish students to their families and communities cannot be mistaken for a "stay-at-home" attitude because many of these same Irish students will have already spent a summer working on the Continent, in the States or Canada, or they may have taken a year off and spent it travelling the world.

## Integrating Socially

The fact that differences between the U.S. and Ireland are often quite subtle matters most in learning to negotiate those differences. For example, American students tend to feel comfortable among their Irish counterparts because, in general, the Irish are genuinely friendly and the Irish sense of humor, in its mild forms, is easily appreciated by Americans. Irish humor, however, is not necessarily the same as American humor. For example, Irish humor tends to be more self-deprecating than American humor. This is reflected in the fact that the Irish are fond of teasing each other (cf. Keltner 2008). They even have a special word for it. They call it "slagging." For the Irish slagging becomes a kind of verbal game or contest and helps explain the Irish reputation for repartee. When someone is slagged the expectation is that s/he will come back quickly with an even cleverer quip. Those who are able to do so consistently are admired and appreciated by their peers. Many Americans do not understand this form of humor, New Yorkers, perhaps, being the exception that proves the rule.

Whether this American failure to understand slagging comes from an over-emphasis on "political correctness" or simply results from the American desire to have people feel good about themselves, it presents a challenge to an American student's success at social integration, especially during the initial stages. Some American students may interpret slagging as rejection, which is the opposite of its intention. Typically, the Irish only slag people they like. Not being slagged is, potentially, a greater form of social rejection and at best implies the person is thought incapable of effective repartee. A foreign anthropologist visiting an Irish community might accurately interpret slagging as a form of the Irish denigration of self-importance. The Irish appreciate successful people who do not lose the common touch and who interact comfortably with people at all social levels. An over-sensitive American who values feeling good about him/herself, can easily interpret slagging as anti-American sentiment. Slagging is, in fact, a good example of the Irish sense of familiarity and connectedness they have with one another through their extended families and communities.

## Historical Contrasts

The difference in history between the United States and Ireland is often one of the hardest aspects for American students to grasp. The comparison is made even more complicated by the rich prehistory and archaeology of Ireland. Structures like the megalithic tomb of Newgrange (*Brú na Bóinne*), which was built five thousand years ago and is older than the Egyptian pyramids, remind visitors of the cultural depth of Ireland. Any trip across Ireland reveals archaeological evidence of this rich past, whether one visits pre-historic dolmens, stone circles, ring forts (often referred to as "faerie rings"), or medieval tower houses, castles or monastic ruins.

Even if we pass over Ireland's amazingly rich medieval history and concentrate on more recent centuries, we still reach back further in time than Americans are able to in order to trace their own country's past. For example, Ireland—unlike other western European countries—spent several centuries as a colony of a major imperial power. Thus Ireland's recent history—meaning, in this context, the last three to four hundred years—is unlike that of other Western European countries. American students are often surprised to realize that Ireland's relatively recent struggle for independence gives this modern English-speaking Western European country more in common with other former colonies around the world than it does with its European neighbors and makes it have much in common with many African, South American and Asian countries in its efforts to achieve political independence and economic success. Due to its post-colonial status, Ireland has served as a role model for other former colonies in the Third World.

One way that Ireland's post-colonial status can be easily shown is the dramatic break with its indigenous cultural past as reflected in the loss of language. Two hundred years ago, a majority of Irish people would still be native speakers of Irish Gaelic and not English. The switch to English language dominance reflects radical and fundamental political and social changes throughout Ireland. The English conquest, begun in earnest during the Elizabethan Wars of the late sixteenth century and carried on throughout the seventeenth century, saw the deliberate dismantling of the native Gaelic Order which had its own elaborate system of laws (called Brehon Laws, from the Irish word *breitheamh* "judge"), social and political organization, and cultural traditions that had been consciously carried on and handed down for over a thousand years, since the beginning of recorded history on the island.

During the sixteenth century, England and its monarchy had participated in the Protestant Reformation and during the course of the seventeenth century instituted a Protestant state religion with the monarch as its head. In order to show loyalty to the English crown one adopted the monarch's religion, which is exactly what loyal English forces in Ireland did during this period. The native Irish and others who supported the Gaelic Order, maintained their Roman Catholic religion which means that religion came to be a mark of political and cultural loyalties.

The use of religion to mark political and cultural identities helped set the background to the reason for the present political division of the island of Ireland with an international border separating the Republic of Ireland (twenty-six counties) from Northern Ireland (six counties), this latter political division being a part of the United Kingdom of England, Scotland and Wales on the island of Britain.

With the final defeat of the native forces that supported the Gaelic Order in Ireland and the clear dominance of the English forces at the end of the seventeenth century, the loyal Protestant authorities instituted a series of anti-Catholic restrictive ordinances known as the Penal Laws intended to guarantee the dominance in Ireland of the new English land owners referred to as the "Protestant Ascendancy." These rules were in place for what is sometimes called the "long century," from 1695 to their repeal in 1829, a period of over five generations. The protracted wars of the seventeenth century had begun a process of dismantling the social and political structures of the Gaelic Order of the native Irish and the Penal Laws continued this process of the "Anglicization" of Ireland. They guaranteed that English Common Law rather than native Brehon Laws became the law of the land in Ireland, that the old Gaelic aristocracy lost their landholdings and the power of patronage and that, even after independence, the

parliamentary political system and educational system adopted by the new Irish state owed more to English political and educational patterns than to the former Gaelic Order. By the time the Penal Laws were repealed a new dispensation was firmly in place that consolidated a definitive cultural and political break with Ireland's Gaelic past.

## Famine and Emigration

The severest blow to the fabric of the Irish nation was yet to come however. Although the rich agricultural lands of Ireland made it the bread basket of the British Empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the most devastating famine in European history was about to overtake Ireland. One of the results of the Penal Laws was to create a large peasant class that relied for its livelihood on small holdings that depended almost exclusively on a single crop, the potato, for sustenance. The population of the island had also climbed to somewhere between eight and ten million souls. Within one generation of the repeal of the Penal Laws in 1829, the potato crop failed with the peak years being in the period 1845-48. The failure of the potato crop occurred throughout the Northern Hemisphere, across both North America and Europe. No other crops were affected and Ireland continued to export large quantities of food to Britain, but the results of this single crop failure for the typical Irish peasant, particularly those living in the West of Ireland, were devastating. It is estimated that during those three peak years of famine Ireland lost approximately two million people, at least one million from starvation and disease, and another million from emigration. The census of 1851 returned a population of 6,250,000.

One result of the Great Famine (*an Gorta Mór* "the Great Hunger"), which hit the Irish-speaking populations of the West particularly hard, was to set in train a continuous round of emigration from Ireland that was to last for several generations. Ireland continued to lose population through emigration until 1991, just a few years before the economic recovery called the "Celtic Tiger," when the population decline was finally reversed (Central Statistics Office 2008).

People had been emigrating from Ireland since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, long before the Great Famine, when a steady flow of Protestant settlers from Northern Ireland (Ulster) crossed the Atlantic to North America. This latter population movement constitutes what Americans came to call the Scots-Irish, whose descendants to this day comprise a substantial proportion of the Appalachian region. They are the reason that ethnomusicologists can trace so much traditional American folk music directly back to Ireland, Scotland and the north of England. Depending on how you reckon descent, anywhere from

eleven to fourteen of the forty four U.S. presidents—that is to say, a quarter to a third—trace their origins to the Protestant population of Northern Ireland, their ancestors having participated in this earliest wave of emigration from Ireland (Ulster Scots 2004).

Several generations of continuous post-Famine emigration from Ireland has guaranteed that people of Irish descent are found throughout the world, and that the Irish "diaspora" is easily the largest produced by any of the peoples of Western Europe. Seventy million people worldwide is a common estimate of those who claim Irish descent. Nearly eleven percent of the U.S. population, more than 30 million people, makes that claim. Nowadays, there are more people on the island of Britain who claim Irish descent than the present population of five and a half million on the island of Ireland itself. More than one hundred and fifty years after the Great Famine, and even after the economic success of the "Celtic Tiger," Ireland has still not returned to the size of its estimated pre-Famine population of between eight and ten million people.

## The Quandaries of Identity and Politics

Ireland, to the surprise of many, is a relatively small island divided by an international border. Six counties, of the total of thirty two counties on the island, constitute Northern Ireland and form part of the United Kingdom. The population of Northern Ireland participates in the rights and benefits of British citizenship. This means that a substantial minority of people on the island of Ireland—but a majority within Northern Ireland—are as likely to identify themselves as British as Irish. Matters of citizenship and identity are further complicated by the fact that the government of the Republic will automatically grant Irish citizenship and a passport to anyone born in Northern Ireland who chooses to apply.

People who identify themselves as British, and for historical reasons already discussed they are usually Protestants, have been firmly ensconced in the political, social and cultural history of Ireland for longer then there has been a United States of America. As an outcome of the Elizabethan Wars the English began a deliberate policy of "planting" loyal, Protestant settlers in various parts of Ireland in the late sixteenth century. The "plantations" of the south began first, in the late sixteenth century. The plantation of Ulster began in the early years of the seventeenth century, around 1610, shortly after the military defeat of the prominent Gaelic chieftains of the north. In other words, the contention between native Irish "Catholics" and planted "Protestant" English and Scots, has been an unavoidable fact of Irish history since before the establishment of any of the successful European colonies in the territory of the United States.

Many political commentators have argued that the partition of Ireland would, inevitably, result in armed conflict. The roughly three decades of conflict, known euphemistically as "the Troubles," from the civil rights demonstrations of the late 1960s to the Good Friday (or Belfast) Agreement of 1998, are poorly understood by most outsiders, and this includes the typical American heritage student. It is inaccurate to portray the Troubles as a religious conflict. Rather, it is a conflict in which one's religion, for historical reasons, becomes a reasonably accurate predictor of one's politics.

For Americans the situation in Northern Ireland can be an interesting study in matters of identity, in this case, Irish versus British, Catholic versus Protestant, or even Irish Gaelic versus the English language. Americans often think of ethnic identity as something that can be seen superficially on a person; i.e. skin color, hair texture, shape of the eyes, style of clothing, etc. They are amazed in Northern Ireland to see people trying to differentiate themselves who, from an American point of view, have so much in common: they are overwhelmingly white and middle class, they are Christians and practice high rates of religious observance while espousing family values, and they profess belief in democracy and the right to have a voice in one's future. But how do you reconcile the choice between those who want to maintain the union with the United Kingdom ("unionists") and those who want to see a single, united Ireland ("nationalists")? These are challenging questions for young American students accustomed to dealing with a whole different set of criteria for identity politics in their own country.

## The Complications of International Relations

American students studying in the Republic are often taken aback by the differences in political outlook that they encounter, particularly with regard to American foreign policy. Often as not, they are confronting for the first time the differences in attitudes between a small versus a large nation toward foreign affairs. A small country that does not have any military might or cannot exert any significant economic influence must certainly deal differently with the world community of nations from the way the United States does. In fact, many American students are surprised to learn that the Republic of Ireland has an official policy of neutrality and that neutral status is guarded jealously and comes up frequently when discussing relationships with larger nations, whether that involves debates about allowing the United States to use Shannon as a refueling stop for its military, or if Ireland should contribute soldiers to a European Union military

force, or if Ireland should join NATO.

In Ireland the debate about foreign influence and which international organizations to join and emulate is closely related to the economic debate referred to as "Boston or Berlin." The question often boils down to whether to hitch the country's fortunes to the world power of the United States or to the emerging and strengthening European Union. Irish people have strong emotional and family connections to the United States that were first created, and then reinforced, for as long as Europeans have colonized North America. But the ties to Europe are much older and, arguably, even stronger. The question is a serious one for the Irish and, as one can imagine, the pendulum swings between the two poles depending on who is in government, which economic community is doing the best, or is most relevant to the current Irish situation.

The Irish are proud of their achievements internationally given that they are such a small and relatively new nation. For example, they see Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland, as a great ambassador for the nation through her post as commissioner in the United Nations and her ongoing work in human rights. A local Irish politician, Pat Cox, served efficiently and effectively for several years as president of the European Parliament. A former prime minister of Ireland, John Bruton, is presently the European Union ambassador to the United States, a link between America and Europe that the Irish seem particularly qualified to serve. Various Irish celebrities, such as former rock stars Bob Geldoff of the Boomtown Rats and Bono of U2, have been influential in campaigns to combat world poverty. The Irish are also proud of their peace keeping forces that have served the United Nations around the world, including in Lebanon, Liberia, Kovoso, East Timor and, most recently, Chad.

## The "Irishness" of Politics in the Republic

Despite the deep and venerable roots Ireland has in terms of Western European cultural history, its modern political history is relatively recent. The Republic of Ireland, the Irish Free State as it was known at the time, gained independence from Britain in 1921 and immediately entered a two-year civil war that has left significant marks on modern Irish politics and society. Ireland inherited its parliamentary system from Britain to which it immediately gave a special Irish quality. Some of the terms used in Irish politics can confuse the novice American student of politics. For example, in Ireland the "president" is a figurehead and does not wield the political power of the prime minister who, in effect, is more like the American president. The Irish parliament also has a bicameral house, one of which is called the "Senate," but the Irish Senate wields nowhere near

the power of the American Senate. The two largest political parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, are based on principles of civil war politics, that is, whether one accepted the 1921 treaty that created the border that partitioned Ireland (Fine Gael) or rejected the treaty (Fianna Fáil). The influence of civil war politics has been steadily diminishing in Ireland, but the usual politics based on the economic and fiscal debates of Right versus Left still do not dominate Irish politics in the way they do in the United States and in the European Union.

Politics is one area of modern Irish life where the Irish language has retained a high profile. Although the parliamentary system adopted by the Irish looks like many other similar systems around the world, the vocabulary used to describe it is purely Irish. The term for the combined houses of parliament is Oireachtas. The major deliberative and legislative body is called the Dáil. The official who oversees the Dáil, serving much like the "speaker of the House" in the U.S., is called the Ceann Chomhairle. An elected deputy to the parliament is called a TD, the acronym comes from the Irish term teachta Dála "member of parliament," parallel to the British MP. The prime minister is rarely referred by the English term, except for the sake of foreigners. Otherwise, the Irish prime minister is called the Taoiseach. The deputy prime minister is the Tánaiste. As noted above, several political parties use Irish names, and every political party still holds an ardfheis, the annual gathering open to all members in which future policy is discussed. Even the president's residence in the Phoenix Park is typically referred to by its Irish name, áras an uachtaráin, in media reports of all kinds.

## Literature and the Issue of Language

Many students come to Ireland eager to study its rich literature and will name their favorite writers including William Butler Yeats, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and Seamus Heaney. Ireland's literary reputation is well deserved and many critics have argued that the best English language literature of the twentieth century was produced by the Irish. That is quite a compliment to a people for whom, two hundred years ago, a majority would still be native Irish Gaelic speakers. In fact, Irish literature written in English has only been on the world stage for about three hundred years. One could argue that Jonathan Swift (died 1745), dean of St Patrick's Cathedral and author of *Gulliver's Travels*, was the first truly international figure of English letters who wrote as an Irishman. Since then, of course, there have been many Irish literary masters who wrote in English including, Oliver Goldsmith, Maria Edgeworth, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, John Millington Synge, Kate O'Brien, James Joyce, William Butler Yeats, Seán O'Casey, Patrick Kavanagh, Elizabeth Bowen, Samuel Becket, Seamus Heaney,

Eavan Boland, and John McGahern to name only a few.

In the course of the twentieth century, the island of Ireland produced four Nobel laureates in literature: William Butler Yeats (1923), George Bernard Shaw (1925), Samuel Becket (1969), and Seamus Heaney (1995). Americans may proudly point out that the United States has produced eleven Nobel laureates in the same period, but when one compares the relative populations of Ireland, five and a half million, and the U.S., three hundred million, then which achievement seems greater?

James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* has been voted the most influential novel of the twentieth century. It is at once a very modern novel, the first to develop so thoroughly the "stream of consciousness" narrative, with the entire novel covering a twenty-four hour period, 16 June 1904. Despite its modern narrative techniques, the novel emphasizes a "sense of place," a common feature of literature in Ireland from its inception in Old Irish during the early Middle Ages. The route of the characters in their wanderings through the novel can still be traced on Dublin's streets today, with many places mentioned in the novel still important present-day landmarks. At the same time *Ulysses*, as suggested by its title, is deliberately wrapped in ancient clothing, a narrative technique used by the Irish since the early Middle Ages. Its various chapters are modeled on episodes from Homer's *Odyssey*, one of the oldest surviving examples of western European literature.

Despite Joyce's venture into modernity through an acknowledgement of the past, few newcomers to Joyce expect to find the influence of native Irish tradition in his works, but they are certainly there. Anyone willing to enter the linguistic puzzle of *Finnegan's Wake* will come to realize that many characters, scenes and subplots are based on ancient Irish myth and tradition. In Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* the portrayal of the young writer, Stephen Dedalus, has been shown to be based on medieval Irish ideals of the poet (Owens 2003). Any perusal of modern Irish writers will reveal their reliance on themes, topics, story plots, and motifs from Irish language traditions, both ancient and modern. Among the modern Irish writers writing in English who can be shown to have been inspired by the Irish language tradition were W. B. Yeats, John Millington Synge, Eavan Boland and John McGahern (Kiberd 1993; Kinsella 1995), to name only a few.

The richness of Irish literature in English must be contrasted with one thousand five hundred years of literature in Irish Gaelic. Ireland has the distinction of creating the oldest vernacular literature in Western Europe. By vernacular, we mean the native language spoken by the people, in other words, for the early Middle Ages, we mean a language other than Latin. The conversion of the Irish

to Christianity brought with it literacy in Latin in order to read the Bible and the writings of the Church fathers. The Irish soon made themselves literate in their own vernacular, Irish Gaelic, and by c.600 were creating and preserving elaborate and sophisticated poetry and prose texts.[4]

There are vast numbers of medieval narratives preserved from Early Irish literature with tales about the heroes Cú Chulainn (Cuchulain) and Fionn mac Cumhaill (Finn McCool) being widely known. The single most famous of the early Irish epics is the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (The Cattle Raid of Cooley) first written down in the eighth century. Its vivid action portrays Cú Chulainn defending the province of Ulster in a series of brutal single combats from the warriors of the combined armies of the rest of Ireland. The sense of place is palpable in the text, with dramatic events depicted in the medieval narrative still easily identifiable on the modern landscape today, the same technique copied by Joyce in *Ulysses*. The story is also notable in that a female protagonist, Queen Medb (Maeve), is in charge of the combined Irish forces arrayed against Ulster and Cú Chulainn. In fact, early Irish narrative is full of interesting female characters from the wily Queen Medb; to the determined Emer, wife of Cú Chulainn, who must struggle to keep her warrior husband from the wiles of otherworldly women; love-struck Gráinne who plays a rôle parallel to Guinevere in later medieval Arthurian tales; the beautiful Étaín, wooed and pursued by both mortal and otherworldly kings; and the tragic Deirdre, fated to be parted from her chosen lover by powerful kings because of her great beauty.

Students interested in modern Irish literature written in English are often surprised to learn how frequently and naturally modern Irish writers mine the wealth of the medieval Irish tradition. W. B. Yeats, for example, often wrote poems based on ancient Irish themes and even wrote a cycle of plays centered on the tales of Cú Chulainn and his exploits, including characters already mentioned like Queen Medb and his wife Emer. But these ancient tales have entered modern Irish life in other surprising ways and the story of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and Cú Chulainn's defense of the province of Ulster against the combined invading armies of Ireland has turned the tragic warrior Cú Chulainn into an icon of resistance for "loyalist" (Protestant) paramilitaries in Northern Ireland in a remarkable resurrection of ancient myth into the modern politics of "the Troubles" of recent decades.

One of Ireland's most interesting modern literary figures in this globalized world is the poetess Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill. Nuala writes only in Irish and never translates her own poetry into English, but she is well served by fellow poets such as Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon, Medbh McGuckian and Eiléan

Ní Chuilleanáin who have helped expose the wider world to her poetry through facing page translations of her work. Her parents came originally from the west Kerry Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking area) and settled in England where Nuala was born. Growing up she spent long periods back in Kerry with her grandparents and eventually came to live with them where she was imbued with the Irish language and all the legends and lore carried through it. In college she developed her initial interest in writing poetry. But, ironically, it was after marrying a Turkish engineer and spending five years in Turkey, where she learned the language and lore of that land, that turned her back to her Irish roots and inspired her to pursue poetry in Irish (Ní Dhomhnaill 2003).

## The University Experience

There is much more to learn while abroad than the obvious things such as new social customs, differences of history and politics, and the cultural richness expressed in art and literature. When international educators talk about the learning experiences of American students abroad they tend to overlook one of the most important cultural institutions of all: the foreign university itself and its varying approaches to pedagogy and research.

When an American undergraduate enrolls at an Irish university for a semester or a year, s/he is about to enter a system that differs markedly from the system s/he will return to and earn a degree at home. Despite the changes affecting all European universities, such as semesterization and modularization, through the ongoing Bologna Process, undergraduate degree structures remain widely different from those in the American higher education system. At universities in Ireland, north and south, the typical undergraduate degree takes three years, although an increasing number of universities have a four-year undergraduate degree structure. American undergraduates quickly realize that the broad array of general education requirements of the American system are assumed to have been met at secondary level in Ireland, and the undergraduate degree structure is much more restricted in terms of subjects studied so that the three year undergraduate degree is neither easier nor harder, but it is more concentrated in its contents.

American students also encounter a completely different pedagogical style at universities in Ireland and one that forces them to emphasize a different set of skills from what they are accustomed to at home. While the American system of Socratic teaching involving question and answer sessions as a normal part of each class meeting will still be met, American students find that the emphasis shifts to a different set of learning skills. The American students have honed these skills in their home environments, but in Ireland they must give them an emphasis they are

not accustomed to at home. American students are certainly practiced in listening to lectures and taking careful notes, and they are perfectly capable of independent research in which they have chosen the readings themselves under supervision of their teachers, and they have learned to write coherent, well-argued essays.[5] But they have now entered a system where the previously mentioned techniques are privileged, and the system they are accustomed to—of regular graded assignments, and teachers who systematically engage in classroom discussions of topics being studied, and where students are judged on their class participation—disappears.

The lecturing system is used in the United States more frequently than we care to admit, particularly in large state universities at the lower classmen levels where disciplines as disparate as biology, psychology and English literature are taught to freshmen in large lecture theatres. Most American undergraduates adapt to it quickly. While some students find the lack of controlled supervision of the detailed American syllabus disconcerting, at least an equal number are liberated by the freedom to explore and research subjects on their own using the lighter guidance of the lecture as a beacon to help direct their individual research. Based on reviews of GPAs before and after studying for a semester at an Irish university, American undergraduates do not suffer academically. [6] They tend to earn while studying abroad a GPA roughly equivalent to the GPA they had earned at home.

Some international educators have argued that American undergraduates abroad should be taught in a manner that is familiar to them from home despite the new environment of their foreign location (vande Berg 2007). Others find it an odd pedagogical philosophy to encourage American students to experience a foreign culture without participating fully in one of the most significant institutions of a college-age person, the foreign university itself.

## Conclusions

The learning opportunities presented by Ireland are vast. American undergraduates can study a society that went from a rural, peasant economy to a developed, globalized one in a few short generations. Business and political science students can engage in the "Boston or Berlin" debate while using Ireland as a window into the economy and politics of the European Union. Ireland's post-colonial status, a rare situation for a Western European country, has made it a model to emulate for countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America because of its relatively recent successful bid for political and economic independence. Ireland's status as a colony of an imperial power helped fuel several generations of continuous emigration that initially weakened the homeland but helped create an international network for future economic development and influence. Ireland's

post-colonial legacy bequeathed the island a dual identity that is played out today in contentious political debate and that has, on occasion, spilled over into violence. Irish culture has privileged the word, both spoken and written, from its earliest records in the Middle Ages and in several languages—Irish Gaelic, Latin, English, to name only three—to a degree rarely attained in other countries. It can be argued that, having lost their native language, the Irish *literati* have excelled in a second language. In short, an island people with a reputation for being traditional and backward-looking have rapidly evolved into a model of modernity (Tymoczko and Ireland 2003). Astute American undergraduates have a lot to learn from Ireland's multi-faceted differences.

The American undergraduate is right to see initially the superficial similarities between the United States and Ireland. But the similarities only mask more profound differences. It is our duty as international educators to encourage and facilitate students to explore and understand the deeper differences that exist, to help them search below the surface for a compelling learning experience. The rewards for the effort are myriad.[7] In this brief essay we have touched on economic, social, political, historical and cultural issues that reveal Ireland's "foreignness." The process must begin before students depart, it is intensified while they are abroad, and it continues and matures after they have returned home.

## Bibliography

Beach, R. and Sherman, G. (2000) "Rethinking Canada: Canadian Studies and Study Abroad." *Frontiers,* 6 (Winter): 59–72.

Central Statistics Office Ireland (2008) Central Statistics Office Ireland (CSO) [Internet] Cork. Available from: http//www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/~Dialog/Saveshow.asp [Accessed 15 December 2008].

Curthoys, A. (2000) "Australian Studies and Study Abroad." Frontiers, 6 (Winter): 47–57.

Edwards, J. (2000) "The 'Other Eden': Thoughts on American Study Abroad in Britain." Frontiers, 6 (Winter): 83–98.

Engle, J. (2007) "Culture's Unacknowledged Iron Grip." The Chronicle of Higher Education, 53 (22): B16.

Falk, R. and Kanach, N. A. (2000) "Globalization and Study Abroad: An Illusion of Paradox." Frontiers, 6 (Winter): 155–68.

Foreign Policy (2007). Foreign Policy [Internet] Washington, D.C. Available from: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id-3995&page=1 [Accessed 11 December 2008].

Ireland, C. (1999) "Seventh-Century Ireland as a Study Abroad Destination."

Frontiers, 5 (Fall): 61–80.
Kearney, A. T. (2004) "Measuring Globalization: Economic Reversals, Forward Momentum." Foreign Policy, February [Internet]. Available from: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/issue_marapr_2004/countrydetail.php[Accessed 11 December 2008].
Keltner, D. (2008) In Defense of Teasing. The New York Times, 7 December [Internet]. Available from: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/07/magazine/07teasing-t.html [Accessed 11 December 2008].
Kiberd, D. (1993) Idir dhá Chultúr [Between Two Cultures]. Baile Átha Cliath [Dublin]: Coiscéim.
Kinsella, T. (1995) The Dual Tradition: An Essay on Poetry and Politics in Ireland. Manchester: Carcanet.
National Survey of Student Engagement (2008). National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) [Internet] Bloomington, IN. Available from: http://nsse.iub.edu/NSSE_2008_Results/docs/withhold/PressRelease2008.pdf [Accessed 25 November 2008].
Ní Dhomhnaill, N. (2003) "Seal sa Domhan Thoir: Sojourn in the Eastern World." Éire-Ireland, 38:1–2 (Spring/Summer): 181–195.
Open Doors (2008). Open Doors [Internet] New York, N.Y. Available from: http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=131556 [Accessed 14 January 2009].
Owens, C. (2003) "Stephen Dedalus, Fili." In Tymoczko, M. and Ireland, C. eds. Language and Tradition in Ireland: Continuities and Displacements. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press: 28–46.
Tymoczko, M. and Ireland, C. "Language and Tradition in Ireland: Prolegomena." In Tymoczko, M. and Ireland, C. eds. Language and Tradition in Ireland: Continuities and Displacements. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press: 1–27.
Ulster-Scots (2004) The Ulster-Scots Society of America (U-SSA) [Internet] Amarillo, TX. Available from: http://www.ulsterscotssociety.com/about_the-roots.html [Accessed 25 November 2008].
Vande Berg, M. (2007) "Intervening in the Learning of U.S. Students Abroad." Journal of Studies in International Education, 11: 3–4 (Fall/Winter): 392–99.

## Endnotes

[1] Engle 2007 discusses many of the challenges in achieving this goal.

[2] See the wide ranging discussion on globalization and international education in Falk and Kanach 2000.

[3] American students quickly learn to use their weekends for travel and, like their Irish peers, learn to spread their socializing across selected weekdays.

[4] See Ireland 1999 for a discussion of how this same early period in Irish cultural history compares with our own modern world of international education.

[5] NSSE surveys find that "when courses provided extensive, intellectually challenging writing activities, students engaged in more deep learning activities such as analysis, synthesis, and integration of ideas from various sources ..." National Survey of Student Engagement 2008.

[6] This observation is supported by evidence gathered at National University of Ireland, Galway; University of Limerick and Arcadia University (personal communications from Mike Kavanagh, NUIG; Liam Ó Dochartaigh, UL; David Rudd, AU).

[7] The observations in Falk and Kanach 2000 are relevant here.