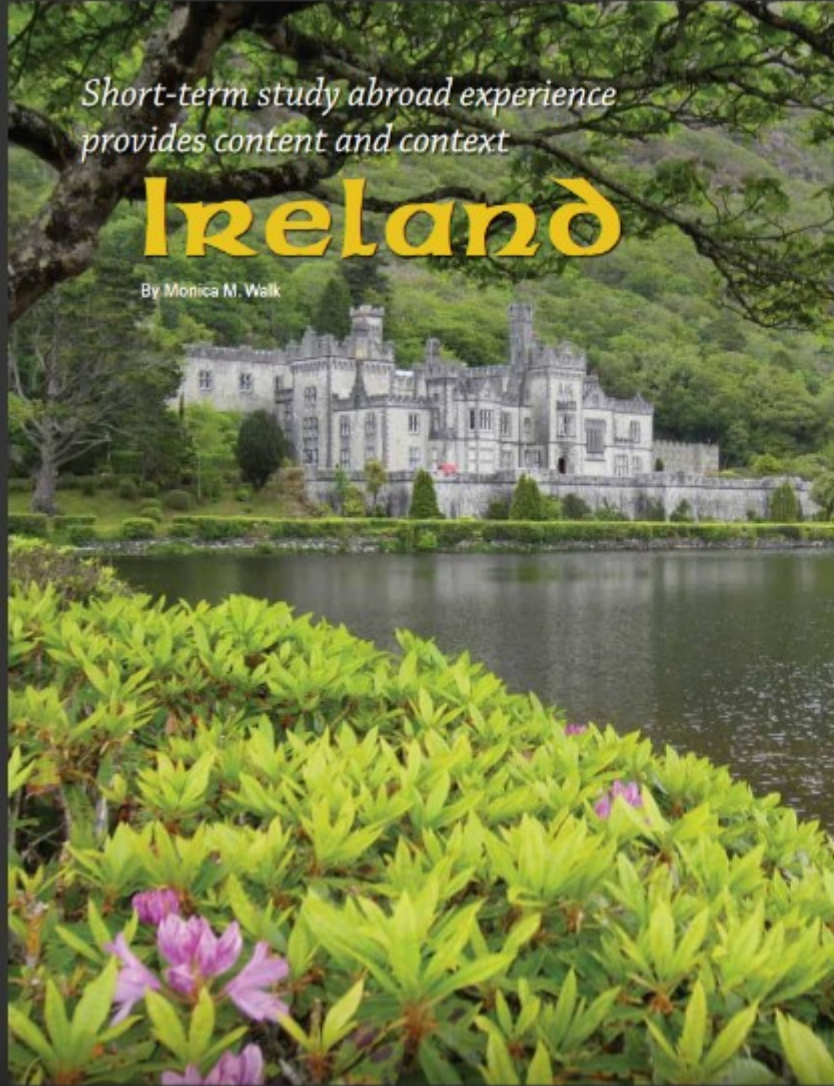


Short-term study abroad experience  
provides content and context

# Ireland

By Monica M. Walk



The simple potato changed world history in ways hard to fathom in a modern culture of agricultural abundance. Lack of it emptied much of Ireland when crops failed in the mid-1800s, filling graves from starvation and ships with émigrés headed for more stable locales, like the United States.

But, walk a mile in another man's shoes — along the Doolough Valley Famine Road where Irish citizens trekked and died in search of food — or sit below deck in the crowded steerage section of a cargo ship and the history becomes real.

Eleven Marian University students felt their classroom conversations about the Great Irish Potato Famine of 1845–51 come alive during a short-term study abroad course this past May. Led by Assistant Professor of History Matthew Szromba, Ph.D., the group followed eight on-campus class sessions with an 11-day trip to the Republic of Ireland.

"The Potato Famine is a world historical event," Szromba said. "A third of Ireland's population disappeared in five years' time: one million died of famine and related disease and another one-and-a-half million emigrated. It set social and economic patterns for the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup>

and most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Partly because of the famine, more than 36 million Americans claim Irish ancestry today."

Kelsey Beine '13 is among those Americans with Irish roots, which made participation in the class even more meaningful. She and Kim Schuenemann '12, both student interns in Marian's Office of University Relations, blogged about their educational travel experience as it was happening.

(See accompanying story p. 19–20, and visit [www.marianuniversity.edu/ireland](http://www.marianuniversity.edu/ireland))

## Global awareness

"It's important to create global awareness and use the world as a classroom," Szromba said. "It's easy with history, but many disciplines can use the world as a classroom. We have to make a commitment to raise global awareness among our students.

"It can be a cliché to say study abroad is a transformational experience, but in my case it transformed me into a much more mature learner," Szromba said of his own undergraduate experience in London. "Because of this profound effect on me, I want to

create as many rich learning experiences for students as possible at Marian."

That rich experience needn't be cost prohibitive.

With the logistical help of International Education Office Coordinator Ann Umbreit, the study abroad portion of the Ireland course totaled approximately \$1,850 per student, including travel, accommodations in hostels and small inns, and museum entrance fees. A generous donor provided a \$5,000 gift toward the course, which lowered the initial \$2,100 cost.

The length of the travel experience made it affordable in several ways. Szromba noted that the traditional semester abroad experience can be difficult for students who are married, in

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academic programs with proscribed schedules such as nursing, or committed to employers in addition to school.

