The Center for Irish Studies

Villanova University’s Irish history began in 1842 when it was founded by Irish Augustinians as a school for immigrants. Since then, Villanova’s connections—to the Irish community in the United States and to the entire island of Ireland—have grown deeper and stronger. Today, Villanova is the heart of Irish activity in our region for educators, authors, artists, athletes, business leaders and politicians.

In 2016, the University’s renowned Irish Studies Program was elevated to a Center for Irish Studies, thanks to a generous gift from the Connelly Foundation.

For more information about the Center for Irish Studies contact:
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Original St. Augustine’s Catholic Church,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Irish Studies Academics

Undergraduate students may minor or major in Irish Studies under the guidance of 12 faculty members. The 15-credit minor enables students to explore the multi-disciplinary field of Irish Studies through literature, history, theater, film, art, politics, philosophy, theology, music and language. A rigorous 33-credit Irish Studies specialization is offered as a major through the Department of Global Interdisciplinary Studies.

The Heimbold Chair

Each spring semester, a distinguished Irish writer is invited to hold the Charles A. Heimbold, Jr. Chair of Irish Studies. Established in 2000, the Heimbold Chair is one of the most prestigious Irish Studies positions in the United States. The first Chair was poet and editor Peter Fallon.

Abbey Theatre Exchange Program

The Abbey Theatre Exchange Program with Villanova University links the University’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences with the prestigious National Theater of Ireland. The program includes a residency of an Irish Theatre practitioner at Villanova, a professional student internship at the Abbey, and the Irish Theatre Summer Studio, an intensive three-week program in Dublin.

National University of Ireland, Galway

Villanova has a more than 30-year relationship with the National University of Ireland, Galway and students can take advantage of the Semester in Ireland or Summer in Ireland program in Galway.

MILESTONES

1842 Irish Augustinians establish Villanova College.

1844 Villanova College remains on a state of alert after nativist anti-immigrant and anti-Irish rioters in Philadelphia burn St. Augustine’s Church and vow to destroy Villanova, which thrives instead.

1848 Villanova’s “Irish Pipeline” begins at the London Olympic Games. Villanova’s coach, Jumbo Elliot, offers Irish runner, Jimmy Reardon, a scholarship, making him the first international athlete to accept an American track-and-field scholarship. Nearly 30 Irish athletes have since come through Villanova, including 12 Olympians and six world record-breakers.

1898 Irish poet and Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney first visits Villanova.

1940 Joseph McGarity, an Irish emigrant turned successful businessman, donates his rare books to the Falvey Memorial Library. Today, the McGarity Collection contains more than 10,000 items ranging from books, periodicals and pamphlets to music, Irish-language manuscripts and letters.

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1950 The first Villanova University in Ireland Summer Program takes place at National University of Ireland, in Galway.

1979 Led by James Murphy, PhD, Villanova establishes its Irish Studies Program, one of the first interdisciplinary Irish Studies programs—offering courses from departments of English and History, as well as Political Science, Theater, Irish Film, Art History and Business.

1985 Martin McGuinn ‘64 CLAS, ‘71 JD, inaugurates the McGuinn Irish Scholars Program, which annually provides scholarships for four Irish university students to attend Villanova for a semester.

1991 Mick Moloney, one of Ireland’s premier ethnomusicologists and traditional musicians, serves as a Villanova visiting professor.

2001 The Charles A. Heimbold, Jr.’54 Endowed Chair of Irish Studies is inaugurated and becomes one of the most prestigious Irish Studies positions in the United States.

2011 Villanova and the Abbey Theatre, Ireland’s National Theatre, create an exchange program, inaugurated with a lecture by renowned Irish Director, Patrick Mason.

2009 Through the Fulbright Program, Villanova begins hosting young Irish language professionals to teach introduction to the Irish language. O’Casey’s production of Sean O’Casey’s The Plough and the Stars.

2015 Villanova’s Center for Irish Studies is founded through a generous gift from the Connelly Foundation. The Center directorship is named for Emily C. Riley, Executive Vice President for the Connelly Foundation and a former Villanova University Trustee. Joseph Lennon, PhD, is appointed inaugural director.


The McGuinn Irish Scholars Program, Villanova University in Ireland