

May Session takes students to Ireland

As part of Concordia's Global May Session 2010, 13 students, accompanied by Professors Kit Fitzgerald (New Media) and Dr. Erin Obermueller (English), travelled to Ireland and toured the country from Dublin to the Dingle Peninsula. The goals of the academic course included a study of Irish literature and film as well as an examination of the ways Irish culture and national identity are created and communicated throughout history. Upon returning to Concordia, each student created an audio-visual project highlighting their experiences ranging from Irish education, music, literature, and Irish humor.

In Dublin, the tour included a visit to Kilmainham Gaol, the site of the 1916 Easter Rising leaders' execution, a backstage tour of the Abbey Theater, the Book of Kells at Trinity College, and the Guinness Storehouse. Concordia students were hosted by Barney McKenna of the legendary music group *The Dubliners*, for a private music session in his home. They attended the play *The Kiss*, followed by a private Q and A session with the playwright Michael Harding and actor Tom Hickey. They also toured Dublin's newest avant-garde cinema space in Smithfield Market, *Lighthouse Cinema*, where Trinity College Film Studies Professor Ruth Barton spoke on the state of contemporary Irish filmmaking.

Going west, the study group visited beautiful Coole Park, home of Lady Gregory, co-founder of the Abbey Theater and influential member of the Irish Literary Revival. Coole Park features in many of W.B. Yeats' poems and served as inspiration for J.M Synge, Sean O'Casey, and other Irish writers. Other literary sites included Thoor Ballylee, Yeats' summer home and studio, and the Seanchai, the Kerry Literary and Cultural Center. Natural wonders on the tour featured the Cliffs of Moher, the Aran Islands, and the Dingle Peninsula. Of particular interest and inspiration was the 7th century monastic site, Gallarus Oratory and hearing Seamus Heaney's poem of the same name recited by our local tour guide. The group visited the Blasket Island Center which showcases the rich storytelling of the Island writers and their influence.

As one of the student's remarked in her presentation, "When I stood at the Cliffs of Moher, I finally understood why the Irish would fight so hard to keep their land." Another remarked, "Standing in Coole Park my only thought was--Yeats understated the beauty of this place!" From the impromptu music sessions in the pubs to the literary and historical tours, the Ireland/Eire experience was both memorable and remarkable.