



St Mary's
University College | **125**
A College of Queen's University Belfast

INTERNATIONAL SUMMER SCHOOL

www.smucb.ac.uk

St Mary's University College Belfast | Féile an Phobail

The small bird chirp-chirruped: yellow neb, a note-spurt. Blackbird over Lagan water, clumps of yellow whin-burst!

The Blackbird of Belfast Lough,
Seamus Heaney, College Alumnus



Titanic Experience, Belfast

Welcome to Belfast

In its 125th year, St Mary's University College is delighted to welcome students and faculty from our partner universities in the United States of America to the 2026 International Summer School. We are especially pleased with the continued growth of the Summer School, as participation has now expanded to seven U.S. institutions. This reflects well on the strength and deepening of our transatlantic partnerships.

At our Summer School, we are proud to provide a unique platform for exploring the integration of politics, culture and evolving international relationships, 28 years after the signing of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement. Our theme, "Building Peace through Dialogue," reflects both the progress that has been made and the work still required to foster peace, reconciliation and mutual understanding in our part of the world.

At St Mary's, we are deeply committed to nurturing dialogue at local, national and international levels. As a faith-based institution, our mission is grounded in a values-driven approach to education which seeks to promote mutual respect and the dignity of every person.

For over thirty years, our College has proudly partnered with Féile an Phobail, Ireland's largest community arts festival and summer school. This year, Belfast will also host Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, the world's largest celebration of traditional Irish music, offering a unique cultural backdrop to your time here. Together,



these experiences reflect the vibrancy, creativity and cultural richness of our city.

The 2026 International Summer School offers our visitors an enriching educational and cultural journey in Belfast and across the island of Ireland. It is our hope that the experience will not only deepen your knowledge but also strengthen and spark enduring friendships and partnerships between our institutions, communities and peoples.

Creidimid go gcumasaíonn foghlaim
forbairt agus síocháin.
*Learning empowers development
and peace.*

Professor Peter Finn KSG
College Principal & Ex-Officio Governor

Derry A City of Culture

Founded by St Colmcille in the 6th century, Derry is renowned for its complete 17th-century walls, among the best-preserved city fortifications in Europe.

Derry is rich in history and steeped in culture. It is associated with two Nobel Prize winners in John Hume and Seamus Heaney. It was the birthplace of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights movement in the 1960s.

The people of Derry experienced some

of the worst days of the Troubles including the Bloody Sunday atrocity. Today, its resilient spirit shines globally, newly celebrated through the hit Netflix comedy series Derry Girls. This classic programme features life in the city during the Troubles for a group of teenage girls. It was written by Derry native Lisa McGee, inspired by her experiences of the time.

As part of our day in Derry we will visit the famous Derry Girls mural.



Derry Guildhall

Things to do and see in Derry on your day off...

1. Tour the city's ancient historic walls
2. Visit 'Free Derry' Corner
3. Go to St Columb's Cathedral
4. Cross the iconic Peace Bridge
5. Explore the Craft Village and city shops
6. Understand Derry's history in the Tower Museum
7. Enjoy a pint, music and the craic in a city centre pub.



Derry Girls Mural



Peace Bridge, Derry

Belfast Welcomes Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann

The Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann is the world's biggest celebration of traditional Irish music and culture. Fleadh is the Irish word for festival. This year it is taking place in Belfast at the same time as our Summer School!

From Sunday 2nd - Sunday 9th August 2026, Belfast will be alive with music, song and dance as the Fleadh transforms the city into a carnival of sound, culture and craic. There is something for everyone, from incredible traditional pub music sessions to headline concerts, and from street performances to prestigious All-Ireland singing and music competitions. It promises to be an unforgettable week.

The Fleadh attracts the world's finest traditional musicians, so you never know just who you might see playing in the corner of a pub or in an impromptu session on a street corner.

The Fleadh was last in the North, in Derry, in 2013, and what a fantastic week that was! This year Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann returns in spectacular style, and with over 800,000 visitors expected to come to Belfast, we are delighted that our St Mary's Summer School visitors can enjoy this unique experience.



Fleadh Cheoil 2025, Belfast



Fleadh Cheoil 2025, Belfast

Fleadh Cheoil 2025, Dark Horse



St Mary's University College Belfast



McConnell's Distillery, Belfast

Whisky that tells a story.
Ours began in Belfast in
1776 when the city exported
75% of all Irish Whisky.

McConnell's Whisky

International Summer School

Talks & Activities

MONDAY

1:00pm Hard Border in Ireland, From Partition to Brexit. The Eamon Phoenix Memorial Lecture

The lecture is given by Dr Cormac Moore, a renowned historian who has written widely on Irish History. His latest book is *The Root of All Evil* on the Boundary Commission. He is a well-known broadcaster, journalist, and columnist for *The Irish News*.

3:00pm Let's Talk Politics

Discussion on current political issues chaired by *The Irish News* columnist David McCann alongside Sarah Creighton, columnist and commentator; Chris Donnelly, commentator; and Gavan Reilly, host of 'Gavan Reilly Tonight' on Virgin Media One and author of *The Secret Life of Leinster House*.

3:00pm A Continuing Crisis of Confidence in Policing

25 years since the PSNI was established,



Cave Hill, Belfast

how much has changed in terms of a new beginning to proper, independent, accountable, and human rights compliant policing? When it comes to legacy, Irishness, and constitutional change, is the PSNI still culturally the RUC?

Can the PSNI be trusted with ensuring free and fair voting in the event of a border poll?

TUESDAY

11:45am: How the Troubles Impacted Our Communities. Lecture by Rev Bill Shaw and Fr Gary Donegan

Reverend Bill Shaw and Father Gary Donegan offer insights and experiences from their ministry and community work at the interface in north Belfast.

2:00pm Kindred Spirits: Parallel Paths of Language Loss and Revitalisation

This presentation by our special guest international speaker, Dr John Hopkins, explores the striking parallels between Native American and Irish linguistic histories. It examines how colonial policies, from boarding schools to systemic elimination, targeted Indigenous languages to erode identity. Finally, it shares contemporary revitalisation strategies, celebrating the enduring bond and shared resilience of these kindred cultures.



Dr John Hopkins

Dr John Hopkins serves as the Chief Dignity Officer (CDO) of St Martin's University, where he also teaches courses in Indigenous Studies, Communication Studies, Race and Ethnic Studies, and Leadership Theory. John is a citizen of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, located in South Dakota.



Maritime Walk, Belfast

Talks & Activities

Continued

3:30pm South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Legacy and Lessons 30 Years On

Thirty years on, a panel of experts from South Africa and Ireland reflects on the legacy of the TRC and the lessons learned for peacebuilding in other post-conflict societies.

WEDNESDAY

11:00am The Good Life and Unresolved Murder of a Derry GAA Man

On May 12, 1997, Seán Brown, the chairman of Bellaghy Wolfe Tones GAA club, was abducted and murdered as he locked his club's premises in south Derry. For almost thirty years, his widow, Bridie and their six children have waged a dignified campaign against official obstruction for truth and a public inquiry into his killing. This is the story of one man's good life, a community's loss, and a family's unyielding fight for justice in the long shadow of collusion.



Introductionn to Gaelic Football



2:00pm From Wounded Knee to Gaza

Centred on the new collection "From Wounded Knee to Gaza" by Brian Vallely and an accompanying film by Antaine Ó Donnaille, this programme draws compelling historical and political parallels between the experiences of Native American communities and the Palestinian people.

3:00pm AI, Big Tech and Ireland's Energy Futures

Drawing on their recent book, *From the Bog to the Cloud: Dependency and Eco-Modernity in Ireland*, the authors discuss how US big tech gained a foothold in Ireland and the opportunities to challenge its expansion into our environmental future.

THURSDAY

11:00am Political Posters Talk (See page 11)

11:45am Introduction to the Irish Language

Bhuel, cad é mar atá tú?
An bhfuil tú go maith?
Cúpla focal?
Learn some phrases to get you started with this introduction to Irish.

2:00pm Walking Tour of Belfast's Peace Walls

Join a 3-hour walking tour led by former activists, uncovering the history of the Anglo-Irish conflict through stories and visits to significant sites.



James Connolly Museum, Falls Road, Belfast

5:00pm McConnell's Distillery Experience at Crumlin Road Gaol followed by Dinner

Established in 1776, McConnell's was the name that delighted whisky-lovers around the world for over 150 years. Now the Legend is Reborn.

By the early years of the 19th century, in terms of volume alone, Belfast had far outstripped those other great centres of Irish distilling, Cork and Dublin. Following its decline and disappearance, McConnell's Whisky is back and is Belfast Born again.



St Mary's University College Belfast



The Derry city walls are among the best-preserved in Europe. The historic walls were built to protect English and Scottish settlers and, because they were never breached, Derry is sometimes referred to as "The Maiden City."

1:30pm Derry Girls Mural

The Netflix comedy 'Derry Girls' has brought the city's name to a huge international audience. We will visit the mural for an iconic selfie with the Derry Girls themselves!

2:00pm Derry Walls. Craft Village and Guildhall

3:30pm Depart Derry

FRIDAY
Summer School Trip To Derry

11:15am Arrival in Derry
On our arrival in Derry, we will walk from Ebrington across the iconic Peace Bridge. Ebrington is a military heritage site located on the Foyle riverfront dating back to the 1600s, featuring impressive listed buildings and parade ground.

11:30am Mayoral Welcome

The Mayor Grace Uí Niallais will formally welcome us to the city and give a brief outline of the history and heritage of Derry and the local area.

12:30pm Guided Walking Tour of Derry Walls



Derry Walls Tour

Talks & Activities

Continued

5:00pm Evening Meal

Evening Meal at Crosskeys, Ireland’s Oldest Cottage Pub

SATURDAY

11:00am Titanic Exhibition Belfast

Titanic Belfast CEO will welcome us for a tour of the exhibition. Titanic Experience is a world-renowned, self-guided visitor attraction located in the Titanic Quarter on the exact spot where the RMS Titanic was designed, built, and launched.

Housed in an iconic, shimmering building that mirrors the height and shape of the ship’s hull, it features nine interactive galleries, full-scale reconstructions, interactive rides and authentic White Star Line memorabilia from the Titanic era.

12:15pm Maritime Walk and Belfast City Centre

Our Maritime walk brings us from the Titanic quarter, across the River Lagan to the city centre. Towering above us,

we will see David and Goliath, the two huge cranes that dominate the Belfast skyline.

Followed by lunch at The Northern Whig and Fleadh Cheoil sessions.



Introduction to Hurling



The Crosskeys Inn



Titanic Experience, Belfast



The Crosskeys Inn, Ireland’s Oldest Cottage Pub

Political Posters Talk

The Political Collection at the Linen Hall began in 1968 with one civil rights leaflet and today contains some 350,000 items. It is the definitive archive of the ‘Troubles’ and beyond, charting from the emergence of the civil rights movement, through the peace process to our post conflict society. Encompassing political, social and economic history, it elucidates the lived experience, is the people’s history and our collective memory. As material was collected contemporaneously, the collection contains a significant number of items which exist in no other collections. Linen Hall Librarian Samantha McCombe will discuss the several thousand political posters in the collection. These posters give real insight into this momentous period – they are the physical remnants of the times in which they were collected and serve as historical documents that help us to better understand those times; conveying the messages of the moment, stirring emotions, encouraging reflection or in many cases prompting action.

St Mary’s University College Belfast



Speakers and Panellists

Patrick Bresnihan	Associate Professor of Geography, Maynooth University
Patrick Brodie	Assistant Professor of Communication Studies, UCD
Sarah Creighton	Solicitor, political writer, and commentator
Chris Donnelly	Political commentator
Fr Gary Donegan	Passionist Priest and Director of Peace and Reconciliation
Dr John Hopkins	Chief Dignity Officer, St Martin's University
David McCann	Columnist, The Irish News
Samantha McCombe	Chief Librarian of the Linen Hall Library
Dr Cormac Moore	Dublin City Council Historian-in-Residence and columnist
Antaine Ó Donnaile	Featured documentary filmmaker
Gavan Reilly	Virgin Media current affairs host
Rev Bill Shaw	Presbyterian minister and interface peace builder
Brian Vallely	Featured author of 'From Wounded Knee to Gaza'

Talks & Events Timetable

Mon, 3 August	Thu, 6 August
1:00pm: Hard Border in Ireland, From Partition to Brexit. The Eamon Phoenix Memorial Lecture	11:00am: The Political Collection – Political Posters 11:45am: Introduction to the Irish Language
3:00pm: Let's Talk Politics	2:00pm: Walking tour of Belfast's Peace Walls
3:00pm: A Continuing Crisis of Confidence in Policing	5:00pm: McConnell's Distillery Experience at Crumlin Road Gaol followed by Dinner
Tue, 4 August	Fri, 7 August
11:45am: How the Troubles Impacted Our Communities. Lecture by Rev Bill Shaw and Fr Gary Donegan	Summer School Trip To Derry 11:15am: Arrival in Derry. Walk across the Peace Bridge to Guildhall
2:00pm: Kindred Spirits: Parallel Paths of Language Loss and Revitalisation	11:30am: Derry Mayor Welcomes Summer School Scholars
3:30pm: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Legacy and Lessons 30 Years On	12:30pm: Guided Walking Tour of Derry Walls 1:30pm: Derry Girls Mural
Wed, 5 August	2:00pm: Free time: Derry Walls. Craft Village and Guildhall
11:00am: The Good Life and Unresolved Murder of a Derry GAA Man	3:30pm: Depart Derry
2:00pm: From Wounded Knee to Gaza	5:00pm: Evening Meal at Crosskeys, Ireland's Oldest Cottage Pub
3:00pm: AI, Big Tech and Ireland's Energy Futures	Sat, 8 August
	11:00am: Titanic Exhibition Belfast
	12:15pm: Maritime Walk into Belfast City Centre Lunch at The Northern Whig and Fleadh Cheoil sessions

Fr Dr Gary Donegan CP and Rev Dr Bill Shaw OBE

Fr Gary Donegan CP has been based in the Passionist Community in Holy Cross, Ardoyne since 2001, and is currently acting parish priest. He is involved in peace-building initiatives at both parish and national levels, and is the director of the Passionist Peace and Reconciliation Office.

He has extensive experience in conflict resolution, including mediating with armed groups, police, and community groups. He has spoken at international conferences and was invited to the United Nations and the White House for his work in peace-building.

Fr Gary also supports local residents in conflict resolution efforts and advocates for the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. He has firsthand experience with the effects of trauma, drug and alcohol dependency, and suicide in post-conflict areas of social deprivation. He has received honorary doctorates and the Sean MacBride Humanitarian Award for his peace-building and reconciliation work.



Rev Dr Bill Shaw OBE grew up in Belfast during the Troubles and later became a Presbyterian minister. He served in a church on the loyalist Shankill Road before becoming the Director of the 174 Trust, a Christian Community Development Project in a Nationalist/Republican area of North Belfast.

Bill has been in this role for over 24 years, working towards building peace and promoting reconciliation through

various projects and initiatives. He has received recognition for his efforts, including the Harry McKillop Irish Spirit Award and an OBE for his services to the community. Bill has also delivered lectures on peace-building in Northern Ireland at universities in the United States.

He continues to be involved in interfaith chaplaincy and was awarded an honorary doctorate for his distinguished service to the community.

Celebrating 125 Years

St Mary's purpose is to make a distinctive contribution of service and excellence, in the Catholic tradition, to higher education in Northern Ireland.

At St Mary's, we have been doing that since our doors opened over a century ago here on the Falls Road campus.

The College originated in 1900 with St Mary's Training College, enrolling 100 women students for primary teaching.

In 1948, four-year courses for post-primary teachers began, allowing some students to combine university study and professional training.

St Joseph's Training College for men was

established at Trench House in 1961. In 1968, Queen's University recognized St Mary's and St Joseph's for teaching matriculated students in Bachelor of Education courses.

The Trustees merged St Mary's and St Joseph's in 1985, with the Colleges combining at St Mary's Falls Road in 1996.

In 1999, the Privy Council granted University College status, allowing for Liberal Arts and other degree programs.

For 125 years St Mary's graduates have created an indelible mark teaching in Catholic schools in the primary and post-primary sector in Ireland and further afield. Our alumni have excelled in education, academia, politics, sport business and civic society.





The Best of Belfast

Féile an Phobail is a showcase of the best of Belfast. This year, visitors will also enjoy Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, Ireland's premier traditional music festival.

Féile an Phobail began as a local community initiative, and it now attracts audiences, performers and visitors from across Ireland and around the world.

In 2026 the Féile and the Fleadh, two major cultural celebrations, will create an extraordinary atmosphere across the city. With more than 100,000 visitors coming to Belfast, the programme of 600 events across 80 venues offers something for everyone: international speakers, eyewitness accounts of historic events, insightful talks, the cut and thrust of

robust cultural and political debate, theatre, cultural walks through the city, and a powerful Irish-language dimension. The family-friendly ethos means there are events for all age groups. Music is a huge part of Féile and 150 trad music sessions are taking place in the lead-up to and during the Fleadh Cheoil.

We are delighted that our Summer School Scholars have the opportunity to experience Féile an Phobail in person, enjoy the Fleadh and create memories of St Mary's University College and Belfast that will last a lifetime.



Life in Belfast is still uncomfortable... Let's all be uncomfortable together. Let's talk about it, and talk about an alternative.

Mo Chara, Kneecap





St Mary's
University College | **125**
A College of Queen's University Belfast

International Summer School

191 Falls Rd, Belfast BT12 6FE
Tel: +44 28 9032 7678
Email: j.brolly@smucb.ac.uk

Additional Images © Tourism Ireland
All Rights Reserved

www.smucb.ac.uk