

Bridging Heritage and Innovation: The Marshall University WV-Ireland Transatlantic Partnership

Presentation by Dr. Brian A. Hoey, Dean of the Honors College at Marshall University to the WV House and Senate Joint Committee on Education, Sunday 05 October 2025 at 4:00 p.m.

Opening

Thank you, Delegate Hornby, for your invitation, and to Chair Grady, Chair Ellington, and all members of the Joint Committee for your kind attention. It was a pleasure to meet Delegate Hornby, Robert Leslie, and Dr. Jamie Field in the Irish Parliament this past May. My thanks go as well to the office of Senator Mark Daly, Cathaoirleach (Chairman) of the Seanad Éireann, the upper house of the Irish Parliament. Senator Daly graciously sponsored our meeting in Dublin. Speaker Hanshaw was unfortunately unable to attend, but we're here today, at least in part, because of that convivial meeting.

That gathering was serendipitous. I happened to be at Dundalk Institute of Technology at the very same time the delegation was in Ireland, together with our first group of West Virginia students from both Marshall and BridgeValley, but the connection had already been made. In early 2023, as the Legislature established the West Virginia–Ireland Trade Commission, I was already beginning to develop plans for a Marshall partnership in Ireland. When the Commission came into being, it was immediately clear that our work and its mission were moving on parallel tracks—both seeking to connect education, workforce, and economic development across the Atlantic. The partnership we'll describe today has since become one of the clearest examples of what that Commission envisioned.

Who Am I and Why Am I Here

My name is Brian Hoey, and I serve as Dean of the Honors College at Marshall University. But I'm not here simply because of that title. For more than two decades I've worked at the intersection of education, culture, and workforce development in West Virginia. I'm an anthropologist by training, and my work has always been about people, place, and how we build meaningful and fulfilling lives through work, family, and community.

In recent years, since becoming Dean, I've shaped the Honors College into a hub for innovation—an incubator for new programs that often begin with Honors students but are designed to serve the entire university and our broader community. That's why this Ireland partnership began with us, but it was never meant to stay only with us. My role today is to set the stage because this is about vision, alignment, and how West Virginia can leverage global connections to serve our students and our state in ways that are both meaningful and fulfilling.

Personal Connection

On a personal note, Ireland is not just a strategic choice for me—it's a place I feel deeply connected to. My family has roots in County Louth, the “wee county” just north of Dublin on the border with Northern Ireland, where they have lived for generations and still live today. That connection was one of the reasons I first reached out to Dundalk Institute of Technology, but it quickly became something much more.

I came to realize what a truly remarkable institution DkIT is, and how extraordinary its people are to work with—collaborative, forward-looking, and deeply committed to their students and community. This partnership has become a labor of love: it blends my professional commitment to preparing students for a global future with my personal belief that Ireland and Appalachia share stories and struggles that can teach us a great deal about resilience, innovation, and community.

Why Ireland

Why Ireland? On the surface, it's an easy choice—our shared heritage and Appalachian–Irish cultural ties. But the deeper reason is this: in the past fifty years Ireland has transformed itself from one of the poorest countries in Europe into a global hub for technology, invention, and entrepreneurship—all while preserving its cultural heritage.

That combination—innovation plus heritage—is exactly why we want West Virginia students to experience how a place that is rooted in tradition can also embrace change and thrive globally. That lesson resonates profoundly for our state.

Big Picture Message

This is more than study abroad—though we started to build our bridge there. It's a transatlantic partnership that does at least three things:

1. Ties directly to workforce readiness and global trade.
2. Builds what we hope will be a sustainable model that other WV institutions can adopt.
3. Expands access for West Virginia students, especially those from underserved backgrounds.

The Consortium & Impetus

The partnership grew out of practical needs. Working with Dr. Zelideth Rivas, our Assistant Provost for Global Education, and with guidance from colleagues like Clark Egnor and others at the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, we began exploring how to make study abroad accessible for more WV students. That led to support from the U.S. State Department's IDEAS program, which gave us the initial lift through a \$50,000 grant.

That grant concluded this year after supporting WV students, programming in Ireland, and faculty exchange between our two countries. BridgeValley Community and Technical College joined under the grant's imperatives, and together we're showing how a four-year and a two-year institution can collaborate to expand global opportunities for students who might otherwise miss out for a variety of reasons that are no fault of their own.

This is not just about Marshall or BridgeValley; it's about creating a model that others across West Virginia could replicate—one that aligns perfectly with the state's economic goals: global trade, STEM workforce readiness, and innovation.

What We Have Now and What's Next

Where do we stand today? Our first concrete program is the Certificate in Cultural Landscapes with Dundalk Institute of Technology. It is the program we ran this past May. It's rigorous, comparative, and rooted in place-based learning—Ireland and Appalachia side by side. It's also interdisciplinary, drawing students from STEM, business, and the humanities.

But that's just the beginning. We envision this partnership as a platform, not a one-off—expanding into business, technology, health, tourism, and other fields that are so in demand. The idea is to create a true West Virginia-Ireland bridge that prepares our students for the workforce of tomorrow—and enriches Ireland with Appalachian voices: sharing traditions in motion, innovation grounded in place, and stories of our remarkable communities, ingenuity, and resilience.

Tiered Asks

Your support can matter in different ways—from recognizing and lifting up this model, to helping us convene business and education partners, to considering student and program support down the road. Each of these carries a different kind of weight—and any one of them would be transformational in helping us build on our successes and broaden our reach and impact here in West Virginia.

Handoff

To give you a fuller sense of what this looks like in practice, I'd like to introduce my colleagues who are helping make it real. First, Dr. Jason Spencer, Associate Professor of Computer and Information Technology at BridgeValley Community and Technical College, will share how this collaboration opens new global opportunities for West Virginia's two-year students and supports our state's workforce pathways.

After Jason, you'll hear from our partners in Ireland via Teams—where it is now 9 PM on a Sunday—Dr. Patricia Moriarty, Head of the School of Business and Humanities, and Dr. Annaleigh Margey, Head of Humanities at Dundalk Institute of Technology. They'll describe

the academic and cultural frameworks that make this partnership such a strong and sustainable fit for both West Virginia and Ireland.

And after our presentation, Dr. Jamie Field from West Virginia University will be offering remarks from his perspective as a member of the West Virginia–Ireland Trade Commission. We're very pleased that he could be part of today's session, helping show how this partnership connects to the broader vision the Legislature had when it established that Commission.

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