Newspaper names UM faculty among nation's top Irish educators

University of Montana--Missoula. Office of University Relations

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The Irish Voice newspaper has named University of Montana faculty members Traolach O’Riordain and Katie Kane, as well as UM Executive Vice President Jim Foley, to its inaugural Irish Education 100 list, which honors the nation’s top 100 education professionals of Irish descent.

Kane, professor and director of UM’s Irish Studies Program, teaches courses on ethnic studies, 17th century Ireland, and the colonial and postcolonial experiences of the Irish and American Indians. Raised with strong emphasis on her Irish-American heritage in Bismarck, N.D., Kane received her bachelor’s degree in ethnic studies from the University of Texas.

“It’s a significant award for The University of Montana, primarily, I believe, since it honors the work we’ve done over many years to establish an Irish studies program here in Missoula,” Kane said. “Irish studies programs are heavily concentrated along the coasts of the United States, primarily in the East, and to have a program located in the West is very significant, not only for the field but for the students and community as well. We accept the award on behalf of our colleagues, students and Montana citizens, who have been extremely supportive.”
O’Riordain, an adjunct assistant professor raised in County Cork, Ireland, teaches UM courses in Irish language, nationalism, literature, history and philosophy, as well as Gaelic culture. He earned bachelor’s and doctorate degrees in Irish language and literature from University College, Cork. He taught courses there and at the University of Notre Dame and Carroll College before coming to UM.

“While programs at Boston College and Notre Dame have far greater resources than we do, they don’t reflect the richness of Irish culture in their programs as the program at UM does,” O’Riordain said. “This event not only recognizes the sacrifices and efforts of all in developing Irish Studies at UM, but also provides a forum to inform the greater Irish-American community of what we have to offer here.

“I believe that we can develop Irish studies at UM into a national center of Irish and Irish Gaelic studies, where anyone who wishes to study Irish literature, history and theatre, to learn the Irish language, to engage in Irish dance and to play Irish music will come. To make this happen, we need to establish a national profile,” he said.

Helena native Foley — whose Irish-American father was raised in Anaconda and whose mother grew up an O’Neill in Butte’s Dublin Gulch neighborhood — has served as UM’s executive vice president since 2005. O’Riordain said Foley was integral in building the partnership between UM and Ireland that led to the establishment of the Irish Studies Program, which was launched in 2006 by Irish President Mary MaAleese. MaAleese continues to advocate for the program, and the Irish government provides 30,000 euros (approximately $44,000) in grants to the program each year, O’Riordain said.

Irish Voice, in conjunction with Irish America Magazine, will honor the recipients at an Oct. 8 awards ceremony at the American Irish Historical Society in New York City.
The publication regularly honors top Irish professionals in various fields, including business and law. Past recipients include members of the Kennedy family and Donald Molloy, U.S. District Court judge in Missoula.

For more information on the award, call Kane at 406-243-5284 or e-mail kathleen.kane@umontana.edu.

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