

***ELPS 429: U.S. Students Abroad:
Lessons from Rome in Cultural Immersion***
Loyola University Chicago
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http://www.luc.edu/education/rome_graduate.shtml

Introduction

In this course graduate students explore the study abroad experience of U.S. students from the unique vantage point of simultaneously undertaking a short-term, education abroad experience. Offered in Rome, Italy in summer 2006 and 2007, the Eternal City becomes each student's "learning laboratory" and serves as the cultural context for the exploration of the field of study abroad. Formal class time occurs not only in the classroom at Loyola's Rome Center campus but beyond within Rome thus enabling students to serve as engaged "participant observers" with each other and with key informants at selected cultural, educational, religious, and historical sites within the city. Together, class members will explore:

- The purposes, goals, and mission of international study programs;
- The diverse nature, scope, and structure of study abroad programs;
- The intended and unanticipated learning outcomes of international study;
- Challenges and issues experienced during study abroad;
- Issues faced by coordinators and administrators of study abroad programs;
- The extent and nature of 'cultural immersion' experienced by students enrolled in various 'models' of education abroad programs.

This course is open to students with wide-ranging international experience including those with either very little or no study abroad experience to those with extensive engagement with education abroad. Loyola students may use this course as an 'elective' in their academic program with advisor approval. Non-Loyola students may be considered for enrollment and must be admitted as a 'non-degree' seeking student into the School of Education through an on-line application process.

The Eternal City as "Classroom"

The international city of Rome provides an exciting and culturally rich laboratory for student learning about study abroad. Through visits to cultural, educational, governmental, and other sites and by talking directly with key informants, students have the opportunity to explore and reflect on their own cultural immersion experiences while at the same time examining the research and practice of study abroad itself. Selected field experiences reinforce and complement the topics under examination in this course. The following sites were visited in Summer 2007; and these sites and/or similar others will be scheduled for Summer 2008.

- **Approaches to Study Abroad.** To gain appreciation for different approaches to the provision of study abroad (our primary objective in this course), we will visit selected campuses of both Italian and American colleges/universities (e.g., **Scuola Lorenzo de' Medici (LdM), American University Rome, Temple University Rome, and Torre di Babele**) and meet with staff, faculty, and/or students to explore course topics. As students at the **John Felice Rome Center of Loyola University Chicago**, we will also compare and contrast our own program structure and experiences with those of other campuses we investigate. Conversing with faculty and students at the **Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza** (University of Rome) is also planned.
- **International Dimensions of Faculty Scholarship.** Meet with an **Italian scholar** to explore from his/her perspective the international dimensions of academic work and experiences with cultural immersion in international education. Faculty who teach U.S. students will be interviewed along with faculty who may have completed study abroad experiences themselves in various parts of the world.
- **Study Abroad and Tourism.** A significant element of study abroad for students involves travel within the host nation and beyond including visits to key historical, cultural, religious, and other sites.

Research reveals that these travel experiences have a profound impact on study abroad students and influence their developing perspectives about other nations and cultures and the people with whom they are engaged.

Similarly, students will select and visit cultural, historical, religious and other sites in Rome (e.g., the **Coliseum, St. Peter's Basilica, The Imperial Forum, etc.**). During these visits students are assigned the role of "participant observer" and will record observations of visitor behaviors, conversations, and questions. Students may choose to conduct informal interviews with both Italian and non-Italian visitors at these sites to learn more about their experiences with and developing perspectives about Italian culture.

- **U.S.-Italian Educational Exchange.** Students may have the distinctive opportunity to meet with the **Consular Minister** from the **Office of Public Affairs, American Embassy Rome** to discuss educational and cultural exchange issues between the U.S. and Italy including career opportunities involving international exchange. In Summer 2007, the **Consul General** also joined our discussion.
- **Lessons About Italian Life.** In an effort to explore "day-to-day" life among Italians the class as a whole or divided into small groups will visit sites selected by students themselves as part of 'teach us sessions' which contribute to an understanding of Italian culture. Students may select sites that offer historical, cultural, educational, religious, or other insights into the day-to-day lives of Italians. In previous summers, the class explored in-depth: **the local coffee bar culture, an open-air food market, a church-based center for homeless refugees and immigrants, and a major public garden used by Italians for leisure activities.**

Course Requirements

Readings. Selected readings that address course topics have been assembled into a course reader available at cost of photocopying in the weeks prior to the start of the course. The reader will be mailed to enrolled students not residing in the Chicago area. Students are asked to complete the readings prior to arrival in Rome as these will be integrated into class discussions during all classroom sessions and site visits. While some class sessions will have a topic/theme, we will typically discuss several themes during site visits.

Course Projects (tentative and subject to some modification).

- **Letters From Rome.** Students will maintain a personal daily journal and, periodically throughout the course, will prepare a reflective "letter home" addressing students' own personal experiences of study in Rome including reactions to site visits, the assigned reading, and cultural experiences. Students are encouraged to reflect on the ideas discussed in class and themes that may be raised.
- **Field Observation Reports.** In small groups of two or three, students are asked to conduct 1-2 field observations at a historic, cultural, religious, or educational site and to record observations of how both Italian and non-Italian visitors interact with that site including their own reactions to the visit. As a class, we may also undertake a visit to a specific cultural event (i.e., Italian opera or other similar program).
- **Class Participation.** Students are expected to prepare in advance for class sessions by completing assigned readings. A teaching and learning environment that welcomes all opinions is highly valued and students are expected to participate in class discussions that occur at the Rome Center and those conducted at various sites.
- **Teach Us Session.** Small groups of students (3 to 4 per group) will prepare a class 'teach us' session about a site in Rome that students believe may advance learning about some aspect of Italian culture. Thus, the assignment asks each group to select a site that will advance class learning about some aspect of Italian/Roman culture; to lead the class to the site using public transportation, to present contextual/background information about the site, to lead a class discussion at the site on its cultural relevance.