

***ELPS 529: U.S. Students Abroad:  
Lessons from Rome in Cultural Immersion***  
**Loyola University Chicago**  
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[http://www.luc.edu/education/spgrm\\_rome\\_graduate.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/education/spgrm_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 for the **past 6 consecutive summers** (2006-2011), this course, situated in 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 John Felice 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 diverse 'models' of education abroad programs.

This course is open to graduate students including those with either little or no study abroad experience to those with substantial engagement with education abroad. Loyola students may use this course as an 'elective' in their academic program with advisor approval. Non-Loyola students from throughout the U.S. (and beyond) may enroll but will need first to be admitted as a 'non-degree' student in the School of Education through an on-line application process. The course carries 3 semester hours of graduate credit for which all students must register through Loyola's Graduate Program in Higher Education in the School of Education.

**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 2011; and these sites and/or similar others will be scheduled for Summer 2012.

- **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., **IES Rome, John Cabot University and/or American University Rome**, and **Italiaidea**, an Italian language and culture school) and meet with staff, faculty, and students to explore course topics. As resident 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 at the **Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza** (University of Rome) is also planned for summer 2012.
- **International Dimensions of Faculty Scholarship.** Students will 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. Additionally, Italian Student Companions (ISCs) will be available to share their personal experiences living and studying with U.S. undergraduate students in Rome.

- **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 not only about themselves but 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/Vatican City, The Pantheon, 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 unique opportunity to meet with the Consul General at the **American Embassy Rome** to discuss educational and cultural exchange issues between the U.S. and Italy including career opportunities involving international exchange.
- **Lessons About Italian Life.** In an effort to explore "day-to-day" life among Italians the class 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 examined: **the Roman coffee bar culture, open-air food markets, a church-based center for homeless refugees and immigrants, a major public garden used by Italians for leisure activities; an Italian opera, the Italian cinema, the museum of purgatory, and a visit to the site of the 1960 Olympics held in Rome.**

### **Course Requirements**

**Readings.** Specific readings that address course topics have been assembled into an electronic course packet available on the course Blackboard site several weeks prior to the start of the course. **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 covered by the readings during site visits. Students are asked to carry a good tour book for the City of Rome as well as a small personal journal for maintaining notes from class visits.

**Course Projects** (subject to modification).

- **Journal Reflections.** Students will maintain a personal journal and will prepare reflections addressing their own personal experiences of study in Rome including reactions to site visits, the assigned reading, and cultural experiences. Students are asked to reflect on the ideas discussed in class and themes that may be raised and to relate the readings to their reflections.
- **Field Observation Report.** In small groups of two or three, students will conduct a field observation 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 undertake a visit to a specific cultural event (i.e., Italian opera or other similar program) which may be used for the observation report.
- **Class Engagement.** Students are expected to prepare in advance for class sessions and site visits by completing assigned readings. A teaching and learning environment that welcomes all opinions is highly valued and students are expected to participate in all 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, and to lead a class discussion at the site on its cultural relevance.