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

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 11 summers (2006-2016), 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 education 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 engage in critical discussions of the following themes:

1. The diverse purposes, goals, and mission of international study programs;
2. The diverse structures of education abroad programs;
3. The learning outcomes that may arise from study abroad experiences;
4. The challenges and issues experienced by undergraduate and graduate students during study abroad;
5. The challenges faced by coordinators and administrators of study abroad;
6. The personal, cultural, and socioeconomic impact of cultural immersion experiences while abroad.

The Eternal City as Classroom

The city of Rome provides an exciting and culturally rich laboratory for student learning about study abroad. Through visits to cultural, educational, historical, 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 have been explored in past and these sites (or similar others) will be scheduled for Summer 2017.

- **Approaches to Study Abroad.** To gain appreciation for different approaches to the provision of study abroad (one of our primary objectives in this course), we will visit selected campuses of both Italian and American colleges/universities (e.g., IESAbroad Roma, 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) or at Roma Tre is also planned. Italian Student Companions (ISCs), home stay parents, internship supervisors and student interns, faculty, and administrators will share their personal experiences living, teaching, mentoring, and studying with U.S. undergraduate students in Rome.

- **International Dimensions of Faculty Scholarship.** Students will meet with one or more Italian scholars 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 included along with faculty who have completed study abroad experiences themselves in various parts of the world.

- **Study Abroad and Tourism.** Often an important element of study abroad for all 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 may 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.

To experience student ‘tourism’ at the graduate level, the class will 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 will be asked to take on the role of “participant observer” and to record observations of visitor behaviors, conversations, and questions. At each site the class will ‘de-brief’ following the visit and share observations and insights.

- **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 culminating ‘cultural immersion visits’ 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. As examples, in previous summers, the class has examined: The Roman coffee bar culture, open-air markets, a church-based center for homeless refugees and immigrants, a local working class neighborhood experiencing significant political, economic, and physical change, a major public garden used by Italians for leisure activities; an Italian opera, the Italian cinema, the site of two summer Olympics held in Rome, Mussolini’s continuing impact on Roman architecture, and public graffiti found throughout Rome.

**Course Requirements**

**Readings.** Specific readings that address course topics have been assembled into an electronic course packet available on the course Sakai site several weeks prior to the start of the course. **Students are required 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 may have a topic/theme, typically several themes covered by the readings will be addressed during site visits. Students are encouraged to bring a 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).

- **Reflections from Roma.** Students will maintain a journal and 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.

- **Photo Elicitation Project: Cultural Metaphors.** Building on Metcalf’s (2012) framework that applies visual sociology in higher education contexts, students will record a specific aspect of Italian life and/or campus culture that was observed or personally engaged while in Rome. Students will produce a photo that captures the observation and submit the photo along with an analysis of the phenomenon in relation to its broader social and cultural contexts.

- **Class Engagement and Discussion.** Students are expected to prepare in advance for all 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 discussions that occur at the Rome Center and those conducted at various sites. In small groups, students will lead a class discussion on a key topic related to the course.

- **Cultural Immersion Walks.** Small groups of students will prepare a ‘teach us’ session about a site in Rome that students believe may advance learning about some aspect of Italian culture. Each group will select a site that will advance class learning about some aspect of Italian/Roman culture; lead the class to the site using public transportation; present contextual/background information about the site; and lead a class discussion at the site on its cultural relevance.