

The Department of Art & Design

Each summer the Chair of the Department of Art and Design at the University of North Florida (UNF), Dr. Debra Murphy, offers a course entitled, “Study Abroad: The Art and Architecture of Italy.” During this field based course, the students take a two week tour of Rome, Pompeii, Florence, and Venice while reading and listening to lectures about the history, art, architecture, and culture of these cities and concurrently learning about the religion, politics, and role of the family in Italy. The students are required to read *The Italian Way* by Mario Costantino and Lawrence Gambella as well as an art history survey text such as the classic *Gardner’s Art through the Ages* in preparation for the study tour. (*The Pope’s Ceiling* and *Brunelleschi’s Dome* by the author Ross King are texts that are recommended reading for the students.) The trip is preceded by two weeks of study on the UNF campus and concludes with the required journal and visual documentation (which may include drawings, postcards, watercolors, for example) of the experience abroad and essay exam. (Future trips will require an on site presentation in Italy as well; one is planned for June 11-25, 2007).

The goals of the course as stated on the syllabus are the following: to “be able to identify major works in the cities visited and discuss them according to characteristics of period and artist’s style; be able to locate major works on a map of the city and know which of the major museums, galleries or churches hold significant works of art; understand the history of the important institutions (church and state) of each of the sites visited.” It also indicates that “works of art from a wide range of styles and periods will be considered including ancient Roman, Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, and modern. Topics such as patronage, city planning, materials and techniques, restoration,

archeology, the history of Italy, geography and topography will all be taken into account.” The student journals are required to include “observations about the many differences in Italian culture” experienced. Dr. Murphy guides the students into being “aware of the mundane as well as the magnificent.” She poses the following questions on her syllabus in order to provoke her students into observing, reflecting, learning: “How is traffic and public transportation in the urban center of heavily populated Rome? How do the past and present coexist and even collide? Be aware of geography and topography. How did the physical locations of Rome, Florence, and Venice contribute to the success and duration of the respective governments? Consider also the economic base of these three great cities comparing and contrasting eras from the past with the present. The inclusion of other topics such as popular culture, Italian views of Americans and our government, attitudes toward feminism, gay rights and immigration is also encouraged.”

In an interview with Dr. Murphy, she states that this course provides the opportunity for students to be exposed to a different language and customs and to be stimulated into thinking about conservation and space in relation to our own country. She claims that the trip helps make the students aware of how much we have here in North America. As is also indicated on her syllabus, Dr. Murphy emphasizes how students are often able on this study tour to learn how individuals from another country think about Americans. These are just some of the new ways of thinking that are likely to present themselves during the trip, according to Dr. Murphy. She also indicates that this introduction of new levels of thought are in addition to the sheer thrill of being in a situation where each time a corner is turned a great masterpiece of one sort or another is experienced and where the texture and scale of these works of art and architecture have

the potential for great impact upon each individual student.

As illustrated in the thoughts recorded in the interview with Dr. Murphy and in her guidelines from the course syllabus quoted above, this Art & Design Study Abroad course offers a profound transformational learning opportunity for students. Not only does it offer the opportunity, but it fulfills its goals as is evidenced by the reactions of students as especially revealed in their journals, visual documentation of the trip, and required final essay exam taken upon completion of the study tour course. Before turning our attention to these responses to the course, however, let us take a look at the itinerary of the tour which was taken from May 20 to June 2, 2006:

UNF Art and Art History in Italy

Saturday, May 20: Departure

Sunday May 21: Arrive Rome; transfers to Hotel Milani; Murphy will lead orientation walking tour; DINNER

Monday, May 22: Metro site of Circus Maximus, visit to Colosseum [admission included], visits to Roman Forum and Imperial Forum, Column of Trajan and the Pantheon; Murphy guides throughout. Free time in the afternoon. DINNER.

Tuesday, May 23 Early departure for Pompeii [local guide, Alfonso, requested]; proceed to Sorrento; free time in Sorrento to shop, visit the cloister of San Francisco, enjoy view across the bay before returning to Rome.

Wednesday, May 24 Morning free for painting and photography projects; Murphy will lead walking tour. Afternoon excursion to Villa d'Este with its magnificent fountains. Dinner in Tivoli.

Thursday, May 25 Public transportation to the Vatican Museums; free for lunch; tour St. Peter's in the afternoon; Murphy guides throughout. Free afternoon. DINNER.

Friday, May 26 Early departure for Florence; Hotel San Giorgio requested or well located 2 star; Murphy will lead orientation tour; entry to Baptistery included. Book Uffizi? DINNER.

Saturday, May 27 Accademia for the David; San Lorenzo; Medici Chapels and Laurentian Library; free afternoon

Sunday, May 28 Morning visit to Bargello; visit to Boboli Gardens; free afternoon

Monday, May 29 Free Day. Dinner.

Tuesday, May 30 Departure for Venice. Hotel Casanova requested. Murphy will lead introductory walking tour. Dinner.

Wednesday, May 31 Local guide for San Marco and the Doge's Palace. Free afternoon.

Thursday, June 1 Murphy will guide Accademia, church of the Frari and Scuola di San Rocco. Free afternoon. Farewell dinner.

Friday June 2 Return to USA

The consensus of opinion of the students who participated in “Study Abroad: The Art and Architecture of Italy” is that the effects of the experience are life changing.

Stephanie Stark, who just graduated from UNF in August 2006, prefaces her feelings and experiences about the tour of Italy course in her journal: “For the last four years I have sat under some of the most incredible professors that one could imagine at the University of North Florida. Each of those professors has stirred a passion in me for art” (1). On her final exam she indicates that,

As I write this, I begin crying because I remember how overwhelmed I was when I entered the Vatican, the Sistine Chapel (of which I had dreamed of seeing since I was a child) and St. Peter’s...the David! The Medici Chapel...it was all so overwhelming...and to walk the streets that my favorite artist walked. It made me feel so close to what I had admired from afar for so long. Am I changed? A big resounding, YES! I can teach someone with confidence now about this thing we call art.

In her journal, Ms. Stark repeats and expands on these ideas and feelings where she states,

The end of my touring left me full of wonder. I felt like a child discovering all over again.. Everything I had read and studied had now come to life. I can not write in words the feelings that overtook me upon entering [St. Peter’s Basilica]. With tears streaming down my face, I tried to pay attention to everything that Dr. Murphy was saying, but it was truly overwhelming. I never imagined it could be this big, this beautiful (26-27).

Later, Stephanie again reveals in her diary, “I am a changed woman for the better... This experience is still reaching into to the depths of my soul” (45). In an interview, this UNF graduate describes her opportunity to experience the art in Italy as being a “spiritual experience where knowledge became a reality.” She concludes by proclaiming, “I love the program and the school!”

Stephanie Stark is not the only student to have such high regard for the transformative opportunities provided by this Study Abroad course in Italy at UNF. Below are excerpts from the final essay exam taken after students returned from the trip. Noelle Withington writes,

The trip was all I could hope for and more... The place that had the most impact on me was the Sistine Chapel. It’s just such an overwhelming place to actually be standing in and it was emotionally overwhelming... Around every corner was a work I had studied throughout my education, and I really had no idea that one museum could have such an abundance of priceless works of art... Coming home was very strange. I was very happy to see my family and friends again but Italy had definitely left its mark... The trip had such a profound impact on me that I decided to move to Oregon immediately after graduation... I am grateful for the trip for opening my eyes and inspiring me to live life to the fullest. It was definitely a wake up call in the language department as well and I feel a new urgency to actually learn a foreign language... This trip was by far a transformational learning experience... It helped me to realize that there is a whole wide world out there, that I don’t have much time to be on, so I

should definitely take advantage of my opportunities while I still have them.

The student J. Veneman indicates on her final exam that, “The trip to Italy exceeded my expectations in that I saw even more than I imagined I would be able to see...I feel that this trip was the absolute best way to learn about my major art history. Although text books give a good introduction, there is nothing like living it and seeing it first hand.”

Another participant in the program, student Silence Bourn writes the following on her exam:

The tour met and exceeded my expectations, and will probably go down as one of the best experiences of my life. Being in St. Peter’s on a feast day, in the perfect spot for viewing the procession, was a one in a million moment. To wander around the streets of Rome, and have your casual stroll include the Roman Forum, the Colosseum, and the Trevi Fountain, priceless...Sunsets in Venice, the Doge’s Palace, and even the pigeons of San Marco Square, were magic...I do look at America differently now, and it is mostly due to the fact that we lack the artistic history that older nations possess. American culture seems to have a different focus, a more capitalistic aesthetic than that of Europe, and I find it puzzling, and a bit sad. This is not to say that I do not like it here, I just see that we are a young country more so than I realized previously....If I were to say that I am the same as I was before, I would be the biggest liar. Since I was given this opportunity to travel, I feel grateful to have received this gift,

because it will stay with me always. I am braver than I was before, because I have stepped on foreign soil, and have shed the hesitation and fear that comes with experiencing something new. I am kinder and more thoughtful than prior because I know what it is like to be lost and lacking the means to find my way, but make it through with the kindness of strangers. Lastly, my dreams are broader, because my world-view has expanded. I am not the center of existence, but a part of something greater, and the accomplishments of mankind are countless. They lay before our feet waiting to be seen, and this small glimpse has given me a desire to see more.

Virginia “Cody” Maurer informs her professor on her exam of her thoughts with the words below:

... all the great masterpieces were so much more beautiful in person and that was something I could have never conjured up in my mind before arriving in Italy. But the whole tour in general had an extraordinary impact on me. Not only the art and beautiful monuments but the culture and the amazing people that I was accompanied with made everything that much more enlightening...When I got back home, I felt like it was in a dream -- or maybe I should say a nightmare! It was like everything finally hit me. The fact that there are so many strip malls on either sides of the roads combinations of Wendy's, McDonalds, Taco Bells, and Arby's at almost every corner of every intersection....Coming home just made me want to go back to Italy...You truly have to leave the country to even remotely

recognize how we, as Americans, are so dependent on so many unnecessary things and how all of our dependencies are founded by so much ignorance....This tour provided me with so much transformational learning opportunities that my head still hurts from it all! I learned so much in so many different ways. I learned so much history that I never could have really acquired in a textbook or much less a classroom. I learned about other people and their diverse cultures. I learned more about myself and how I had no idea I could walk so much in one day! But most importantly, I learned things that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. This trip is something that I recommend to everyone.

Emily Harwood reports similar sentiments:

I especially admired how Florence is STILL so involved in creating and supporting the art world. Everywhere I looked, I could always see someone drawing, painting, or sketching, and there were art schools there as well...I realized, upon coming home, how young America really is. Italy has so much rich, ancient culture that even permeates its current society. America does not have ancient building, the incredibly extensive history, and such strong traditional roots. I realize how diverse America is, compared to a country that has its roots from many centuries ago....The study tour provided me with a transformational experience, in that I was able to experience the study of art first hand. I was able to stand in front of the actual works, instead of just reading about them; I was able to discuss them, and even experience the culture that created them.

eyes...

It is apparent that the goals not only of Dr. Murphy's course but of UNF are met with this Study Abroad trip. Students have clearly been transformed in their thinking about themselves, their country, and the world through their experiences on the tour course. Stephanie Stark feels this deeply moving spiritual experience of having the opportunity to personally view some of Western Civilization's most profound art has better equipped her to teach art to others. Noelle Withington realizes that life is finite and has made the radical decision to relocate to the west coast of the United States. J. Veneman has learned the most effective way to study her major of art history. Silence Bourn, Virginia Cody and Emily Harwood maintain that they have a new view of their country and of themselves. Silence in particular asserts that she has grown personally to such an extent that she is braver, kinder, more thoughtful, and more of a risk taker as a result of the trip. Finally, the words of Lindsay Bledsoe expressed on her final exam epitomize the feelings expressed by each of these students in more general terms: "The tour of Italy surpassed my expectations. I knew it was going to be an amazing experience but it was even better than I thought it would be. I loved every minute of it, even being exhausted by the end of the day! I could not have asked for a better trip. I was particularly struck by the Vatican, especially the Sistine Chapel. Its beauty brought tears to my eyes..."

Works Cited

Murphy, Debra. Personal Interview. 17 Aug. 2006.

Stark, Stephanie. Telephone Interview. 11 Aug. 2006.