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Majors: Psychology and American Indian Studies

Site of Experience: Lorenzo de' Medici Florence, Italy

Dates of Experience: 1/2/2016-1/24/2016

Graduation Date: May 2016

Support of UW- Eau Claire: Scholarship name: Global Awareness \$400

1. During the winter session I was grateful to have the opportunity to study abroad in Florence, Italy. During my time there I stayed in a 2 bedroom apartment with three other girls who were also from the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. The apartment was a block away from the Golden Bridge, so every day we got to take in the breathtaking views of the river and storefront architecture. Every week day I had my Foods of Italy course, which was a cooking class. Each day we learned about a different region of Italy and then learned how to cook a meal from that region. On the weekends we travel around Italy to places such as Rome, Pisa, and Venice. I came to Italy with a goal of learning as much as I could about the culture such as the food and way of life. I wanted to make Florence my home away from home for the short time I spent there. I feel I accomplished that goal with the help of my class, my professor, and experiences I had there.

2. I have learned a lot about Italy's diverse culture, mostly through my Foods of Italy course. I was able to learn about products, dishes, and economy of all the different regions. The way in which things are today truly reflects the culture and way of life. One example is they use all parts of the animal, the Ox's tail is used to make a stew, the cow's stomach is used to make flavoring, and even a type of cheese has worms in it. To Americans this may sound disgusting because a concern is getting the best quality cut but for them it is about being resourceful. In class I remember many students being grossed out by the thought of this but I found it interesting. I am Native American and so I understand this concept. When we hunt deer we use all parts of the animal that we can. It is considered a delicacy to eat the heart or liver, just like Italians consider cow

stomach to be delicate flavoring. It was interesting to make connections cross culturally.

Between my class and exploring Italy through their food, which I learned a lot about their diverse culture, which to me made sense because what better way to learn then through a core aspect of a culture. Italians pride themselves on using foods that are in season, traditional, and not full of preservatives. In class I saw this come through because we only made dishes whose ingredients were in season. Example of this was making squash ravioli oppose to other kinds of ravioli because the squash was in season and a traditional meal. In the market this cultural aspect also came through because you could only buy produce that was in season. Our professor would mention products but then say, “But you cannot find this item right now because it is out of season”.

Restaurants also change their menu or only serve certain items during different times.

On example of a wintertime dish is ribolitta. This dish is only made during the winter season and so the menu will reflect that. This mentality is very different than in American because the idea off “out of season” doesn’t apply. If one desires a product it can be found.

3. During my short time there I picked up on a few instances on how their institutional practices operate. Going to Italy many people hear about beggars or gypsies, but not much is known about their lifestyle. The Italian government actually gives assistance to these people such as free housing that is furnished, and free education for their children. The police officers even go as far as to talk their children to see because they want to help these people get back onto their feet. Despite the efforts being made to help these

people they still are set in their ways. Their mentality is that it is easier to beg and steal from people than to actually get a job. Their children grow up in this environment which involves them stealing because until the age of 17, no punishment can be given to children so they are recruited to steal. I was not aware of this issues before arriving. Other classmate of mine learned this through their professors so this is an interesting dynamic that many people do not have insight to.

A second example of how their institutions influence society is the church. The main religious domination there is Catholicism. This comes as no surprise because the Vatican is located within Italy as well as many other famous Catholic sites. If there is a religious holiday everything closes, not just certain things like in American. It also influences all types of food. During lent it was common to give up sweets but many Florentine people wanted to eat sweets so they created a “bread” that was really sweet to give into their cravings. The impact church had as their functioning of everyday life is more influence than the government itself.

4. As I was only in Italy for three weeks I wasn't expose to a lot of global implications of collective action. One implication I can talk about is the healthier life choices that are encourage in Italy. The food eaten there is less processed than it is here. We found that out our first week when we bought groceries for two weeks and the food only lasted us 5 days. We could tell the difference the food has on our bodies along with the endless walking we did every day. Within the short time we were there many of us lost weight and felt like we had more energy. There it is encouraged to eat healthier and this is reflected in the lower prices of fruits and vegetables and forbiddance of cars in many

cities. I have seen American make many strives to encourage healthier eating and an active lifestyle but it isn't as successful as it was in Italy. I think if we used less pesticides, encourage organic eating, and made it affordable for everyone we might see a change. This is a big task but if other countries are striving then we have no excuse.

5. One experience that I found disorienting was how people interacted in Italy. Coming from the U.S. I am accustomed to saying hi or smiling to people as you walk by, walking on certain sides of the sidewalk, and saying things such as excuse me when you bump into someone. None of these social norms applied, which was a very hard adjustment for me. I had to get use to people bumping into me as I was walking and not saying excuse me to me or me not saying it to them. For many of the people I was traveling with they thought it was rude. I had to readjust my thinking and not call it rude but that it was normal. I started doing as they did and acted the same way. It started to easier as time went on. What was even more bizarre was when I returned and a random person said hi to me, that action caught me off guard. I had to rethink to myself, oh yes this is normal.

This one instance of how social norms are different can really have an impact on the interactions we have globally. One person could take away that all Italians are rude instead of thinking about it from their perspective. When study abroad you really have to put yourself in their shoes, so to speak, and instead of thinking everything is weird or difference one has to think that this is how things are here. This same mentality can be had in the U.S. people are always assuming what is different is wrong, or their way is

the best way. This is far from the truth we need to look at everyone as having their own opinions and different ways of life instead of criticizing them.

6. My study abroad experience will be integrated into my life in small ways. I a lot of this coming from my class. I know now the proper way to buy olive oil, which I plan on telling everyone I can so they can enjoy the great taste and health benefits. I didn't realize putting salt into your water before it boils actually makes it bowl slower. I can create delicious meals from scratch. Which is something I want to share with my friends and family. I have also made new friend from Eau Claire as well as from around the U.S that I plan on keeping in contact with.

The bigger impact study abroad is had on me is the confidence boost. I am planning on going to graduate school across the country. This was something I was very nervous about. I wasn't confident that I could move somewhere by myself, but after studying across the ocean I know have the confidence to do so. I enjoyed every minute of this experience and I wish I had more time there. I can now go out and have other experiences knowing that I conquered that challenge.

7. During my time there I took a foods of Italy course which is one of my highlights. At first I was very nervous because our classroom was located inside the central market and one wall was all windows! So everyone walking by could watch like you were in a fish bowl and often times people stopped to take pictures, but eventually we were used to it. Every day we learned how to cook foods from different regions of Italy and then the greatest part was you got to eat all of them! This really allowed me to get a feel for

their culture. We would learn about products in class and then see them at restaurants and markets, it really made us feel like a local!



Florence is also known for one of its landmarks called the Duomo. From almost everywhere in the city you can see the Duomo. When I first arrived I used it to get around. If I got lost all I had to do was look for the Duomo! It was marvelous to look at because it is detailed with green and white marble which makes it look fake. Everyone was asking me when I posted my pictures if it was actually real!! Oh it's real and so are the steps to get to the top. We climbed both the bell tower and the dome which totaled 876 stairs. My legs were KILLING at the top but the incredible view was totally worth

it.

