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Communication Sciences and Disorders

Studied in Florence, Italy

Traveled to Switzerland, France, and Ireland

May 26th, 2015-July 5th, 2015

Graduating May, 2016

Support from UW-Eau Claire: Foundation Study Abroad Grant Committee \$600

In May of 2015, I embarked on a journey of a lifetime. I was accepted into the summer in Italy Study Abroad Program in Florence, Italy. This program included 6 other wonderful students from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. This program allowed me to take 6 credits in Florence as well as travel for two weeks after to Switzerland, France, and Ireland. I was also able to live in an apartment with a total of 7 girls from around the United States.

These 6 credits were useful to keep me on track to graduate in 4 years. I was immersed into a new culture in every aspect of life. I took an Art History Course and an Intro to the Organized Crime: The Mafia. Both these courses were some of the most interesting courses I have had the pleasure of taking. They were held in museums, outside, on the roof, and near the beach. The location of each class collaborated with the art or the crimes that we learned about through that course. We saw statues created by some of the most known artists of the centuries and cathedrals made thousands of years ago. This art and history changed the way I looked at architecture and paintings permanently. It showed me a new found respect for our history and why our buildings and our canvases are made these ways.

While I was abroad, there were many adjustments that had to be made. One of these adjustments came from culture changes. In my culture, it is custom to have Sunday night dinners with the family. After school was meant for homework and time to yourself, and the weekends were meant for relaxation and hanging out with friends. While in Italy, my eyes were open to the world's diverse cultures. While studying abroad, I spent after class with friends, hanging out and going downtown during the week, while spending the weekends doing homework and traveling to other cities. This lifestyle alone was a huge change from the daily pace I had set for myself in the last 21 years.

During my time in Florence, Italy, I walked around the city almost every day. In Italy, it is not accustomed for there to be gypsies picking your pockets, street vendors selling materials illegally, and restaurant workers calling at you from across the plaza. While these do not sound appealing to us here in America, these interactions were all part of Italy's culture and frankly, I miss every bit of it. The streets in Eau Claire are quiet during the day. I wake up to the sound of my roommate making coffee or the trees hitting my window. In Italy, I woke up to the sound of street vendors opening up their shops, parades walking through the plaza to celebrate the day of the Saints, and singing from children and their families walking to church and school. It was because of these experiences, my daily living and the interactions of the people, that I saw how different our lives were from theirs. This being said, different wasn't bad, it was an adjustment but an adjustment I will willingly make again. I felt welcome in this culture and I hope that this world's culture will become a part of mine.

It was in Italy that I understood the relationship the people had with their government. The relationship the people had among those of authority. Italy is home to two different types of police force, the Italian police and the Carabinieri. When the Italian police came around, street vendors who were out in the open would grab their gear and run in opposite directions. At one point we saw 5 vendors with 2 police officers chasing after them. This was very different than the relationship between the police here and the people. To me, these street vendors were almost showing a sign of disrespect. In America usually those who are doing illegal activity are not rubbing it in the faces of those who try and

stop them. It is unfair that there are so many street vendors but only a few police officers. This instance was a wakeup call to how society functions around the police.

A professor teaching at Lorenzo De Medici also opened my eyes to an idea of power that one does not see too often while here in America. It seemed that the professors who were hired out of contract did not seem to have course outlines or course outcomes but more taught what they thought and what they felt. This was all opinionated, with facts surrounding the ideas, but information handed to students. This information, however, was the truth that not many teachers would feel comfortable teaching. As a 21 year old, I have heard of my fair share of stories about drugs and alcohol, but stories teachers refrain from telling. My professor in Italy seemed to have no concern for curriculum but more a concern for the real information that he thought we should learn. There was no sugar-coating or beating around the bush, and this was one of the best types of teaching I have received in my academic career. I found his teaching and his outlooks to be refreshing and very insightful. As much as his teaching was slightly unconventional, it was a new insight to how real life teaching could make me think more than a textbook ever could.

While studying abroad, the history that surrounded me was astonishing. In a sociology class that I took in Florence, I was taught about the Italian Mafia. During the reign of the Mafia in Italy, there were many branches of the mafia that came from it. While the police in Italy were corrupted at the time, many members of the mafia were able to escape from Italy and come to America. While in America, a group of La Cosa Nostra moved to Chicago and created families near the city of Kenosha, my hometown. The lack of force by the police caused the movement of this group which created chaos among the city of Chicago and its surrounding cities. This move by the Italian police has impacted my hometown but not in the way many would think. A known mob member created a business after prohibition called CJW. This company is a beer distribution company that is still running in Kenosha and supplies much of the liquor to local stores and businesses. Without the corruption by the Italian police, mob members may have never moved so close to the city, therefore, there may have never been a business that has created so many jobs over the years.

Traveling was the biggest concern before departing on this adventure. I have traveled abroad once before but this was many years ago and with a large group including my mother. While I was with 3 other girls, we found traveling to be quite difficult when things did not always go our way. Our adventure started off with 2 delayed flights, a missed connection, a spontaneous stay in Atlanta, 2 more flights to get to Rome, and a couple of lost suitcases. It was with these travel issues that I realized the miscommunication that happens among countries and the lack of responsibility taken by certain countries. Italy lacks the security in the airport that we have in our host country. This affects our country greatly when it comes to traveling and packing. Many of the issues we had in the United States had to do with our suitcases and documents getting to Italy and when we were in Italy, these documents seemed to no longer matter. Our passports were barely checked and some of ours were not stamped. This caused us to sign a declaration of presence and pay a fee with our host country. It was Italy's lack of decision to take security seriously.

While traveling itself was an issue, an issue that was well worth the reward, but an issue nonetheless, there was another disorienting experience that challenged my assumptions. While in Italy, there was a protest occurring in France and chaos occurring in Greece. On a week travel to France from Italy, we were caught in a protest against the genocide of the people in Africa. Many refugees took home in France and protested the death and destruction of their families and their country. This experience was very frightening for me but it was a learning experience. Previously, I had always thought these protests were counter-productive, that creating chaos won't stop the chaos. This was proven to be false when I received a phone-call from my mother the next morning asking if I had seen the protest that was on the news. Apparently this little town got more media coverage in France than it did in its own city. This experience showed me how the decisions of others and how I, myself, handle situations can make a very different impact depending on how I handle it. If these protestors never made this scene outside of Africa, who knows how many people would have received the news of these awful genocides. It was because of their actions that the word was spread.

Another disorienting experience was the government falling in Greece. Upon my return to Italy, I used my credit card to purchase a ticket to Switzerland. While purchasing this ticket, the government in Greece had fallen and many of the citizens were withdrawing money from their banks in order to flee and find refuge in a more stable environment. Because of the overload on the European System, my card was declined due to the glitch in the system. The following morning, the Euro conversion had changed drastically. Normally, I would receive 1 Euro for every \$1.04; however on this morning for 1 Euro, it cost me \$1.42. It was a very concerning experience because my budget had changed drastically due to the conversion rate being raised. I never realized how one country's government and money could affect another. As a student, you do not handle stocks very often or conversions, but being on my own abroad, I learned the affects these situations had on our government, stocks, and banks.

This study abroad experience will forever change my life. I learned to be more flexible and patient as well as living in the moment. Study abroad has opened my eyes to a whole new world of opportunities. As a hopeful SLP, I thought working right after graduation was my dream. This dream has been changed forever after living in Florence. My goal today is to graduate from Grad school and go back to the land that will forever hold a piece of my heart. Living in a country so different from my own made me miss my home country but it also made me respect it more. Respect for the way our businesses are run and the opportunities we have. This country also made me respect the more traditional way of living. Picking fruit from the garden and cooking those for dinner, using local grapes and trees for wines and olive oils, appreciating the food from the roots versus from the factory.

Upon my return home, I hope to change the way that I live my everyday life. I want to experience the beauty we have here as well as loving the beauty that I experienced there. We always assume that there is so much culture and history anywhere but here and I have come to realize that adventure is right outside the door, all you have to do is find it. Since my return from Italy I have found beautiful caves to explore, hills to climb, old churches that need exploring, and people who have a history far greater than any I would have expected, and I found this all here. If it were not for my time abroad, I feel my life would not have had the great improvement that it did. I hope that someone else

will be given the amazing opportunity to spend their time in another country to help them grow as a person as well.