Off-Campus Study Student Profiles

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Major: Art History

Syracuse University: Florence, Italy



Program Highlights:

- Living with my Italian host grandmother and learning how to speak Italian
- The field trips I took for my classes and the excellent professors
- The friendships I made with students from different colleges
- Starting as a tourist and leaving as a "granddaughter", a friend, and a student of Florentine culture, language, and art

What courses did you take and how did you like your courses?

I dedicated my off-campus semester to studying art history, mostly because it was the particular strength and focus of the program and city I was in. I took a course on the Italian Renaissance to lay a basic foundation for my understanding of Florence and its art and a challenging course on Botticelli and the artists of his age. The professor for both of these courses was a renowned renaissance art historian; he was incredibly knowledgeable but also a wonderful and supportive teacher. I took a course on Renaissance architecture and urbanism which included several wonderful field trips to ancient hill towns around Tuscany and Umbria, and even a long weekend in Sicily. One of the most important classes was my Italian language and culture class. The professor was fun, easy to understand, and an excellent communicator. I learned Italian so quickly and thoroughly, I was often mistaken for a Florentine!

Why did you choose your program and location in particular?

I chose SUF because of its academic reputation and location in a city so crucial to the history of art in the western world. I wanted to immerse myself in a renaissance city and really live the art. I wanted to be in a city where I could walk everywhere I needed and participate in the rhythm of everyday life. I wanted to embrace the Italian culture and language and transcend my tourist identity. And I can proudly say that I was able to do that, though it took time.

What unique experience did you have while abroad that contributed to your Wooster education?

I decided to live with an Italian host family. This was the best decision I made regarding my off-campus study. I was matched with a sweet 75-year-old grandmother ("nonna" in Italian) named Vera, who was recently widowed. She didn't speak English. I didn't speak Italian. But within a week I had learned more Italian than many other students learn in their entire semester abroad. I learned so much about Italian culture: family life, food, religion, politics, community, and national identity through my conversations with nonna Vera. She was there when schoolwork was stressing me out, when I got homesick, and she even took care of me when I got the flu. I came to Italy as a foreigner and a tourist, unconnected and disconnected from Italian society; when I left Florence, it was like leaving home and leaving my family all over again.