ELPS 529: U.S. Students Abroad: Critical Explorations from Rome  
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 10 consecutive summers (2006-2015), 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 study 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 challenges and issues experienced by students, coordinators, and administrators during study abroad;
3. The personal, cultural, and socioeconomic impact of cultural immersion experiences while abroad, with special attention to cultural immersion experiences;
4. The roles of study abroad programs within systems of student and academic mobility in the global economy.

This course carries 3 semester hours of graduate credit for which all students must register through Loyola's Graduate Program in International Higher Education in the School of Education.

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, governmental, 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 were visited in July 2015 and these sites and/or similar others will be scheduled for Summer 2016.

- **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 for July 2016. Italian Student Companions (ISCs), Home Stay parents, and Internship supervisors and interns will share their personal experiences living, working, 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 their 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 may have completed study abroad experiences themselves in various parts of the world.

- **Study Abroad and Tourism.** A significant element of study abroad for 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 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. Similarly, students will select and visit cultural, historical, religious and other sites in Rome (e.g., the Coliseum, St. Peter’s Basilica/Vatican City, The Pantheon, Imperial Forum). During these visits students are assigned the role of “participant observer” and will record observations of visitor behaviors, conversations, and questions. Students may choose to conduct informal interviews with both Italian and non-Italian visitors at these sites to learn more about their experiences with and developing perspectives about Italian culture.

- **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. In previous summers, the class examined: The Roman coffee bar culture, open-air food 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 museum of purgatory, the site of the 1960 Olympics held in Rome, 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 asked 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 will have a topic/theme, we will typically discuss several themes covered by the readings during site visits. Students are asked 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 personal 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.** Building on Metcalfe’s (2012) framework to apply 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 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 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 all class discussions that occur at the Rome Center and those conducted at various sites.

- **Cultural Immersion Experience.** 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.