Country: Italy  Program: UC Florence – Lang & Culture  
Term & Year Abroad: Summer 2011  
Gender: Female;  Major/Minor: Biopsychology

Instructors  
- What were they like when compared to UCSB instructors?  
Because class sizes were a lot smaller, we got to know the instructors a lot better. They were very open and helpful.

- Could you call them by their first names?  
Yes.

- Was the student/instructor relationship more formal than at UCSB?  
It was a little less formal in that we could call them by their first names and got to know them a lot better than the professors I’ve had at UCSB. A group of us students even visited our language instructor at her home one weekend and have added her on Facebook.

- Were they available for help during office hours?  
Yes, but there was plenty of time during class to get what help you needed, and tutors available for the language courses.

Courses

- Were the courses more difficult when compared to UCSB courses?  
The courses were similar in terms of difficulty to UCSB courses. However, more material was covered per week since the summer program shorter than a normal quarter, so in that aspect it was a bit more intense. For example, while I would have one hour of language a day during a normal quarter at UCSB, while the summer language program has us take 3 hours of language class a day, and complete 2 quarters worth of Italian.

- Was the grading system similar to UCSB?  
Yes.

- How did the course structure differ?  Ex) did you have many assignments or just finals?  
The course structure was different in that we had more field trips and practical usage of the material we were learning. For example, our Mediterranean Food culture class brought us to the outdoor market and to an olive grove, while our Italian class let us go out and interview baristas in Italian. Language courses had a little homework everyday, and midterm/final tests, which was similar at UCSB.

- Did you have oral and/or written exams?  
Our culture class only had a written exam, while the language class had both a written
and an oral exam.

- **Was the final exam schedule flexible or inflexible?**
  It was inflexible, we were required to take the final exams on the given dates.

- **What kind of academic support, if any, did you receive?**
  Teachers and tutors were available for help if necessary.

- **Did you find you needed to be more independent and take more initiative abroad?**
  It helped to take more initiative to ensure you get the most out of the experience and do all you want to do.

- **Was classroom participation expected?**
  Yes, especially in the language course. My class was very small and so everyone participated often.

- **How were the host university courses different than UCSB courses?**
  The courses were more personal and hands on. They had more real world application since we could actually use what we learned in the language class to get by for day to day life, and the culture course actually brought us out to see the things we were discussing in class.

- **Were classes usually on certain days/times and for how long?**
  Yes. Language class was every day for 3 hours, and culture courses were twice a week for an hour and a half.

- **What is the class culture like? How important was it to be punctual? Could you eat/drink in class?**
  It was similar to a normal class structure, however since each class was pretty long we usually got a small break in the middle so we could eat. We were never told we couldn’t eat during class, so we did sometimes but we could usually wait until that break. People tried to be punctual so as not to miss any information.

**Language**

- **In which languages were the courses offered?**
  Courses were offered in English, although of course Italian language class was primarily in Italian.

- **What language did you take your courses in?**
  I took the culture class in English. The language class was in Italian.

- **If you took your courses in a foreign language, please provide info about your overall experience, difficulty of courses, language acquisition, placement exams, etc.**
  N/A
Host University

- How large is the university? Student enrollment and approx campus size (smaller than UCSB)? Is it an urban campus with many tall buildings or just a few building?
  We took courses at the ACCENT Center as opposed to an actual university. Therefore it was a lot smaller than an actual university and classes were comprised of students from different UC campuses. The Study Center was located in a beautiful old building with modern classrooms inside.

- Do the local students live on campus, at home, or off campus?
  N/A

- If not located in the city center,
  o How far or close is it to the city?

  o What type of public transportation could you take – cost?

  o Could students take cabs -cost?

  o How long would it take to get to the city center?

- Are there student clubs on campus that UC students could join?
  If interested in anything particular, students could get together and either start or join a club.

- Is there a bookstore on campus? Where did you get your books?
  Books were provided to us.

- Is there a computer lab on campus? Or, should students bring laptops?
  Yes, there was a nice computer lab in the Study Center that had Macs. Most students brought a laptop along to though to work at their apartments.

- What types of establishments are in the university’s neighborhood? (cafes, stores, etc)
  There was a small market right outside in the mornings where one could find fruits, clothes, and different odds and ends. Around the neighborhood are cafes, stores, restaurants, etc.

Housing

- What types of accommodations are available to UC students?
Students in this program could either stay in apartments with other UC students or in homestays.

- **How close are they to campus?**
  They usually ranged from a 5 to 30 minute walk. A couple of the homestays were a bit further and the students had to take a bus into the city.

- **How did you find your housing?**

- **Where did you live and with whom?**
  I lived with 3 other UC girls. We lived about a 20 minute walk from the ACCENT Center. We were right by Piazza Santa Croce, which has a famous church and many things to see and do in the area.

- **If you lived off campus, was it difficult to find an apartment and roommate?**
  The apartments were found for us.

- **Were the rooms nicer or not than I.V./UCSB dorms?**
  I found them nicer than IV apartments and the UCSB dorms.

- **Was it more expensive than living in I.V.? How much was a typical rent cost in US dollars?**
  I feel like it was about the same cost as living in IV. I think for the summer program it was a total of 1000 euro for the whole summer to share a room in a nice, furnished apartment, which would probably translate to about 700/month.

- **How/who did you pay for housing?**
  We paid in the program costs before the program started.

**Food**

- **What was the food like?**
  The food was delicious! Italian food is amazing. Fresh fruits and veggies from the market, pastas, gnocchi, risotto, bread, etc. We had gelato almost everyday.

- **Where did you eat most of your meals? Cafeterias, restaurants, street vendors, etc?**
  I cooked a lot in the apartment, but I would also occasionally eat out at a restaurant or get a panino or small meal from a vendor or cafe. I got gelato from gelaterias often.

- **How much was an average meal?**
  A panino averaged about 3 euro, or a bit less than 5 dollars. An average meal would probably be around 10 euro, or 14ish dollars.

- **What time of day did people eat lunch/dinner?**
People ate lunch about midday, the same as US, but had dinner much later, like around 9 or later because there was apertivo, a drink/small meal before that in the evening.

- **Would it be difficult for vegetarians to find meals?**
  No, a lot of the Mediterranean diet doesn’t include meat.

**Travel/Safety**

- **If not discussed above, describe the public transportation system around your host university/city?**
  It was easy to just walk almost everywhere in the city. I never used a bus within the city, but taking trains to other cities in Italy was easy enough.

- **Did you feel safe in your host city? Are there tips you would offer future students?**
  Yes, it felt safe. It was mainly just using common sense, things like don’t wander around the train station by yourself in the middle of the night. Watch your purse or bag.

- **Describe the public transportation in your host country?**
  I took trains to get to other cities in Italy. They ran on a schedule and are pretty convenient.

- **Was it difficult/easy to travel to neighboring countries?**
  It wasn’t hard. You could train, ferry, plane, etc.

**Host City/Country**

- **What was the weather like?**
  It was very hot. Florence is one of the hottest Italian cities in the summer.

- **Describe your host city…which California/US city is it similar to (if any)?**
  I don’t feel like there’s any city quite like it. Florence is a small, but like any city, there are many things to do and see, art and great food everywhere. It’s beautiful. Because of it’s small size it is easy to walk everywhere and not quite as overwhelming as larger cities such as Rome or Paris may be.

- **What were some interesting/fun things that you did in the host city?**
  We had a student museum pass that let us get into almost all of the museums for free as much as we wanted without waiting in line. In Florence it was fun to go to the big outdoor market, different museums, stroll along the river and view the Ponte Vecchio, hike to the Piazzale Michelangelo to see a view of Florence, and wander around the many shops in the area.

- **How international was your host city in terms of tourism, cultural diversity,**
and international businesses?
There is a lot of tourism in Florence, and it is international in that sense. In the more touristy areas it is very easy to find people who will speak English.

Culture
- **Describe the cultural differences that you observed/encountered.**
  
  o **Time & punctuality**
  It was about the same as in the U.S.
  
  o **Eye contact & staring**
  Men were very forward.
  
  o **Relationships**
  Men were more forward and upfront about how they felt and what they wanted. People weren’t looking for relationships really though since it was just a summer program.
  
  o **More formal dress in general, for women, for school, etc?**
  People in general were more fashionable and well dressed.
  
  o **Alcohol consumption**
  Young people drank, especially before/during going to clubs at night.
  
  o **What culture shock did you go through?**
  I didn’t go through much culture shock, the main thing I had to adjust to was trying to understand and use Italian.
  
  o **Other?**
  Food was fresher and thus expired faster. Instead of getting food in bulk to last a while like I would in the US, I would just walk over to the market every few days to get fresh foods.

Banking
- **Were credit cards widely accepted?**
  Yes, but it was better to withdraw cash and use that.
  
  - **Did you open a local bank account? Was it easy?**
  No, I used my same bank account.
  
  - **If you did not open a local bank account, was it easy to withdraw money from the ATM? Which banks were popular & had low ATM fees?**
  I used Schwab, which I recommend because it does not charge ATM or international exchange fees.
  
  - **Were there ATMs on campus?**
  There were ATMs nearby.