Major/Minor: Global Studies, Italian Studies (minor)

Country: Italy           Program: Padova Immersion                          Term & Year Abroad: Year 2009-2010

Instructors

- What were they like when compared to UCSB instructors?

They are generally more formal with students and more conservative, but friendly and accomodating towards foreign students. I found that my professors didn’t really stick to their office hours, but if you asked to meet with them, they’d help you out with any questions you have about the exams, or even take you to coffee.

- Could you call them by their first names?

No, it would be inappropriate. Just Professore/Professoressa…

- Was the student/instructor relationship more formal than at UCSB?

Professors in Italy are generally more formal with students and are treated more formally as well. In Italy students address teachers in “Lei” form.

- Were they available for help during office hours?

Yes. They would give me a time in which to see them, sometimes even right after class. They were all pretty flexible, especially if they know from the start that you are a foreign student. They are usually understanding and will do what they can to make the exam and workload easier for you. If your teacher doesn’t help you out and the course seems very challenging, you might want to just switch classes.

Courses

- Were the courses more difficult when compared to UCSB courses?

I think overall they were a little easier, just because they are much slower-paced and there isn’t homework throughout the semester. I think the most difficult part of courses at Italian
universities is the oral exam at the end of the year. And understanding the lectures well will come in time.

- Was the grading system similar to UCSB?

The grading system in Italy uses numbers, from 18-30, for passing grades. It can be translated to American letter grades. A 30 or “30 e lode” is difficult to achieve, and a 27-30 is considered an A.

- How did the course structure differ? Ex) did you have many assignments or just finals?

There was no homework in any of the classes I took. The professors just assigned books to read, students attended lectures and read and studied on their own (or sometimes in study groups) in order to take the oral and/or written exam at the end of the class. Teachers usually didn’t have Powerpoints or super structured courses.

- Did you have oral and/or written exams?

The exams are mostly oral, but can also be short essay and written as well. For foreign students, some teachers may also offer alternative exams i.e. an essay instead of an oral exam if the course is challenging for you. I never encountered any multiple choice exams, but know a student who had a multiple choice exam in one of her classes.

- Was the final exam schedule flexible or inflexible?

It was very flexible. Just talk to the Professors. They would often list an exam date, but wouldn’t be able to test all the students that day, so the exam schedule would ensue for 2 or more days.

- What kind of academic support, if any, did you receive?

They don’t really have advising or counseling, I basically just talked to professors when I had questions or the EAP Director of our program.
- Did you find you needed to be more independent and take more initiative abroad?

Yes, definitely. You really kind of have to learn to be adaptable and do things on your own, because the universities are less community-like and people have to be more independent. Don’t be afraid to ask questions. And with finding good housing, meeting people, and doing well in school, its kind of based on how much effort you put in and initiative you take in making sure you know what’s going on and communicate.

- Was classroom participation expected?

None of my classes involved much participation, and there was virtually no group work involved, an aspect of Italian university that’s kind of different from American schools.

- How were the host university courses different than UCSB courses?

They seemed less structured and there’s no homework involved, just an exam at the end of the year. You don’t enroll in classes; you just get proof of them via the exam at the end, so attendance usually isn’t really a big deal. It’s just up to the student to attend or not, and they can often just study for the exams at home, if they commute.

- Were classes usually on certain days/times and for how long?

Yes, they had similar schedules to UC classes, with a weekly schedule and usually each class was about 1-3 hours long.

- What is the class culture like? How important was it to be punctual? Could you eat/drink in class?

People just seem less casual than at Santa Barbara. They wouldn’t wear pj’s or anything like that, and I never really saw anyone eat during class. Professors sometimes get annoyed when you’re late, if the class is small.
Language

- In which languages were the courses offered?

All of the courses were in Italian. There are courses in English for advanced English-speaking Italian students, and we can take those as well.

- What language did you take your courses in?

Italian, except for one course in English.

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

At the beginning, I really struggled to understand the lectures. Sometimes it helps just to try and listen, because taking notes is sometimes impossible. Talking to the teacher helps out, because they gain an understanding of your language level. You’ll also learn technical terms from class from the books you read. Make sure your teacher speaks clearly; if he/she is a mumbler or talks really fast, it will make the class so much harder.

Oral exams can be nerve-wracking because you have to answer random questions asked by the professor and students waiting to take the exam can sit in the classroom and listen to you. But it really helps to meet with the professor for office hours because it will get easier talking to them and they seemed to appreciate the effort.

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?
According to the book, it said there were 50,000 students. But there is no campus, it’s just departments scattered around the city, and sometimes outside the city. All of the departments within the city are old and integrated with the city center.

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

They usually live in apartments scattered around the city. However, there are also students who live at home and just commute by train to go to their classes.

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

  The campus is in the city center.

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

  There are buses and a tram that goes through the city. It costs around 1.50 euro for a ticket or you can buy a pack of 10 for 10 euro.

  o Could students take cabs -cost?

  Cabs are expensive, but you can take them. My house was a bit away from the city center, and it usually cost about 11-13 euro to reach the other end of the city, where the train station is. Good to use for travelling or bad weather, or when people come to visit.

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

- Are there student clubs on campus that UC students could join?

  It’s definitely not as active as a UC campus in terms of student clubs and activities, but they do have political clubs and sports teams you can join. There are some things going on, the
departments just seem more separated and not so much part of a bigger sense of school spiritedness.

- Is there a bookstore on campus? Where did you get your books?

There are bookstores all over, and usually a bookstore and library specific to every department. Just ask your teacher or another student. I usually got them at these bookstores.

- Is there a computer lab on campus? Or, should students bring laptops?

There are computer labs, usually in the library by each department. You can get a code, at least in the PoliScidepartment, that gives you Internet access for about an hour and a half each day. They do have random areas, like the piazza, and probably the libraries, that have Wi-Fi too and some cafes.

- What types of establishments are in the university’s neighborhood? (cafes, stores, etc)

Lots of cafes, little shops, bread stores, grocery stores, clothing stores. The departments and the stores are all basically in the city center and organized around the main piazzas.

Housing

- What types of accommodations are available to UC students?

There are dorms or apartments you can get on your own.

- How close are they to campus?
They are all over the city. Some are right in the center and some dispersed around. It just depends. But nothing is farther than a bike ride away, although there are some student dorms that are very far outside the city.

- How did you find your housing?

On the internet, www.bacheca.it and there are some other sites as well. Students at the beginning of the year will also put fliers all over the city looking for people for their apartments, and you can call those numbers and look online. It takes a bit of work and can be stressful, but it’s really worth it when you find a good place and good roommates.

- Where did you live and with whom?

I lived a little outside the center (about a 10 minute bike ride) with 2 Italian girls who had the house and were looking for roommates, and one of my American friends from the program.

- If you lived off campus, was it difficult to find an apartment and roommate?

Not really. A lot of students put up fliers or post stuff online and are looking for people because they have extra rooms or need a roommate. It gets stressful and can take some tries to find a good place with nice people, but people were usually pretty open to having foreign students. It’s nice to go house-hunting with EAP friends too because it’s easier to communicate when just starting out in Italy.

- Were the rooms nicer or not than I.V./UCSB dorms?

My apartment was a million times nicer than I.V. apartments. It was basically new and in a building with families, but they were really nice and understanding. We got really lucky and had a very nice.

- Was it more expensive than living in I.V.? How much was a typical rent cost in US dollars?
It was a lot cheaper for everyone from UCSB living in private apartments, and for me, about half my average rent in IV. I paid 200 euro/month (about 270 American dollars/month) to share a large room, in a house with 2 other roommates, 2 bathrooms, terraces, a living room, etc. We also had to pay about 30-40 euro/month for utilities.

- How/who did you pay for housing?

We paid the landlord, a lady who owned the apartment, and moved out to a house nearby.

Food

- What was the food like?

Really good Italian food, although it can get monotonous after awhile. The pizza, pasta, Panini and kebab are all really good, and they do have some Indian, Chinese and other kinds of restaurants. They have most of the same kinds of fruits and veggies we have, and the bread is really good.

- Where did you eat most of your meals? Cafeterias, restaurants, street vendors, etc?

Mostly at home, but also at the cafeteria, the « mensa », where you can get a full meal for 3 euro.

- How much was an average meal?

5-10 euro usually.

- What time of day did people eat lunch/dinner?

Lunch, at the normal time. Dinner, later than Americans, around 8 or 9 pm.
Would it be difficult for vegetarians to find meals?

No, it doesn’t seem like they eat that much meat. You can definitely find meatless options at restaurants, although there aren’t really many vegetarians in Italy.

Travel/Safety

If not discussed above, describe the public transportation system around your host university/city?

A lot of kids have bikes. There’s also the public bus system and the tram, with stops all over the city. The tram runs in the center of Padova.

Did you feel safe in your host city? Are there tips you would offer future students?

I usually always felt very safe. The city center is small and well-lit. Around the train station, it can get seedy. If you’re a girl, you’re probably ok if you just avoid walking alone at night or just don’t respond to guys who make catcalls or comments.

Describe the public transportation in your host country?

Buses and the tram.

Was it difficult/easy to travel to neighboring countries?

Pretty easy. We bought tickets on Ryanair usually, but there’s also Easyjet. They can both be pretty cheap, and I never had any trouble with my visa or anything like that. You can travel pretty much anywhere in Europe and its not far away at all.
Host City/Country

- What was the weather like?

Hot and humid in the summer, gets cold around October and November, cold and humid in the winter with snow, and sometimes hailstorms and rainstorms. When I was there, the spring came late after lots of rain, and was very short. Kind of like East coast weather.

- Describe your host city…which California/US city is it similar to (if any)?

Small city center, really beautiful and easy to get familiar with. Lots of shopping and outdoor markets, pretty piazzas, bars for aperitivi.

- What were some interesting/fun things that you did in the host city?

There are lots of little bars where you can go to get spritz with friends before dinner or going out. On Wednesdays, I think, in Piazza delleErbe, all the students of the university bring drinks and hang out in the streets. There are sometimes events too. There are clubs like Fish Market, close to the city, and others like LeQueen which are farther outside the city, so they take some effort to get to at times, but are fun. It’s also fun to go to the holiday markets outside in Prato della Valle or in Via Roma. Students also hang out on the lawn in the Prato.

- How international was your host city in terms of tourism, cultural diversity, and international businesses?

There were other EAP students. But there are very few tourists compared to other Italian cities. There were groups of tourists that would do a day trip around the city to see the main sites and then leave. But it was never packed with tourists, which is really nice. You get to practice a lot of Italian. There are an increasing number of immigrants, which adds an interesting aspect to life in Padova, both positive and negative. People were usually really friendly towards us and interested in talking to us.
Culture
- Describe the cultural differences that you observed/encountered.
  
  o Time & punctuality
  They were much more casual about being on time. Professors and friends were often late, but it wasn’t usually a big deal.

  o Eye contact & staring
  People definitely stare openly at you, especially if they can tell you’re not an Italian. But it’s not really meant personally, it’s just how they seem to be.

  o Relationships
  Seemed pretty similar to U.S. I noticed a lot of really serious relationships and couples who had been dating for a very long time, but also casual relationships.

  o More formal dress in general, for women, for school, etc?
  Italians definitely dress more formally. Women seem to dress more conservative and dressy, nice sandals, nice sunglasses, etc. They aren’t as casual as Americans, and so you’ll get some staring for wearing shorts or Rainbow sandals. They wouldn’t wear pj’s to school, either.

  o Alcohol consumption
  Italians seem to drink a lot less than Americans, usually. They’ll have one drink for an aperitivo. They don’t really drink to get extremely drunk, although people tend to drink more at clubs, etc.

  o What culture shock did you go through?
  Just differences in how people treat you. They are sometimes very conservative, and not as open-minded as Americans seem to be. They are not as open about cultural diversity at times, and at times really traditional about ideas. Life also moves at a slower pace, stores close often during
the afternoon, and on certain days. It can be frustrating but also really nice to live at the Italian pace of life. Things tend to be a lot more old-fashioned, but it can be nice...specialty shops, outdoor markets, etc. are definitely a unique part of Italian life.

- Other?

Banking
- Were credit cards widely accepted?

Usually accepted, but some stores only took cash, so it’s good and often easier to keep cash on hand.

- Did you open a local bank account? Was it easy?

No I didn’t open a 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 a debit card that gave refunds on international transaction fees so that it didn’t cost a fortune to take money out. I think Charles Schwab or Capital One have special conditions for international transaction fees.

- Were there ATMs on campus?

The departments are usually in the city center and there are ATM’s all over the city. They are pretty easy to find.