

FLORENCE

Study Abroad Reports

Study Abroad Experience at The University of Florence

Fall 2004

My experience with the Boston University School of Law Study Abroad program at the University of Florence was excellent. I am very happy that I had the opportunity to study at a foreign university and in a foreign language, and I believe that the semester abroad greatly enriched my overall experience at Boston University.

The university system in Italy is much different than what I am accustomed to in the United States. One main difference is that the study of law is included as an undergraduate degree and not as a Masters degree. Because of this the other students were generally younger, and the school atmosphere does not have the intensity and competitive feel that exists at an American law school.

Another important difference in Italy is the absence of the Socratic method. Students do not prepare for classes with daily assignment, and instead are assigned blocks of reading for the entire semester. The professors lecture for two-hour blocks, and do include some in-class participation, but only on a voluntary basis. I found that my professors were interested to get an American perspective, and often directed questions to me. This was especially true in my Antitrust Law class, in which I was asked to explain American legal concepts such as class actions and treble damages to the Italian students. This was a fun way for me to connect my knowledge from BUSL with what I was learning at the University of Florence. All of my professors were very friendly to me and appreciated the diversity that I added to the classroom. The other students were also friendly and helpful to me in preparing for the exams.

The aspect of attending the University of Florence that I was the most apprehensive about was the oral exams. On the day of the exam all of the students arrive in the classroom at 9 a.m. and wait for their name to be called. Once a name is called, the student must go to the front of the classroom and sit with the professor and an assistant as they ask questions. Each exam usually lasts about 10 minutes and includes three to five

questions. I was very nervous about the exam for the fact that the rest of the class was watching. However, after taking my exams I also saw the benefits of this method. Instead of the grueling hours of typing an exam required at BUSL, after 10 minutes I was finished. Also, I had the opportunity to listen to all the exams before me, as a continual preparation as I waited. Further, because I was speaking face to face with the professor I could understand exactly what kind of answer he wanted. Finally, the most fulfilling feeling I had all semester was after completing my exams and realizing that I had fluently explained legal concepts in Italian!

I was prepared for the negative aspects of studying at an Italian university because of the conversations I had with the Office of Foreign Programs and Professor Caruso before arriving. The most frustrating part for me was the bureaucracy of the university. Any time I had an administrative issue to do, each office would tell me to go to a different office, and most offices were only open for a few hours each week. Plus, I got the feeling that no one in any of the administrative offices could really care either way what happened to me. However, on the positive side, these situations gave me the opportunity to use my Italian to be an aggressive advocate and make sure I accomplished what I needed to do.

Overall the experience in Florence was extremely rewarding. My Italian is now at a level where I feel completely fluent and prepared to use it in a professional situation. I also had the chance to enjoy the beauty of the city of Florence and take advantage of the many cultural activities it has to offer. I hope to have an opportunity to return to Italy in a professional capacity to use the skills I have acquired, and feel that this experience was very beneficial for me and my career. I am very grateful that I was granted this opportunity through Boston University School of Law.

Study Abroad – Final Report

Personal Goals

One reason to participate in the University of Florence exchange program was a personal desire to improve my Italian language skills. In this respect, the UNIFI program offered an excellent immersion experience. While the university does offer some English language classes, the majority of them are in Italian and require a fairly high degree of proficiency in order to participate. I definitely felt after the first month that my language skills had improved substantially, not only from being exposed to a lot of lectures but also because of the amount (and level) of reading required for the classes.

Professional Goals

Another major reason for participating in the UNIFI program was to gain legal knowledge of European legal systems. My courses at UNIFI were a unique opportunity to gain an in depth understanding of Italian and European Union law. My introduction to Italian law class was an excellent survey course that allowed me to study a broad range of Italian legal systems, including: commercial law, administrative law, criminal law, and public law. Similarly, *sistemi giuridici comparati* gave me the opportunity to pursue advanced research into European Union law as well as several different European private law systems.

I also went abroad in hopes of exploring possible career opportunities in Europe, and in particular in Italy. It was great to network both with Boston University Law School and Harvard alumni abroad. I met with contacts in Florence, Rome, and Milan and had very constructive/informative conversations. Due largely in part to these experiences, I am considering moving back to Europe after working in the United States for a few years.

Final Thoughts

As I have already indicated in my mid-semester report, I found the faculty and students very interested in my perspective. The only American in the program and one of only two common law lawyers (one of my peers was British), I really enjoyed being able to share my unique perspective on and knowledge of common law. The academic environment as a whole was very challenging and is something I would recommend to any interested student.

The only criticism I have (which is not unique among the study abroad candidates) is of UNIFI's and the Italian government's inefficient bureaucracies. Communication between the administration and students is infrequent and often unclear. Moreover, the faculty and administration sometimes give conflicting information regarding such fundamental aspects of the academic experience such as registration. (Nevertheless, I would be remiss if I failed to mention that any day, no matter how challenging, can be mended with a tall glass of red wine and some pesto).

Despite the higher standard deviation with respect to daily life I experienced in Florence, I nevertheless am grateful for the opportunity to have participated in BU's UNIFI program and I would recommend it anyone with a sufficient understanding of Italian and an interest in living and studying in Florence.