

Under the Tuscan Sun

As part of the Italian Studies in Arezzo program, students make their home base in the ancient Tuscan city of Arezzo, but they begin their semester with a two-week exploration of some of the most important archaeological sites of Greek and Roman civilization, including Pompeii and Herculaneum and building sites in Rome, Ostia, and elsewhere.

ITALY

Florence ♦

Siena ♦

Arezzo ♦

Assisi ♦

Rome ♦

Ostia

Naples ♦♦

Herculaneum ♦♦

Pompeii ♦♦

ADRIATIC SEA

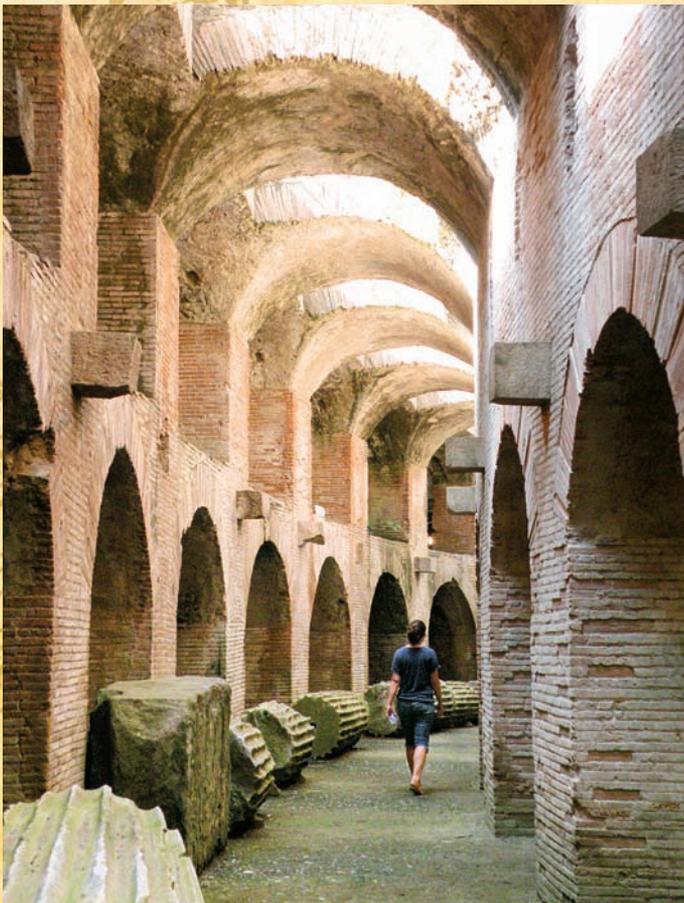
SARDINIA

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

CORSICA

SICILY

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MARKET MEETING:

Students and faculty taking part in this fall's Arezzo program gather for a group photo at Trajan's Market, a complex of buildings dating to first-century Rome.



Ciao, Arezzo!

A Rochester-only study abroad program provides a unique semester of Italian history and culture.

Story and photographs by Maya Dukmasova '12 (T5)

“**W**HAT ARE WE LOOKING AT?”

Professor Renato Perucchio asks the question as we walk through a gap in a crumbling wall and into a large, roofless, rectangular enclosure among the ruins of the ancient Roman port city of Ostia.

Perucchio, professor of mechanical engineering at Rochester, has led our group—12 Rochester undergraduates, their faculty, and an alumna guest—on a morning trek filled with talk of mortar and masonry, arches and columns, forces and loads. The late summer sun beats down as midday creeps closer. We stand silent for few moments, scanning the space.

Finally, a voice confidently volunteers: “It was a water cistern.”

Three days into a semester-long Rochester program exploring the history, archaeology, architecture, culture, and language of Italy, and the lessons are already becoming a little clearer as the students tune their eyes to the visual language of brick and stone. In this case, the telltale sign is a special, waterproof concrete developed by the Romans—chunks of millennial-old mortar are still visible around the corners of the room. The students are

STRUCTURED LEARNING: Sarah-Laurel DeFeo '14 (opposite, far left) walks below the stage of an amphitheater at Pozzuoli. Rebecca Schaffer '14 (opposite, right) sketches notes at an ancient Greek temple in Paestum.



becoming increasingly adept at translating the seemingly chaotic ruins into a rich record of the sophistication of Roman life.

“Being here at these sites, it’s like visiting the places that were the imagination of my childhood, and that’s just awesome,” says John (Jack) Billings ’13 (T5), an economics and brain and cognitive sciences double major from Pittsburgh.

Arriving in Italy in August, Billings and his classmates are the most recent students to take part in Rochester’s Italian Studies in Tuscany program—known simply as the Arezzo program. Established in 1994, the program, which runs through late November, is the only semester-long study abroad program owned and operated entirely by the University.

The 18-credit program counts as a full semester in the College and constitutes a humanities cluster; with the addition of one more class, students who enroll at the intermediate language level can earn a minor in Italian studies. The program is also part of a new, multidisciplinary major—archaeology, technology, and historical

BATH DAY: Professors Renato Perucchio (in hat) and Paolo Vitti (left) explain the mechanics of how water was heated and piped to a Roman bath in Ostia.

structures, directed by Perucchio—that explores the evolution of engineering practices from the first millennium BCE to the 18th century.

For the first three weeks of the program, the students visit sites in Rome, Ostia, Naples, Pompeii, Herculaneum, Assisi, and Siena for an intensive study of Roman and Greek architecture, engineering, and art. For the rest of the semester, the students are based in Arezzo, a 100,000-person city in central Italy with a history that stretches 3 millennia to the time of the Etruscans.

Arezzo native Donatella Stocchi-Perucchio, associate professor in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures, says her hometown’s location in a historically and culturally rich area and its manageable size make it an optimal place to embed an extension of the Rochester campus.

“The idea was to provide what we think is the best introduction to the culture from different points of view, which takes most advantage of the territory,” she says. “The idea was to integrate the teaching with the environment and guide the students to the observation of the environment, to interaction with the people. It’s a city, but it’s small, so you can really possess it. We found that a place that had everything within walking distance was fundamental for the students to feel part of it.”

In addition to a course on ancient architecture, the semester also includes eight hours of Italian language classes per week, as well as courses in art history, Italian history, and the artistic and literary history of Tuscany.

There is also a two-credit course that introduces students to contemporary Italian culture.

“The professors do a very good job of tying them all together,” says Billings. “We talk about aesthetics and form in architecture and engineering, and then in art history we hear how those ideas of aesthetics and form were then used by painters in the Middle Ages, and how, then, painters in the Renaissance turned back to classical architecture for inspiration. And, during history class, we learn about how much the art and the culture of Italy and the legacy of the Roman Empire influenced the *Risorgimento* and influenced all the independence fighters in Italy in the early 1800s.”

The classes are structured and scheduled in ways that are similar to those offered by Italian universities, with lessons lasting two to three hours.

“It can be hard to sit there and pay attention for three hours, but I think I’m able to learn the material better,” says Alisa Johnson ’14, a biology major from Victor, N.Y. “It’s just presented very comprehensively among the professors and I think how they schedule it, it’s easier to learn and remember it.”

The educational experience of the program extends beyond classes and assignments. For many of the students, the program is their first experience of living and traveling abroad, and the semester has its moments of culture shock and confusion, self-discovery, and new friendships.



During the first weeks some express dismay at the unpredictable world of public restrooms in Italy, while others marvel at the vivacity of street life in Arezzo.

“People will actually go out and walk, like a group of men just walking down the street, which is very unusual in America,” says Rebecca Schaffer ’14, a history and international relations double major from Chardon, Ohio. “You’d never see that, like a group of friends hanging out in their 30s, or older. There’s a lot more PDA, too, I’ve noticed.”

Still others find a comforting reminder of home in their daily experience with locale and food. “I’ve always wanted to come [to Italy], my whole life,” says Sarah-Laurel DeFeo ’14, an applied math major from Sodus Point, N.Y. “My heritage is half Italian, so I’ve grown up eating this food and talking about it a lot. The things I eat at my house are pretty much what I eat here, so it’s nice. I’m not homesick as of yet.”

Though Arezzo may lack the fame of other cities in Italy, in many ways it offers a more authentic experience of regular Italian life

NOTED SITES: Jacob Hirsch ’16 and Cindy Chen ’16 take notes during a trip to an ancient Greek archaeological site at Paestum.

than tourist-packed Rome or Florence. The students live together in a small apartment building in the historic center of town. They eat their meals at local restaurants and are quickly initiated into local traditions.

Indeed, their first experience of Arezzo is during one of its most exciting moments—one of the annual jousting competitions, an old tradition taken very seriously by locals. The town is decked out in flags and colors representing its four city quarters and excitement peaks as the streets echo with the sound of horns and drums. People of all ages join in outdoor celebrations; the jousts and their horses are blessed in front of the city’s 13th-century cathedral, and a parade proceeds through the winding streets, culminating with a colorful ceremony at the main square.

As they intently watch the jousts gallop down the main square, attempting to pierce a small target with a lance, the students already bear green and white scarves on their shoulders, representing the quarter in which they are living.

“I loved it, it was so cool to see,” says Kayleigh Hogan ’12 (T5), a chemical engineering major from Geneva, N.Y. “It’s probably the most extravagant thing I’ve seen in terms of a community getting together and having an event.”

“The first image I have of Arezzo is when we were walking by [a local restaurant], and there’s a big group of guys just all singing together, they’re not all the same family, they’re all different, but they’re coming together to celebrate,” says Ashley Rizzieri ’15, of Chapel Hill, N.C. “People will walk in the street and they’ll stop and they’ll know everyone, and it’s nice. I feel at home.”

Donna Logan, who directs the program and has lived in Arezzo for 20 years, helps students get accustomed to the particularities of Italian life.

“I think the close contact with the Aretine reality is what makes the program different from most study abroad programs,” she says. “Students prepare a statement with the goals of what they would like to accomplish while they’re in Italy. I work very closely with them to help them make that possible.”

These goals have ranged from participating in local sports teams and music organizations, to job shadowing professionals and learning how to cook.

“We’re travelers, not tourists, because we have to live here and figure out how to do everything,” says Johnson as she sits in one of Arezzo’s main squares, enjoying a gelato with Billings. “There’s a lot of travel built into the program and that teaches you how to be a good traveler. I think that’s really unique and special about this program, the number of places you get to go to and see just as part of your classes and daily schedule.”

Billings agrees, adding, “Here, learning and being involved in the culture have equal standing.” 

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