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Semester Explores Ancient Rome

Posted on Friday, October 24, 2014

Kevin Teel '17, who has taken Italian language courses since he was in seventh grade, is excited to have the opportunity to use his language skills on a daily basis while spending the fall semester in Rome. He is one of 15 students participating in the Rome Global Education program led by Professor of Chemistry Walter Bowyer.

"This is one of the best groups of students I've ever worked with," says Bowyer. "We've visited so many interesting ruins that they can almost give the tour when we get to a new one. We get out of the classroom as often as we can and, after just six weeks, we have seen many, many impressive ruins, museums and churches."



This opportunity to see numerous historically significant places is among the reasons Teel, a history major, chose the Rome program. "Being at the center of the Roman Empire, having direct access to almost 3,000 years of history, was an opportunity I could not pass up. It is a 'level' of history that simply cannot be achieved or found in the U.S. or even many other parts of the world," he says, noting the program itself focuses on Ancient Rome, giving him the opportunity to see firsthand what he learns in the classroom. When he returns to campus, he intends to declare minors in classics and European Studies, areas in which he is also earning credit while abroad.



Not all students taking part in the experience are history majors. In fact, the 15 students represent 12 different majors ranging from art history to biochemistry, economics to psychology. The HWS program in Rome utilizes an interdisciplinary approach to explore different aspects of Italian culture and society. While the program is designed to immerse students fully in the experience of being in Rome, excursions provide students a wider perspective on the history, culture and daily life of Italy as a whole.

"It is wonderful teaching interdisciplinary courses to a group of students with such a diverse range of perspectives and strengths," says Bowyer.

For anthropology/sociology major Chiara Favaloro '16, for example, studying in Italy was an opportunity to connect more with her Italian heritage, as well as develop an academic understanding of the culture. She has been keeping a blog while in Rome, detailing trips to a buffalo farm, a cannoli cooking lab, a pizza making demonstration, and a town festival, among other experiences.



Among the aspects of the Ancient Roman period the program delves into is its artwork. Architecture major Emily Jones '16 explains, "The discussion has been focused on the techniques of creating different forms of art throughout the Ancient Roman time period. As a class, we have discussed a variety of mediums such as frescos, mosaics and sculptures. Being able to travel and see the different forms of artwork in person creates a greater understanding and appreciation for the pieces."

Seeing the artwork firsthand has occurred in places as diverse as modern era art galleries and ancient ruins, where students were surprised to find many of the colors still vibrant. One of the most compelling field trips for several of the students was a visit to the famous, lost city of Pompeii.

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"It became very surreal as we drove by Mt. Vesuvius, looking at the monster that destroyed the exhibit that we were about to visit. What I find most interesting, however, is the fact that although Pompeii was buried by the ash from the eruption, it was also preserved," recalls Courtney Franceschi '16, a biology major and public policy minor. "It is unbelievable that a natural disaster was able to preserve an Ancient Roman city for future audiences to learn



from. Although suffering from mild damage, the fresco paintings on the walls were still vibrant with color. It was mind-blowing to think that not only were we learning about Roman lifestyles from 2,000 years ago, but we were walking through the same homes that they walked through. This was something that I will never forget."

Classmate Laina Zissu '16 was also struck by the city's preserved state. "Pompeii was awesome to see. Walking down the streets made me feel like I was walking through the actual town as if nothing had changed," she says. "I thought it was interesting to see how some of the stores were considered fast food buildings. All that was left was the stone ledge, but the science says that's what they were used for. It makes me wonder how different we actually are from them so many years later."

The group has become close to each other over the course of the past several weeks, and particularly during these recent jam-packed travel days. They have also grown to see Rome as their home away from home. Zissu explains, while traveling to Southern Italy was "an amazing experience...We did get a little homesick for Rome. We love our city and all are starting to feel like real locals here!"

"The students are loving the field trips and their enjoyment is so infectious, that I love everything about Rome," adds Bowyer.

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