Welcome to the first edition of the OU in Italy Newsletter and greetings from Arezzo, Italy, home of the University of Oklahoma in Italy Programs.

Over the next several months and into the future, I look forward to showing you around Italy via this newsletter. Through the eyes of the growing number of students studying in our Italian programs, you will learn about Italy and OU students. These students’ essays and photos, will help you explore the historically rich towns and universities that host OU students and act as the dramatic backdrop for the student’s experiences. In addition to discovering how OU students develop academically, you’ll be privy to their enlightenment as individuals as they spend time outside of the comfort of family, friends, and easy access to the internet. In the end, I hope that through their Italian experiences they will be better educated and more mature members of an increasingly global community that is radically re-thinking its view of the "American Dream" as the ultimate in socio-political and economic paradigms. I invite you to live vicariously through the students’ essays and photos and to learn about OU in Italy and along the way, a bit about yourselves.

Lastly, I’d like to take this opportunity to thank the many people who are working to make the University of Oklahoma Department of International Programs in Italy a benchmark for the University’s study abroad community.

Ex Cathedra
Kirk Duclaux
Director of Italian Programs in Italy

OU Programs in Italy

The academic programs outlined below are bi-lateral agreements and maintained by the OU Education Abroad Office in Hester Hall. The programs are intended to suit the multifarious needs of OU students and faculty interested in all areas of Italian studies. The programs range from a total–immersion semester at the Universities of Bologna and Florence (geared towards the independent–minded Italian speaking student) to the 6–week “Journey to Italy” summer travel seminar for non–Italian speaking students with academic time constraints and those who are unfamiliar with independent European travel. In addition, there is an exciting new student and faculty exchange program that has been created with the University of Siena in Arezzo (UNISI). This new semester program has been developed to accommodate OU students and faculty who might want to study and teach in Italy yet do not have the language skills to participate in the full–immersion setting.

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Celebrating Italy:
"La Giostra" in Arezzo

The Joust of the Saracen or La Giostra del Saracino takes place every summer on the penultimate Saturday in June and again on the first Sunday in September. It is one of the high points of any Arentine citizen's year. The four historical districts of Arezzo accept the challenge of a jousting competition, offered by the King of the Indies, Buratto (the Saracen). The event takes place in the Piazza Grande which is decorated in medieval fashion with banners, torches and flags. Members of each district are dressed in the traditional costumes of their team. Before the start of the Giostra, the bells in the city are rung and call the citizens 'to arms'. Buratto, who is actually a pivoting manikin anchored into the pavement, is armed with a shield and a cat-o-nine-tails. He awaits the charge of each district's horse and jouster, who aims his lance at a bull's-eye on Buratto's shield and tries to avoid the cat-o-nine-tails as it spins around.

Un perspectivo...La Madonna del Conforto

The Madonna del Conforto (Madonna of Comfort) might be considered just another one of Italy's numerous statues of the Mother of Jesus. However, it was clear on a cold day this winter that this Madonna, housed in the main Cathedral in Arezzo, was something quite special. From early in the morning to late at night on February 15th, 70,000 people streamed up the hills towards the historic center to pay homage to this pristine terracotta relief of the Madonna. The local feast commemorates an event that took place 212 years ago. The citizens of Arezzo had been terrorized by 15 days of continuous earthquakes. In search of protection in a small, dank cellar of the local Camoldolese monastery, three humble cobbler's knelt and bowed their heads in prayers. As they prayed intently for help from the little Madonna, they realized that they were witnesses to two miracles – the tremors had stopped and the once filthy Madonna was now gleaming in all her original glorious color. Had it not been for the prayers of these men, this Madonna would have gone unnoticed under a heavy layer of soot deposited by a nearby oven. After the miraculous intervention of the Madonna, word quickly spread and she was soon transported with great ceremony to the more respectable position of honor that she occupies today in the Cathedral.

As an outsider seeing this endless mass of people walking up the hill to the Cathedral, I would have thought that the Archdiocese was giving something away (or at least selling raffle tickets!). But, in the end, all of these people were heading into the venerated chapel of the Madonna del Conforto at the front of the church to file past the thousands of flowers and
other offerings placed at the base of the Madonna. The sense of devotion was almost palpable and the most intriguing thing about it was that the crowd was composed of people of all ages, from babies to teenagers to grandfathers. As a person who doesn't usually go into the cathedral for strictly religious purposes, I found the experience moving. Most of the time, the church services and festivals seem to attract the young at heart but old in body and it is rare to see many people filing into that part of the city for things other than funerals and weddings. This was truly something to be seen and enlightened by.

**Journey to Italy**

For the past four summers, 25-30 OU students have explored Italy during the 6-week travel seminar called "The Journey to Italy." This year the Journey begins on May 31st in Rome. The program is an intensive travel experience designed for non-Italian speaking students who don't have the time or perhaps the money to devote to a semester program. Students travel to Rome, Florence, Arezzo, and Venice where they participate in a series of on-site lectures. They take classes at the University of Siena in Arezzo (UNSI), and they also learn why no self-respecting Italian puts both onions AND garlic in their tomato sauce or drinks a cappuccino after mid-day.

OU students stay in a beautiful 17th c. convent in Arezzo. They spend 15–20 days taking classes at the UNSI campus, all taught by visiting scholars from OU. In the past, Dr Mitchell Smith has taught Political Science, Dr Randall Lewis taught American Studies, and this summer Professor Susan Shaunessy will teach a class on Shakespeare in Italy. In addition, the students experience the medieval atmosphere of the Giostra del Saracino, the masterful frescoes of the Finding of the True Cross by Piero della Francesca, and the epicurean delights offered by the surrounding countryside.

The Journey to Italy program has been generously supported by President Boren and Dr. Millie Audas, Director of Education Abroad and Student Services in the form of Presidential Travel Scholarships. Each student who is accepted to the Journey to Italy program can apply for a $1,000 travel stipend which helps defray the cost of the program. For more information regarding this study abroad opportunity for summer 2009, contact Jack Hobson at Education Abroad and International Student Services Office in Hester Hall.
Bologna
Bologna (pop. 1 million) lives a sybaritic, socially conscious double life. The city is known as both La Dotta (The Learned) and La Grassa (The Fat). Both monikers allude to Bologna's role as capital of learning and food. Peppered with a healthy dose of Italian Communism, the city leads the nation in the pursuit of progressive politics. The University of Bologna or Alma Mater Studiorum, founded in 1088, is one of the oldest in Europe. It is host to almost 95,000 students, 24 faculties and 72 departments, including 132 undergraduate programs, 95 specialized degree programs, 90 master’s degree programs, 65 specialization schools (including Humanities Studies and Almaweb, the Graduate School of Information Technology), along with 115 Ph.D. programs.

Florence
According to UNESCO, Italy is home to 60% of the world's masterpieces and half of those are in Florence (pop. 500,000). As a result, the University of Florence has a rich tradition in Art History and History studies. The university traces its foundations back to 1321. Consisting of 12 departments, the university has a student body of nearly 60,000.

Arezzo
Arezzo (pop. 100,000) is OU’s newest and most innovative program. Arezzo is one Tuscany's more exclusive small towns mainly because it is the center of gold and silver manufacturing. In addition, Arezzo has a long tradition of internationally renowned cultural events which revolve around the literary world of the Petrarch Academy, the art history studies of Piero della Francesca, and the musical world of Guido D'Arezzo, inventor of modern musical notation. The city hosts the annual Guido D'Arezzo International Polyphonic Competition at the end of August. Arezzo is also the birthplace of Giorgio Vasari, the 16th c. artistic despot under the Medici Dukes and writer of the Lives of the Most Eminent Painter, Sculptors and Architects – a standard for all Italian Renaissance art history majors.

Site of the first department of Philosophy and Letters in Italy, the Arezzo campus (Pionta) is one of two satellite programs of the renown University of Siena (UNSI). It is unique in both its pristine geographic setting and its accessibility to major cities such as Florence and Rome. Most of the 2,000 students of the Pionta have Liberal Arts as their majors. However, there is a growing community of students studying in the medical and business colleges. The Letters and Philosophy Department in Arezzo was voted the best program in the Italian university system. Because several classes are taught in English, the faculty of Liberal Arts is a perfect learning environment for OU students. OU students who spend the semester in Arezzo have the chance to become a part of the Italian university student body at UNSI and its setting, regardless of fluency in Italian or area of study at OU.

"Rarely do great beauty and great virtue dwell together"
– Francesco Petrarca
A Note from Norman

Dr. Jason Houston
Assistant Professor of Italian

What struck me on my first visit to Arezzo in the late 1990's was the town’s authenticity and vitality. Right in the middle of Tuscany and a short trip to Florence and Rome, Arezzo had escaped the negative effects that mass tourism has brought to Italy. This is not to say that there are no tourists in Arezzo. The city boasts wonderful art, food, architecture the keep the tourists coming. But somehow, Arezzo has maintained its feel as an Italian hill town unlike many other Tuscan towns. Arezzo charms me to this day.

I am happy that OU has chosen to partner with the University of Siena at Arezzo. Having taken a group of students to Arezzo for the summer, I know that Arezzo provides a safe, friendly and importantly, Italian, experience for our students. Florence is 45 minutes away and Rome only 2 hours by train; countless other quaint towns dot the land between. Studying with OU in Arezzo, whether if just for the summer, for a semester, or whole year, will allow you to not only eat great food, see great art, and top it all off with a gelato, but you will see how Italians live, work, and play at home.

Stay tuned for the next exciting edition of the OU in Italy newsletter. You'll learn how to lose weight, where to eat, and the nuances of the Italian language as discovered by OU students in Arezzo!