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CWIL Reflection paper

The Experience of a Lifetime

I have had many different experiences throughout my life. However, the one I would consider my greatest and most worthwhile experience was studying abroad in Rome, Italy in the fall semester of 2006. This experience has changed me as an individual in many different ways and I feel that it will forever play an important role in my life. I am so thankful for this opportunity, so glad that I decided to go, and so grateful that I opened myself up to new experiences and let Rome leave her lasting imprint on me.

I studied with a tremendous group of people which greatly influenced my experience in a positive way. Over the course of the semester, the entire group became very good friends with each other. I have come back home to Saint Mary's with a network of friends that I know will be there forever.

While in Rome I visited places such as the Pantheon, Coliseum, Roman Forum, Trevi Fountain, Saint Peter's Basilica and much more. The history which surrounds the city is amazing. I found it so wonderful that we were able to learn about something in class, such as a painting or sculpture, and then take a short walk and see the actual object we were discussing. After having that opportunity, coming back and looking at pictures in a textbook doesn't do justice. The fact that the history was all around us was such a unique experience and I miss that aspect of learning which I came to really enjoy while in Rome.

While studying abroad, our group as a whole took many side trips. We visited everything from ancient Etruscan tombs to the Tivoli Gardens. I cannot express how

rewarding every tour we went on was. The history and culture was so interesting to learn about. Many of the landmarks we saw I had seen pictures of before in books and in the movies. However, when you are actually standing there it seems so surreal. Often times I found it hard to believe that I was really in Europe. I kept waiting for myself to wake up from this wonderful dream. I was also lucky enough to travel to other countries which included France, Spain, Germany, and Luxembourg. Each place I went I found myself learning more and more and becoming increasingly aware of the world around me.

Being immersed in the Italian culture has caused me to become better at speaking the language and more conscious of their customs and way of life. One of my favorite things to do was go for walks and wander around the streets of Rome with my friends. It seemed as though we were always able to stumble upon a new place and therefore better orient ourselves with the area. If we were looking for something in particular and couldn't find it, then we would simply use our Italian language skills and ask a local. I felt that personally the only way to get the most out of this experience was to immerse myself in the culture.

I feel as though I have returned home a more confident, independent young woman. I feel as though this cultural experience gave me just the push I needed to become more self-sufficient and more aware of the world around me and the people in it. Studying abroad has prepared me for the challenges that will be thrown at me in the future. I feel that I am ready to tackle these situations because after spending three months in a foreign country, I feel I can handle anything.

It's hard to believe that Rome is already over but what I learned from the experience will be with me for a lifetime. Rome will forever hold a special place in my

heart because I know that it is there that I stepped out of my comfort zone, took risks and in turn realized who I truly am. None of this would have been possible without the help of the Center for Women's Intercultural Leadership. I am so grateful that they were able to help me achieve my dream of studying abroad. Rome was a once in a lifetime opportunity and I would not change a single thing about the entire experience.