

The Power of Place: Facing the Challenges of On-Site Teaching and Researching

A FaCE Collaborative Event Ripon College March 9-10, 2012

Questions/Prompts for Student Alumni Panelists

1. In what ways did the course(s) you took in Florence take advantage of the location in which you were living and studying?
2. What was the most challenging aspect of taking an academic course in Florence, especially in terms of taking classes on site?
3. What were some of the personal benefits you gained from taking classes on site?
4. Describe a memorable experience you had during a site visit in Florence. What did you learn from this site visit?
5. In retrospect, what were the best aspects of the ACM Florence Program(s) for you?
6. What recommendations would you have for future ACM visiting professors and for the ACM staff in Florence?

Paper Abstracts

Part I. Teaching and Learning in Florence

Elizabeth Hayford, retired President of the ACM

“ACM in Florence: the Power of Place, the Power of Networking”

Florence is an outstanding site for an undergraduate academic program. Its buildings and galleries offer great resources to study Renaissance art and culture. Students do not always know how to use the city as a resource, however, and program faculty and administrators have to craft effective approaches to enable students to learn in the rich Florentine environment. At the same time, contemporary Florence and Italy present bureaucratic hurdles to operating that need to be overcome. In addition to the rich setting, the ACM program flourishes because of the consortial network that supports faculty engagement and attracts student interest.

William Urban, Monmouth College

“Alone in Florence”

1974 was the first year of the fall ACM Florence program. I traveled there early in order to learn as much of the language as I could. Taking advantage of the ticket policies of that era, my wife and I stopped in London (then a week in Oxford), Amsterdam, Paris and Milan. ACM had the housing from the London-Florence program and Janet Smith had been hired,

but almost nothing else. Getting everything set up was good experience, and the travel with students and on my own prepared me well for teaching and publishing.

Robert Warde, Macalaster College

“Please Don't Go Missing on My Shift: The Terrors of Teaching Off Campus”

That all-nighter in the intensive care ward was manageable. The 2:00 a.m. phone call from the student who woke up to find a man with an ax in her room ended up OK. I didn't even hear about the arrest for possession until after the fact, and we actually foiled a pickpocket on the Rome bus. As time passed, one hardly noticed the occasional piece of missing luggage, or the unreasonable complaints from hotel staff when a room or two got trashed. Mostly, however, I'm grateful that I never learned about the Stendhal syndrome until my stint in Florence had ended.

Susan Ashley, Colorado College

“Street Noise: Finding the Past in the Present”

Teaching Italian history where it happened changes the game. Students accustomed to meeting the past on the printed page, in photographs, on screens and through numbers now see its structures and artifacts on the spot. History also leaves less obvious traces, allowing students to extrapolate from ruins, street names, and unexpected fragments. What they discover makes the written record less abstract, more immediate. Yet, these visible remains of history surface through the din and distractions of the present, sharpening the gulf between now and then and complicating the teacher's task.

Katy Smith Abbott, Middlebury College

“Where ACM Florence Led Me”

When students study on-site in Italy, they have a remarkable opportunity to observe the power of place in shaping the way art was made and how it functioned in its original setting. For many, this is also a first—sometimes surprising—opportunity to forge a powerful connection **with** place, in a country of great beauty and rich contrasts. What does it mean to actively encourage students to cultivate this connection, both through and outside of their studies? In this talk, I will share observations on how my own ACM semester has informed my teaching, both on-site and in the classroom.

Anna Trumbore Jones, Lake Forest College and Sarah Mahler Kraaz, Ripon College

“Teaching in Florence and its Impact on Faculty Research and Teaching on the Home Campus”

The purpose of this talk is to present the findings of the ACM survey that was administered to faculty who have taught in the Florence program. Drawing on this evidence, we will address two subject areas. First, we will discuss what subjects have been covered by courses in Florence and then offer suggestions for subject areas that have been under-represented and might be profitable to cover in future. Second, we will discuss the ways in which respondents felt that their experience in Florence affected their work on their home campuses in terms both of teaching and of research.

Part II. Faculty Research in Florence

Thomas J. Sienkewicz, Monmouth College “Teaching Hercules in Florence”

The goal of this presentation is to illustrate the importance of Hercules in the history and art of Florence and to provide some resources for teaching about Hercules on site in Florence. These pedagogical observations, information and suggestions are based, in large part, on tenures as visiting professor on the ACM Florence Program. A brief chronological overview of selected literary texts from Late Antiquity and the Renaissance which helped to mold or to articulate Renaissance attitudes towards the hero is followed by a survey of some specific public representations of the hero in Florentine art. A fairly comprehensive list of art in Florence in which Hercules appears, organized by location, as well as bibliographies of primary and secondary resources on the hero, will be provided for participants.

Timothy Chasson, Grinnell College “Botticelli's 'Septizodium': On the Uses of Architecture in a Sistine Chapel Wall Painting”

This project had its genesis in one of those annoying student habits of asking “peripheral” questions instructors may not be prepared to answer. Standing in front of Botticelli’s fresco of the *Punishment of Corah* in the Sistine Chapel, it was fine to be asked first about the artist’s superb representation of the Arch of Constantine that frames a scene of wrongful rebellion and violent justice. We could readily see that the fresco’s narrative about the divinely sanctioned authority of Moses and Aaron was cast here as an Old Testament prototype for the authority of the Roman church. But what of the imposing ruin to one side, behind another group of threatening Israelites? Why was the student not satisfied with the default response, that its presence could be just a sign of the pagan order eclipsed? Years later, I think there are better answers and they come through late Imperial and medieval historical sources accessible to Renaissance scholars.

Rand Smith, Lake Forest College “Linking Past and Present: How the ACM Program Opened Doors on the Modern Italian Left”

The ACM program probably impacted my research more than my teaching, in that the year in Florence (2005-06) enabled me to begin a new research field in modern Italian political history. In addition to teaching Italian political history, I studied Italian intensively through Linguaviva, developed my interviewing skills, and made research contacts at the European University Institute in Fiesole. I returned to Italy for two months of research in 2008 on the modern Italian Left, focusing on the on-again/off-again relationship between the Socialist Party (PSI) and Communist Party (PCI) from 1920 to the present. This research has been incorporated into a book manuscript, currently under publisher’s review, “Enemy Brothers: Socialists and Communists in France, Italy, and Spain.” My basic argument is that during the 1960s and 1970s the PSI and PCI made fateful strategic choices – most notably about alliance partners – that put them on diverging paths and eliminated any prospect of future cooperation. For both parties, those strategic choices ultimately proved counterproductive, thereby leaving the Left divided and disorganized.

Stephen Fineberg, Knox College

“Theseus’ Lyre”

My talk (and in greater detail my contribution to Janet’s Festschrift) focuses on the François Vase, and early 6th century crater in the Museo Archeologico in Florence. The vase represents a range of mythological scenes each identifiable in itself but difficult to relate thematically to one another. To date no scholarly consensus has emerged about the thematic unity of the vase – and indeed some scholars deny that such a unity exists.

Drawing a parallel between the scenes on the vase and the extended description of Achilles’ shield in *Iliad* 18, I propose that the two sides of the vase stand in thematic contrast: the heroic but tragic life of Achilles versus the heroic but long and prosperous life of Theseus and the city that he ruled. On the Achilles side of the vase, I note the absence of music and dance, while on the Theseus sides of the vase I point to a common thread of music and dance that appears in more than one of the scenes – and particularly to the representation of Theseus playing the lyre. In broad terms I argue that this thematic contrast on the vase may be found in Homer’s description of the shield in *Iliad* 18 where, I suggest, it is expressed in the double nature of Achilles’ fate: a long and inglorious life at home (which Achilles rejects) versus a short and glorious life in battle (which Achilles embraces). On the François Vase, where Theseus makes his debut appearance in Athens, defines the city’s legendary king and the city itself in contrast to the tragic world of Homer’s *Iliad*.

Robert Hellenga, Knox College

“Everything is Material: Fictionalizing Florence”

A published author addresses the role of personal experience in writing a novel set in Florence vs. the role of book learning, including returning to Italy as a writer in search of “material,” and *La dolce vita* vs. “the good life.”