

INTERDISCIPLINARY WRITING AT HOME AND ABROAD: EXCAVATING AND EXPLORING ITALY

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The two linked CORE classes, Excavating Italy (CORE 2613) and Exploring Italy (CORE 2518) are unique among the University of Denver's general education offerings. Team-taught and thoroughly interdisciplinary, the classes combine the complimentary yet different perspectives of literature and art history. Excavating Italy (CORE 2613) is a 50 student lecture class, fulfilling the "Change and Continuity" theme. In this class we examine chronologically the great achievements of Italian art and literature that inspired the tradition of the European Grand Tour. We study the architecture and sculpture of Classical and Baroque Rome; the evolution of Renaissance art in Padua, Florence and Venice, and we read the Roman and Italian writers of these periods, including Plutarch, Suetonius, Dante, and Savonarola, along with Shakespeare's Italian plays – *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice*, and other works by English literary figures inspired by Italian art and culture.

Exploring Italy (CORE 2518) a Writing Intensive seminar, fulfills the "Self and Identities" theme. While any student can enroll in CORE 2613, students whom we accept through an application process into the travel class must take both the lecture class and the seminar. In the seminar, we introduce the museum collections that the students will visit; we provide additional background to the culture of Italy and its history; and we direct the students in their writing and research projects that will be explained more fully below. Soon after exams, usually on Thanksgiving Day, the two professors and the students fly to Rome and spend the next fourteen days exploring the art and literary sites that we have been studying all Fall Quarter. In effect, Italy becomes for those two weeks a cultural and aesthetic laboratory in which the students are able to reinforce and test at first hand knowledge gained from the on-campus classes.

The travel portion of the class includes five days in Rome, with trips to the Forum, Coliseum and other classical monuments; St. Peter's Basilica; the Capitoline and Vatican Museums; and the Borghese Gallery, followed by a day trip to the Archeological Museum in Naples and the excavations at Pompeii. We then travel to Florence for four days to visit the Cathedral, the Baptistry, the Convent of San Marco, the Uffizi Gallery, the Pitti Palace, and a number of smaller museums and local churches with Renaissance frescoes. On our way to Venice, we stop in Padua to see Giotto's inspiring frescoes in the Arena Chapel, and our final four days are spent in Venice, where we explore the Byzantine splendor of San Marco Cathedral, local churches containing paintings by Titian and Tintoretto, the Ducal Palace, the Academia, Peggy Guggenheim Museum, and travel to the island of Torcello to see the famous Byzantine mosaics in the church there. Within all of these cities we visit sites that evoke the literary works we have studied in the fall, including the place where Caesar was assassinated in the Roman forum, the Piazza della Signoria where Savonarola was executed in Florence as well as his cell at San Marco, and the melancholic Bridge of Sighs in Venice, evoked by Lord Byron in his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and Dickens in *Pictures from Italy*.

The design of these two courses reflects the experience we have gained in over twenty-years of collaborative team-teaching, beginning in 1986 with the year-long CORE class, Making of the Modern Mind. We discovered then that we shared an interest in nineteenth-century British art and literature, and we subsequently created several graduate and undergraduate interdisciplinary classes on Victorian and the Pre-Raphaelite art and literature, expanding those classes to others on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British artists and writers and their admiration for Italian

art and culture. We also both have had extensive travel experience leading study abroad classes in Europe. Dr. McNees designed the University of Denver's London Program and has directed that program four times, and Dr. Warlick directed it once. Dr. Warlick also team-taught with Dr. Jere Surber (Philosophy) the interdisciplinary Making of the Modern Mind: European Experience travel class, which included a six-week block of classes on campus for twelve AHUM and CORE credits, followed by a twenty-three day travel class to England, France and Germany during Spring Quarter from 1992 to 2002. The design of Excavating and Exploring Italy germinated from our conviction that a strong grounding in the academic disciplines of art history and literature together with solid practice in writing prior to departure are essential to ensure the students' appreciation and understanding of what they will experience on the road. The unusual design of these two classes has enabled us thoroughly to integrate the literature and art history students study. Both classes are, in fact, writing-intensive, although they were not designated as such until recently, and we try to build skills in the lecture class that can be augmented in the seminar, and further amplified during the travel portion of the course.

Writing Assignments

CORE 2613: Excavating Italy

The lectures on art and literature in Excavating Italy along with readings from both academic disciplines provide the materials from which students draw their writing assignments. The lectures aim to reinforce and help students synthesize the reading. The literary writing assignments in the class consist of 1) a paper comparing one of the characters in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* to that character's historical model in the writings of Plutarch or Suetonius; 2) an in-class close reading and interpretation of one of the cantos from Dante's *Inferno*; 3) a mid-term essay comparing a Browning dramatic monologue to a painting; and 4) a final examination essay on Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. The primary goals of these assignments are to encourage students to become analytical and interpretative readers and to translate analysis into coherently constructed essays.

The Art History writing assignment in the lecture class requires students to pick two paintings or sculptures from specific periods covered in class and to compare and contrast them. This is a standard type of art historical iconographic and stylistic analysis. Through a handout, students are given some guidance to discuss the subject matter of the two works of art, and then to analyze their stylistic similarities and differences, and to observe the ways in which the two artists use gesture, figural placement, color, lighting, perspective and other pictorial devices. The goal is not the argument of a thesis, *per se*, but rather an exercise in careful observation, a challenge to discover appropriate and evocative language to describe what they see, and an opportunity to organize their ideas and express them clearly. Art History exams often incorporate comparative questions of this sort, and so this writing assignment gives the students the time to develop their responses without the pressure of an exam situation. Hopefully, their essays reflect their understanding of the evolution of the artistic styles of the Classical and Renaissance periods that Dr. Warlick has presented in class and that the students can ground their essays within that framework. Though we each read and grade all of the written work, we are not able to devote as much time to individual meetings with students to discuss papers as we are in the smaller Exploring Italy seminar. We hope next fall to have a graduate teaching assistant who will be available to assist students who desire more one-on-one work with their writing.

CORE 2613 Exploring Italy (Writing-Intensive)

The on-campus two-hour weekly seminars of Core 2518 Exploring Italy in some ways build on students' reading assignments in Core 2613 Excavating Italy since Core 2518 students take the two courses concurrently. However, the writing assignments for Core 2518 are completely separate from and more intensive than those in Excavating Italy. In Exploring Italy students have two principal assignments before they depart for the two-week travel portion of the course. The first assignment consists of weekly paragraphs both in student journals and on Blackboard. Each week students choose three dates from either Core 2613 or Core 2518 reading and lectures. They must post those dates along with a paragraph analyzing the significance of the

three dates in relation to the weekly lectures and readings. Each week we choose three students' postings to discuss at the beginning of class. This weekly writing practice has two principal purposes: creation of personal timelines that will contribute to a comprehensive class timeline at the end of the quarter, and an understanding of audience demonstrated by the difference between private journal writing and more public Blackboard writing. Part of class discussion of the postings will include attention to style and grammar as essential parts of communication.

The second and main assignment is a research project chosen from the following specific options:

- Choose a specific Italian artist whose work is represented in at least two of the cities (Rome, Florence, Venice) you will visit during the travel portion of the class. Focus on several specific paintings or sculptures of this artist in relation to readings from Vasari, Robert Browning, Walter Pater or other art historians and literary figures. Instead of simply describing the works, formulate a research question that drives your investigation. One pattern for formulating this question is the 3 part statement: "I am studying the works of...in order to find out how / whether...so that I can convince my readers that..." Note that you can use this pattern for any of the research topics.
- Investigate the connections between the Biblical version of a story from either the Old or New Testament and its manifestation in at least one piece of artwork in each of the three cities you'll visit. Pay particular attention to how the artists variously interpret the story you've chosen. If you choose a New Testament story, read and compare at least two different Gospel accounts. Specific topics can be culled from the following: Old Testament—Creation and Fall of Adam & Eve, Noah and the Flood, Moses's life, Abraham and Isaac, Judith; New Testament—Annunciation; Nativity; Last Supper; Crucifixion; Last Judgment; versions of such saints as St. Peter, St. Sebastian, St. Francis, John the Baptist; Mary.

- Choose a myth from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or Virgil's *Aeneid* and compare artistic renditions of the myth in the three different cities. Consider how each artist translates the literary myth into palpable art (words into visual object). Examples of possibilities include the following: Bacchus, Apollo, Medusa, Perseus, Venus Juno, Jupiter.
- Choose a political figure from classical Roman or 19th century Risorgimento Italian history. Compare several historical and literary accounts with the artistic embodiment of that figure in painting and/or sculpture in three of the cities. Principal figures from the Roman period include Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar, Brutus, and Marcus Aurelius. Figures from the Italian Risorgimento are Garibaldi and Victor Emanuel.

The research assignment consists of several stages and is intended to teach students how to formulate a research question, how to assemble, organize and use a variety of sources, both print and on-line, and how to write clearly and persuasively. Students will have a chance to rewrite their assignments up to the final draft. They will also present their papers in four-person panels during the last two weeks of class. Following are the five steps of this assignment:

1) Week Three: Submit a research topic with a paragraph justifying the choice of topic and indicating at least three sources. This should be submitted in hard copy and posted on Blackboard. Schedule an appointment with the professors to discuss your topic. (5%)

2) Week Five: Narrow your topic to a research question and rewrite your original paragraph. Submit an annotated bibliography with at least five sources. This should be submitted in hard copy and on Blackboard. (5%)

3) Week Six: Submit a one-page introduction that clearly articulates your thesis by asking a question and posing a hypothetical conclusion. Schedule a meeting to discuss the introduction. (5%)

4) Week Eight: Submit a rough draft (approx. 6-8 pages) to allow adequate time for electronic comment from the professors. In

some cases you will be asked to schedule another appointment to discuss the draft. (10%)

5) Week Ten: Final paper (8 pages double-spaced) is due with title page and complete bibliography in MLA style. (30 %) Students will receive grades on steps 2-5 with progressively more weight on each grade. They will receive their final graded papers at the airport before the flight to Italy. They should keep those papers in their journal notebooks for reference on the trip.

In addition to the above assignments, we will devote one in-class workshop and one optional workshop to writing concerns—grammar, punctuation, citation, sentence structure and diction, style, audience. Before the travel portion of the class, students will be asked to identify two specific “problem” areas in their writing and to focus on these two areas in their journal entries on the road.

Assignments on the Road

The opportunity to examine and evaluate original works of painting, sculpture and architecture is a foundational experience for any student of art history. Without question, original works have an impact that can never be achieved with digital or photographic reproductions. Students can experience the true scale and context of the work of art and they can see many smaller details for the first time, including the ways in which the paint is applied, the condition of the object’s surface, its true colors, etc. Giving students the time to examine and analyze works of art within museums, chapels and other public places is essential to ensure that each student has an opportunity to reflect upon the things they have learned in class and to apply that knowledge in their writing projects. At the same time, there are some logistical problems posed within museum settings that can alter the ways in which these assignments actually work.

Our extensive experience in conducting student visits to museums has taught us that lecturing within the museum is not an effective approach. While a few diligent students might cluster around the professor, most tend to tire quickly and search for the nearest bench, usually in the middle of the gallery, far away from the paintings and sculptures they are supposed to examine. One passes lively groups of elementary

school children, seated on the floor in front a single painting with a teacher asking them “where do you see this” kinds of questions, but that’s not the best approach for college-aged students. We have also learned that both students and professors vary considerably in the pace with which they go through museums. Some are very methodical and view each work of art in turn while others move quickly past most works to linger at greater length in front of those works that really capture their attention. We try to ensure that each student can view works at his or her own best pace. We therefore allow students reasonable flexibility within each museum but make ourselves separately available to answer all questions that may arise during their visits. What one might term epiphanic moments occur with nearly every student at least once when that student draws one of us aside to point out details related to that student’s paper topic or simply point out aspects of the art work the student had not perceived in class.

Our goal is to have each student look carefully at as many paintings / sculptures as possible, to find a few that relate to their research topic, to take the time to “read” and analyze those works carefully, and to make substantive notes that will form the basis of their journal entries. Museums differ greatly as to whether this goal is possible. Some museums, like the Vatican, are so large that the group quickly spreads out in different directions and into several different galleries. Other museums are small, such at the Arena Chapel in Padua, but there we have only the twenty minutes allowed to each group to visit that delightful, but hermetically-sealed environment. Mid-sized museums work the best, but at the relatively modest Borghese Gallery in Rome, the two-hour time limit is not enough for some students to examine each work thoroughly. To reinforce the class community, we have developed a successful exercise of having students in at least one museum per city, give an impromptu oral lecture to their peers on a work of art they have found and analyzed. Luckily, we travel to Italy in late November and early December at a time when museums are generally free of tourists, and so having some breathing room, not being herded by museum guards, being allowed to return to rooms visited earlier, all contribute to achieving that desired flexibility of movement. We have

discovered over the years that the topics selected by the students must be broad enough to allow students consistently to be engaged in searching for relevant works of art throughout the trip. This realization was in response to our having some students in the early years pick very specific topics that they could not apply to all three major cities.

We include below the journal assignment for the travel portion of the class to indicate specifically how students are required to continue to build on the intensive writing from the on-campus portion of the class. Since the travel journal constitutes a large part (45%) of the final grade, students are generally motivated to do a thorough job. Since receiving writing-intensive status for this course, we have incorporated several suggestions from the writing-intensive faculty training class we attended in December. We have decided to include peer review to help students retain a sense of audience. We have also decided to have students choose one specific entry from each city for us to critique. We shall then choose a second entry from each city. We will be looking specifically at the “problem areas” of writing that each student has identified prior to departure. This focus will allow us to assess whether or not the student’s writing is improving and exactly how.

Travel Journal for Core 2518

Please take this sheet with you and place in your journal. It details the required journal assignments which constitute 45% of your grade for the course.

You will be responsible for the following entries:

3 one-page entries on your paper topic: These include descriptions of actual works or sites you see that are directly related to your paper topic. In these entries you should offer a thoughtful, evaluative response to each art work, building on the vocabulary you learned in both classes during the quarter. Where applicable, we encourage you to connect the art to the literature from either *Excavating Italy* or *Exploring Italy* or both. You should consult your final papers to reflect on the difference between studying particular works of art and seeing them “live.”

Total: 3 one-page entries.

3 one-page entries on *each* of the three cities we visit: These would include three entries for specific sites (building, painting, sculpture) we will view as a group and that you’ve studied in class. They will NOT be on your paper topic. For Rome, one entry may include Pompeii or the Naples Archaeological Museum. For either Florence or Venice, one entry may include the Giotto chapel in Padua.

Total: 9 one-page entries.

3 one-page entries on a work or site NOT on our scheduled tour: These may include visits to museums like Florence’s Bargello or the Medici Chapel; St. Peter-in-Chains Church (with Michelangelo’s Moses) or the Risorgimento Museum in Rome; various churches in Venice which we have not already scheduled. Be creative with this one, and stray from the beaten path.

Total: 3 one-page entries.

Minimum required total: 15 one-page entries.

You may write more than one page or choose to include more than the minimum number of entries. However, if you write thoughtfully and analytically, you should have at least 15 good pages for us to peruse. Each entry will be worth 3points.

You will submit your journals to us periodically throughout the trip but at least once during our stay in each of the three cities. You will designate one entry per city for us to read and evaluate and one per city for one of your fellow students to evaluate. Your peers must write a response to the entry you select. In addition, we will choose several entries randomly to read and comment on. You should work hard on the “problem areas” you’ve identified in your writing. We will be looking specifically for improvement in those areas as well as at your increasing skill and flexibility in style and voice. Keep in mind that ultimately your journal will serve as a record of your trip and as a final summary of the course. It is worthwhile to take time to craft your entries not only for us and your peers but perhaps also for your family and even for the family you may yourselves have in ten years!

Goals/Assessment

We hope to engage students more deeply in the course topics by making them responsible for exhibiting some of their writing assignments on Blackboard to the entire class. In addition to working on constructing a viable argument / thesis, students will simultaneously view and critique others' writing and thus gain progressive knowledge of each other's projects. This will be a much more collaborative model than we have used in past versions of this course. By commenting on the research projects at each step and allowing students to rewrite/correct pieces, we hope to see improvement in student writing in the following areas: sentence structure, grammar, diction, punctuation (micro level); persuasive argument with secondary support, awareness of style and audience (macro level). Another goal will be to assess how students are able to discuss and apply pieces of their research projects on site in their reports to the class. We hope to create a traveling community and to interest students in each others' topics in advance of the trip so that the on-site experience will be greatly enriched and reinforced.

In terms of the general goals of the CORE curriculum, both our classes and the travel portion fulfill many of the desired learning outcomes. The interdisciplinary nature of our linked classes speaks to Epistemology and Inquiry in that we incorporate the diverse but

complementary modes of literary and art historical investigations, while at the same time conveying the variations between our Disciplinary Knowledge and Practices. Students refine their Communication skills during the on-campus portion of the class through written assignments, group discussion of the postings on Blackboard, and the final project panel. During the travel portion, they give at least three oral presentations in museums and discuss their journal entries with professors and peers. The Engagement with Human Diversity is a natural component of our travel class, as many of our students are abroad for the first time, and those who have traveled before with their families become more aware of cultural distinctions between Italy and the United States since we discuss and emphasize these differences both before and during the travel portion. As the students become increasingly aware of their own cultural biases, their self-reflection and intellectual growth increase. This increased self-awareness, in turn, leads to Intellectual Engagement and Reflection as students develop empathy for their peers and for Italians and Italian culture. We hope that the scholarly and intellectual preparation students receive in both *Excavating Italy* and *Exploring Italy* makes them better representatives of the University of Denver abroad and more informed and appreciative travelers. In a very real sense, we view *Exploring Italy* as important preparation for future study and travel abroad.

