1. Narrative of Student Monitoring Experiential Learning Plan that Incorporates the Study Abroad Student Learning Outcomes

Laura McGuire – Florence, Italy

As a Resident Director, I will not be involved in assisting students’ academic progress in their courses at the Institute, but I have also created the Experiential Learning Plan below, which addresses the four Student Learning Objectives for Study Abroad programs.

Because of my specialization in the built environment and material culture, I believe that I can bring a unique perspective to the Art History, Anthropology, and Sociology students in the Florence program. Florence is not only the birthplace of the Renaissance, but its art, design, and architecture have had a profound impact on Western visual and material culture that persists to this day (and can even be found in Hawai‘i). Through the lens of Florentine architecture, art, and urban planning, I will introduce them to major artifacts and events that have impacted the architectural and material culture of the West. My experiential learning plan asks them not only to reflect on the people and events they encounter, but also the qualities of Florence’s built space, materials, and objects, and how they “compose” the city – and play a role in the daily lives of its residents. I would like them to learn to consider the experience of a city in its visual, spatial, and haptic dimensions, among others. Through this program, the students will understand the ways in which particular environments and “things” might shape a city’s culture and its people.

I will hold weekly (or semi-weekly, if needed) group meetings in order to socialize and discuss the things that we are together discovering about Florence. I will also arrange mandatory weekend (and optional weekday) walking tours and excursions, in which students can join me to explore various themes in the built environment of Florence, both historical and contemporary.

The students will keep a journal of their study abroad experiences, which will be handed in weekly. They will also complete three essays (two visual and one written) as a part of their Study Abroad grade. Using essay assignments, weekly group meetings, and mandatory and optional tours, the students will achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between the built environment and Florentine society, both historical and contemporary. The students will complete two, thematic visual essays, using photographs and sketches. The final written assignment will ask the students to describe a particular aspect of the city and culture of Florence that they had difficulty understanding or adjusting to, and to reflect on what this can tell them about their own culture and preconceived assumptions.

The goal of study abroad programs is not only academic – the students will be taking their assigned classes at the Institute – but it is also experiential. As they learn about new topics in their classes, I want to help them to integrate this learning into their daily experiences and navigations of an unfamiliar place and country. The experiential activities that I will assign, including walking tours and personal and photographic essays that center on the concept of “placeness,” urbanism, and material culture in Florence will help them to translate their course-based knowledge towards a broader understanding of the city and its people as a whole.
In addition to the required Experiential Learning activities, my weekly “tours with the professor” will focus to some degree on an area of my own research interests in architecture and design, but they also leave room for students to discuss their own interests and explore places that catch their own eyes. When I led student travel to Rome three years ago, I undertook similar tours which were arranged around themes, such as “Early Christian Churches” to sites I, myself, had never visited. While typically only 5-7 students attended these optional tours, they worked wonderfully, as they allowed both myself and the students to explore new buildings and neighborhoods for the first time. This created a sense of shared discovery and opportunities for informal conversation, which were less feasible with the larger, 50-student group. The relationships with students that I developed from the optional tours persisted when we returned to the United States, and several of these students continued to seek my advice and perspectives as they continued along in their academic careers.
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING HANDOUT (DRAFT - Final version will be illustrated)

Aloha students! While you undertake your studies at the Lorenzo de’Medici Institute, I will be your Resident Director from the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa. I am a specialist in the History of Architecture, Design, and Material Culture, which I hope will intersect with some of your own academic and personal interests. My hope is that this will be a stimulating program for us all! My role as Resident Director includes monitoring your academic progress as well as your attendance and level of participation, facilitating and mediating in any academic issue that arises in your study, and insuring your final grade is properly transmitted and recorded as UHM credit.

As Resident Director, I’m also available for counseling and assistance in your adjustment to life in a new and different cultural environment and am happy to help with any issues or questions you may have, large or small.

I will be available most mornings for individual meetings (location TBD), and we will arrange weekly group get-togethers once the program schedule is set. These will be both social and informational gatherings. Since my specialty is in the history of architecture, design, and urbanism, I will give walking tours of significant buildings and other sites around Florence, and arrange weekend group excursions to museums and other cultural sites.

We will also be undertaking some experiential learning beyond your classes and excursions to insure we all meet the Student Learning Outcomes of the Study Abroad Center:

- Demonstrate awareness of your own cultural values and biases and how these impact your ability to work with others.
- Demonstrate knowledge of diversity with a focus on the population or topic of interest in your Study Abroad program.
- Communicate appropriately and effectively with diverse individuals and groups.
- Demonstrate an increased capacity to analyze issues with appreciation for disparate viewpoints.

Walking Tours and Discussions

Together, we will explore the visual, material, spatial, and community environments of the city. To do so, I will lead mandatory weekend (and optional weekday) walking tours to various sites and neighborhoods around the city. We will look at buildings, gardens, streets, piazzas – spaces that are old and spaces that are new. We will use these tours not only as an opportunity to understand the history of Florentine architecture and urban planning and to share our collective knowledge and reactions, but also to discuss how these material features might impact the social community and the behavior of contemporary city residents. We will seek to understand what it is about the built environment of the city that makes it a place, which is different from (or similar to) other places.

Assignments
You will keep a journal and/or sketchbook of your intercultural and visual experiences. You may include text, photos, drawings, newspaper clippings, or anything else that is relevant to the way you are learning about culture in Florence. You may also collaborate on certain journal entries, or even ask city residents that you meet to add something to your journal. If you are an art student, I encourage you to draw and will be happy to accompany you on any expeditions to sites or objects that you are interested in sketching.

You will complete two photographic (or drawing) essays, and one short written essay, which you will work on throughout the trip. I recommend that you take photos or make drawings of anything that that captures your interest, even before you have decided on your essay topics – you might find that this is the way you will discover your final topics!

1. You will describe something important you have discovered about Florence’s built environment through photos and/or sketches. This can be anything from an experience of the street patterns, to the ways people congregate and interact in urban and architectural space, a particular architecture, design, or material culture feature that is somehow “Florentine,” and so forth. The important thing is that you reflect on how the built environment that you are exploring communicates something essential about Florence, whether this is historical or contemporary. Your essay should have a short one or two paragraph summary introducing the reader to the topic you examine.

2. This essay will be “human” based. Also comprised of photos and/or sketches, it should focus on the people, language, daily interactions, “things” that people in Florence do or use, or some aspect of culture that you encounter as you study or in your new life abroad. Your essay should have a short one or two paragraph summary introducing the reader to the topic you choose to explore.

3. The last essay (4 typewritten pages) will reflect on something you found difficult about living in Florence. Was there some aspect of the city or the culture that you had trouble adjusting to? Reflect on this experience and examine what it might reveal to you about your own culture, society, and any assumptions about the ways you have thought things “should” be, and whether those assumptions have changed since your travels in Italy.

Your essays will be shared online among all participants via Laulima.