

Reflection on a Faculty Led Program Abroad to Rome, Italy

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Formulating Eternal Youth in the Eternal City: Reflection on a Faculty Led Program Abroad to Rome, Italy

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La Dolce Vita

Rome, a city synonymous with timeless beauty, was the perfect backdrop for studies on the research and development of anti-aging herbal skin care products. This past spring, 15 students and two faculty from the Biotechnology–Advanced diploma program in the School of Biological Sciences & Applied Chemistry travelled to the Eternal City for an intensive laboratory program offered by the Fondazione I.T.S. per le Nuove Tecnologie della Vita. The I.T.S. is Italy's emerging post-secondary applied technology education system offering training in advanced technical skills to promote innovation and technology transfer in partnership with Italian industries.

Over the course of two weeks, Seneca students worked in teams with their Italian counterparts to research the anti-oxidant properties of several herbal extracts and then, based on the collected data, formulate their ideal anti-aging skin care cosmetic. The selection of plants to investigate were chosen in part by their traditional uses as skin care additives. This work capped-off independent research undertaken by the students at Seneca over the winter 2019



academic semester that focused on the identification, extraction, and efficacy of plant-derived medicinal products. Long, espresso-fueled days were spent at the I.T.S. facility in Rome attending lectures on plant biology, cosmetic formulation, and product regulations, processing raw ingredients, and conducting experiments in the biotechnology laboratory. Evenings and weekends were reserved for wandering the cobblestone streets and exploring the many cultural and culinary treasures of Rome and Italy.

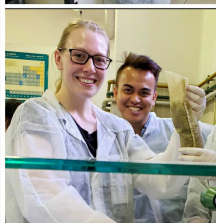
A site visit to the Italian cosmeceutical company IDI Farmaceutici in Pomezia, an industrial town 30 km outside of Rome, rounded out the program. Here Seneca and I.T.S students toured the company's R&D laboratories and cosmetics production areas, seeing first-hand the processes required to bring a cosmetic product to market.

The program culminated in a certificate ceremony, giving all students the opportunity to proudly showcase their creations to representatives of Seneca, the Italian education ministry, the Canadian embassy, and the Italian media. After saying *arrivederci* Roma, our students returned to Canada with samples of their new products in their suitcases and the warmth of new friendships in their hearts.



Avanti Sempre

This was our first time leading a program abroad and we were impressed by the personal growth demonstrated by our terrific students. Not only did they benefit from the academic content and training provided by the curriculum, they also enriched their communication, interpersonal, and intercultural skills. Studying abroad, in an unfamiliar environment, in a different language, and under a different scholastic system, is no easy task. Each day, our students rose to the challenges before them with determination, perseverance, flexibility, and grace. Working in a team environment, they evolved into leaders, planners, interpreters, problem solvers, and, above all, team players. Outside of the classroom, they became adventurers, historians, foodies, and friends.



As faculty and life-long learners, we too gained valuable lessons from the experience. Education systems and styles differ around the globe and we were fortunate to be immersed in a classroom environment that was both similar and distinct from our own. While the lesson content was the same, we noted different approaches to lecturing, student participation, classroom management, assessment and feedback, and observed how our students reacted to these differences. These observations provided us with a greater appreciation of the academic and cultural challenges facing students who study abroad. By viewing our international students at Seneca through this lens, we better understand their classroom behaviours and we feel more equipped to support them in their learning.

Grazie mille

By far, the most rewarding part of the trip was witnessing the genuine camaraderie that developed between the Seneca and Italian students. Eighteen students from the I.T.S and several others from a local high school volunteered their time to teach and mentor, provide English translations, prepare materials, and assist faculty. Many expressed to us a sincere appreciation for this unique learning opportunity. To them, we extend a heart-felt grazie mille for their hard work and enthusiasm, for welcoming us like family, and for their enduring friendship with our students.

We would like to thank Seneca, the International Mobility Office, the School of Biological Sciences & Applied Chemistry, and the Fondazione I.T.S. for their support of this program and the opportunity to work abroad in beautiful Italy. The Faculty Led Program Abroad (FLPA) is truly a valuable, once-in-a-lifetime experience for all involved and we encourage faculty to consider planning their own unique, cross-cultural programs.

"If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need."

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC – 43 BC)

View the [September 2019 issue of the Academic Newsletter](#).

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