Personal information

Name: Brittany
Major: Applied Economics and Management
Period/Time of Exchange: Fall 2010

Practical information

Visa

Make sure you apply for the visa as early as possible. This is not only beneficial to ensuring you receive your visa on time but also for purchasing the plane tickets. I would recommend not purchasing plane tickets until your visa is approved because plane tickets are generally non-refundable. Triple check you have all documents and a photo copy of every single one, even if not stated, because you easily will be turned down and forced to schedule a new appointment to return and re-apply. At least 3 out of the 5 people that were in front of me were turned down. Once your application is approved you return in a few weeks to actually pick up the visa.

In the airport the security/passport check was a fast, easy process. To apply for a permit of stay that I needed in Italy, the Italian system was much more confusing and slow. I never actually received my permit of stay in the end due to a mess up with the computer system.

Packing

I did not bring a warm enough winter coat which I definitely regretted.

Do not over pack clothes because as much as you think you would need for four months, you don't. You can always buy more there, in the worst case scenario.

Resources

The host university, originally through Cornell's website and then the actual school's website, was very informative.

Movies/shows/concerts- The school once again sent emails.

Maps/tourist information- The school had a welcome committee that gave pamphlets on all of this.

International office at Host University

What type of reception did you have upon arrival?
I received a welcome bag with maps and info on Milan and also an optional tour of the school.

Did you receive (or were you offered) a buddy?
Yes but the buddy did not reply to my emails so this part was not helpful, but not necessary.

Were there orientation activities?
Tours of the campus was the main activity.

How was the international office staff?
Helpful and friendly

Academics

The university

The campus is centralized but with a much smaller amount of buildings.

Where do students hang out?
They hung out in the cafeteria, library, and in front of the school.
Courses

How was the course enrollment process?
An online process similar to Cornell but it was complicated to actually check course dates and times and prevent overlaps.

How were the classes structured (mostly lecture? discussions?)?
The classes were all lectures.

Was homework given? If so, how often? How much? No

What types of exams were given? How do they compare to those at Cornell?
Mostly all final exams but midterms did also exist in certain classes. Only one of my classes had a midterm which, like all midterms there, was optional to take.

How are the courses graded? (e.g., flat, curved?)
It depended on the teacher.

On what criteria are grades based? (e.g., tests? papers? group projects?)
Some grades were 100% final exams, others had a group project component.

How many classes did you take? 5

Were you allowed to take your exams early? If so, what was the process?
Yes, I took the exams during the special early exam period for exchange students.

Life Abroad

Language
The faculty all spoke English and some of the students did as well. It was necessary for me to learn Italian to survive the daily life though.

I would recommend taking an Italian course before studying in Bocconi because you do have an advantage of having basic Italian.

Was a “crash course” in the host language offered at the university? Was it useful?
Yes and if you take one year of Italian in Cornell, it is unnecessary. It is helpful if you were never introduced to Italian.

Banking

Would you recommend opening a local account? If so, which do you recommend?
A credit card and debit card from home is sufficient.

If not, how did you do your banking and access money while abroad?
I had two credit cards with two different companies as well as a debit card.

Housing

Did your host university arrange your housing? If not, how did you find housing? Yes

What type of housing (apartment? home stay? dorm?)?
I dormed with other Italian students. Also offered was a residency of only exchange students.

How much did you pay for housing? How did you pay for rent and utilities?
Housing was 600 a month including utilities.

I cooked myself. There was a special meal option for exchange students were you could purchase 10 meals for 40 Euros, which normally would cost 8 Euros a meal, or 80 Euros.

Life Abroad

Transportation

The easiest mode of transportation was the tram. You were able to purchase a semester long tram pass which provided unlimited tram rides. I did not so I am not sure how much it costs but I lived next to the school and did not need to. If you lived in the exchange residency than you would need the pass. I mostly walked everywhere.

Tram tickets could be purchased at any of the tobacco shops or in the center. They cost 1 euro one-way.
Communication

I only called home maybe twice because I used the cell phone I purchased there. It was a reloadable phone. I used Skype to communicate with my friends and boyfriend at home. My parents didn’t know how to use Skype but instead I touched base with them solely through email, which was not a problem.

**Did you buy a cell phone? If so, what type of plan and/or provider do you recommend?**
Yes, I bought a cheap cell phone that cost 20 Euros through Wind and then I would just reload Euros onto the phone.

**How long does it take to receive mail? To send mail? What is the cost?**
It took at least two weeks for postcards to arrive home. My boyfriend sent me a package that took two weeks for me to receive.

Social activities

**Did you meet students from the host country?**
Yes, all my friends were Italian students.

**Did you get involved in any social organizations or clubs? No**

**Throughout the semester were there any special activities arranged for exchange students?**
Yes, there were numerous special club discounts a week offered to exchange students as well as organized trips.

**What do local students do for fun?**
They go to the discoteca or the cinema.

Shopping

**Where did you buy groceries, toiletries, house wares, and other items?**
I went to the grocery store, Esselunga, which is just like Wegmans in Ithaca.

**How do the prices compare to the United States? Did you use cash or credit/debit cards?**
The food prices seemed, on average, to be lower in Italy than the US but the rate of exchange always has to be taken into account as well. I mainly used credit/debit cards but also sometimes needed to use cash.

**Are there outdoor markets? If so, do you recommend them?**
Yes, I would recommend them if you buy a lot of fruit.

**What are general store hours?**
Normally the supermarket hours are the same as here, 9am-9pm but the other shops close for, at least, about 2 hours during the day for a lunch break.

What stores are popular? Convenient?
Esselunga is a very popular supermarket as well as Lidl for discount groceries

Were there any items that were not available?
Certain typical foods of the US, such as graham crackers or peanut butter, were not available or otherwise very difficult to find.

Health and Safety

I felt very safe in Milan and especially my residence. It is risky, as most foreign countries, to be a stranger and you have to be careful for pickpockets (which I never had a problem but a lot of other exchange students I knew had issues with them).

Bring any medicine that you rely on at home when you’re sick and be protective while walking around, never be naïve.

There was a nurse in my residence as well as general medical assistance such as a hospital.

Travel

I decided to stay in Italy while traveling, but it is more common for students to travel all throughout Europe since it is easy access. In Italy, I went to Palermo and Cattania in Sicily, Florence, Pisa, Siena, Perugia, Assisi, Venice, Lake Como, Verona and more of the Veneto region, Ravenna, Bologna, Imola, Rome and I also went to Lugano which is in Switzerland.

I made my own travel plans but a lot of student groups do organize trips throughout the year.

**How much did you spend on traveling abroad?**
That is hard to estimate because you have to figure train tickets that are for shorter trips can be about 40 Euro round trip but then the tickets to Rome were a bit more round trip and my plane tickets to Sicily were 50 Euro round-trip. As you can see from those numbers, it is very inexpensive to travel in Europe; your expenses are really in food and shopping.

**Are there any guidebooks or websites that you would recommend?**
Fodor’s is a pretty good guidebook to use.

Overall exchange experience

I felt completely emerged in the culture by the end of my trip. Living and communicating with Italians really helped me out on this. I never got completely adjusted to the local culture but definitely had more than just a taste of it and would love to return to further understand it.
The exchange experience opened up more cultural experiences to me. I have not been very exposed to other cultures and this experience built on my character and gave me knowledge that I can apply in careers past Cornell.

The experience will have a positive experience because now I am more readily able to understand other cultures and transform myself to adjust.

My exchange experience was all about learning and understanding. I was able to walk in the shoes of a person from another culture and experience what that person’s daily life is like. The experience gave me a more worldly perspective on life and I am excited to take what I learned from that experience and apply it to my life in United States.