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Major: Applied Economics & Management  
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Practical information

Visa information

The visa was relatively easy to obtain (3-4 weeks wait). Get your paperwork done early, and check thoroughly. Italy had nobody checking immigration when I arrived (probably because it was a Sunday, when I returned from outside Schengen area they were checking passports.

Packing

What did you not bring from home that you wish you had?  
More books to read (lots of downtime when traveling), football, blazer you don’t care too much about (for going out), nice shoes, some people had tourist books for Italy that were useful, plastic cups (they only have really small ones), extra passport photos (for tram and metro pass), some people forgot shoes or flip flops to wear in hostel showers, multiple button down shirts (guys), long Ethernet cord (15 – 20 feet -- no wireless in dorm room), and Chocolate syrup (I’m a chocolate milk junkie, and they don’t have that in Italy).

What items do you recommend not bringing?  
Don’t bring any kitchen stuff, no need for heavy jacket, power strips (they blow the circuit), any sort of bulk item, IDs from home (other than license), credit cards you won’t use, etc. (lots of pick pockets).

Resources

Where did you find good information on:  
The host university: Bocconi website (www.unibocconi.eu)  
Social events: They have a very good system of handouts and emails  
Movies/shows/concerts: Handouts and browsing on the internet  
Maps/tourist information: Google, tourist guide books  
International office at Host University

What type of reception did you have upon arrival?  
Was OK, nothing too special, but they got people ID’s and housing quickly.

Did you receive (or were you offered) a buddy?  
Yes. Didn’t use the buddy much.

Were there orientation activities?  
Maybe one or two, but most exchange students live together, so people met on their own.

How was the international office staff?  
Like most of the school, they were laid back, and only got things done when they were continuously reminded and pushed to.

Academics

The University

Is there a centralized campus?  
Yes, not many fields, but all the academic buildings are next to each other.

Where do students hang out?  
Dorm, Park next to campus, Columns (when it’s warm), Canals (when it’s warm)

Are there accessible computer labs, wifi, libraries, etc?  
Computer labs look like they are from the 1990s, but are useful for printing, etc. There is wifi throughout the campus but not the dorm, and the library is different than the many at Cornell, but good for studying (from what I heard).

Courses

How was the course enrollment process?  
It was quick and easy, other than the confusion over the fact that you can take lectures that overlap. Also, Add/drop is the second week, and can cause you to miss some opportunities in some classes (by the time I switched, I missed the option to do a group project).

How were the classes structured (mostly lecture? discussions?)?  
All lectures. Each class met 2 times a week for 90 minutes.

Was homework given? If so, how often? How much?  
No homework given. A few classes included projects, but most classes were optional midterm then final.
What types of exams were given? How do they compare to those at Cornell?
The exams are for the most part short answer or essay. The actual material and grading scales are much easier than Cornell, however, the tests are designed for the Bocconi system of being able to take the exam multiple times before accepting grades, and thus the questions are very specific. Because of this, being an exchange student is a disadvantage because you only have one chance to take each exam, while their main student population can take the tests every month until they are satisfied.

How are the courses graded? (e.g., flat, curved?)
Most are flat on a scale from 1-30 with 18 being passing (21 to get credit at Cornell), but some professors choose to curve the grades.

On what criteria are grades based? (e.g., tests? papers? group projects?)
Most classes are either optional midterm (50%) and final (either 50% or 100%). Some include a project or optional projects that are worth part of the whole grade. Did not receive any papers or problem sets in any class. How many classes did you take? I took 4 classes.

Were you allowed to take your exams early? If so, what was the process?
I did not request to take them early, some people I know did, and the response varied from “certainly” to “absolutely not, that is unheard of” from professor to professor.

Life Abroad

Language

Did you have any language problems with faculty? With other students? In daily life?
I did not have any problems as all the faculty and students spoke English (although sometimes broken). The cleaning service was the one group I struggled to understand.

Would you recommend taking a language course before departing?
I would recommend taking the crash course offered by Bocconi, if not just to get there 3 weeks early and hang out with all the other exchange students. Italian was not very important in my opinion, because classes were in English, I lived with exchange students, and most weekends I was traveling. I did tourist things in Italy or other countries (and Italian was not needed -- i.e. in Rome they speak English at the Vatican, in Barcelona its Spanish, Munich its German, etc., etc.)

Was a “crash course” in the host language offered at the university? Was it useful? It was useful to the extent that, knowing no Italian whatsoever going in, I learned how to pronounce the language, as well as many practical basics such as food and how to ask directions. Like I mentioned before, the main value of it is to meet everybody before classes begin (like a 3 week long Orientation)

Banking

Would you recommend opening a local account? If so, which do you recommend?
I did not. I simply withdrew money from my Citibank account at any ATM. I got charged for using other ATMs (like $2.00 per withdrawal), and my bank reimbursed me for overseas charges usually like 5% of withdrawal. I know that many banks have partner banks in Italy and other countries that do not charge any fees if you use them (B of A in Italy is partnered with BNL)

Housing

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

What type of housing (apartment? home stay? dorm?)? Would you recommend it?
They provided a Dorm (converted from a hotel). I give it my full endorsement. While it is a little pricier than finding an apartment, far away from classes (25 minute tram ride), subject to poor cleaning, and (while I was there, internet outage), it is the place to be. The experience of living with 150 other exchange students is alone worth it, but I’ll address each point.

First, some friends of mine searched for apartments and ended up living in hostels for 2 weeks until they could find something and even then it was a double in a stranger’s house. The ride to classes isn’t bad (I was a bit worried at first), but it goes by quick, and you always end up riding with people anyway, plus, being outside the center of the city meant having fields and basketball courts essentially to yourselves. The cleaning of the floors is terrible, but they replace your towels and sheets every week plus clean the bathroom; can’t complain. Plus, I found that those living in apartments gradually shifted away from the rest of the exchange students while still not getting an “Italian” experience. They lived too far away to come hang with the exchange students frequently, and when they did visit, they always regretted having to go home to sleep (no guest policy – but even if there was the tile floor isn’t so comfortable). In addition, coming back from a night out you most often have to get a taxi, and living in the dorm it is easy to find 4 people and split the ride to only cost you 4 euros, whereas apartment residents have a shorter ride, but end up paying more for their solo ride.

How much did you pay for housing? How did you pay for rent and utilities?
Housing was just under 800 dollars a month. Roughly 550 Euros.
Where did you eat? Was there a meal plan?
Not sure whether there was a meal plan or not. Living where I did, I ate lunch out during the days I had class (tons of shops surrounding campus), and there is a huge supermarket with great prices under a block from the dorm, which we shopped at for dinner. Unless of course we were too lazy, in which case there were 6 or 7 pizza places that delivered right to the dorm for as low as 4 euro’s for a personal pie and a free drink (great deal, fills you up too). Also, the best pizza place I had in Milan was under a ten-minute walk from the dorm.

Transportation

What modes of public transportation are available? How much do they cost?
There are Trams, Buses, and Metro systems. They all have the same ticket system which costs 1 euro for 75 minutes of riding. There is a monthly student pass that costs 17 euro a month, plus a 10 euro onetime fee for unlimited rides (the best option). The public transportation relies on the honor system to pay for tickets (only on trams and buses – the subways have turnstiles), but be careful, because they have employees randomly checking buses and trams for tickets, and the fine for having a non-validated ticket is 34 euro.

How/where do you pay for tickets? Are there monthly or commuter passes?
Each tram stop has a small shop somewhat nearby to purchase tickets, and all subway stops have machines for ticket purchase. A few subway stops have ATM points which are essentially the DMV for public transportation, and this is where you go get the monthly passes.

Communication

How did you call home? What was the cost? Did you use Skype?
I generally used Skype or iChat once a week to call home. I also bought an Italian number on Skype (like 18 bucks for 3 months) and had that automatically forwarded to my home phone. That way, I got a local call charge. To receive a call into Italy is free for the receiver, so when my parents called me, they called from work or just ate the cost.

Did you buy a cell phone? If so, what type of plan and/or provider do you recommend?
I had an international phone from traveling prior, but the cheapest phone is what most people did and they bought it within the first few days. The plan I got was great, cost 10 euro’s per month for 250 minutes and 4000 texts to people of the same plan, Wind. If most people are getting the Wind provider, then this makes sense, if many people that you want to text or call get other providers, another plan would be better. Make sure you check out what people are doing.

How long does it take to receive mail? To send mail? What is the cost?
I have no idea. Not sure people actually send mail still. Only thing on this is that if you receive a package, there is an additional charge once it gets there of around 25% of the package’s cost (so if it is a camera worth 100 Euros, then 25 Euros will be the charge to receive it).

Social activities

Did you meet students from the host country?
Yes, they are in classes with you, and you can meet a lot of them at their study abroad fair representing Cornell.

Throughout the semester were there any special activities arranged for exchange students?
There may have been one or two, but most of the activities are either discounts at clubs (every week) or organized by the students themselves.

What do local students do for fun?
Many of them hang out around Milan (play basketball, soccer, Frisbee), go to Como (45 min by train and 4 Euro each way) or go to a soccer game.

Shopping

Where did you buy groceries, toiletries, house wares, and other items?
There is a grocery store under 5 minutes from the dorm. This has all the housewares, toiletries, and groceries you would ever need. The dorms also come stocked with left over kitchen items (pots, pans, plates, silverware, etc) from the last tenant. For anything else, there is an Ikea located on the opposite side of Milan, but a trip there in the beginning for cheaper pots and pans (if you are missing any) is not a bad idea. Also there is a mall a few tram stops further outside the city from the dorm that has cheaper clothing as well as electronic stores.

How do the prices compare to the United States? Did you use cash or credit/debit cards?
The prices are similar in some areas and different in others. Most basic food staples are similar (once you use exchange rate). Pasta is cheaper, imported brand name items are more expensive (Coca cola, Pringles, etc). Clothing is more expensive, but it is also the fashion capital of the world, so it’s expected. I used mostly credit card (I would recommend getting one that had zero int’l fees before you go – capital one visa is what I used) for food and big purchases, but cash for lunches, eating out, and some other purchases.

Are there outdoor markets? If so, do you recommend them?
I didn’t do too much outdoor market shopping (usually just bought a snack walking through, but they are very good, and not all that expensive.

What are general store hours?
Most stores are open from 9am until 9pm with a close for lunch in the middle of the day. The supermarkets and other
lunch stores do not close for lunch (obviously). Most stores are closed on a Sunday, including the closest grocery store, but there is another grocery store located 5 minutes by tram for any necessary purchases.

**What stores are popular? Convenient?**
Esselunga is the grocery store that is right next to the dorm. Went there almost every day to buy food for dinner. Would usually cook in groups of 3 or 4 to make very affordable and surprisingly good food. The mall is also convenient as well as the pizza places. Also a pharmacy (which in Europe is only a pharmacy – no food or drinks) right outside door to dorm, as well as a coffee bar.

**Were there any items that were not available?**
The two that come to mind are Peanut Butter (they don’t like it in Italy and therefore don’t stock it) and Chocolate Syrup (for chocolate milk). They also didn’t have as many brand name American products, but that is to be expected.

**Health and Safety**

**How safe did you feel in your host location?**
It was very safe, had a 24 hour door man, as well as individual locking doors for both your room and from your roommates room. Seemed like a slightly worse-off area at first because of lots of graffiti, but that is almost everywhere in Italy and Europe.

**What advice do you have for future students regarding their health and safety?**
The same stuff as any big city: Don’t walk alone (especially if you are a female), lock doors when you leave, keep track of keys, etc. As for health, I’d bring extra medicine (such as Advil, cold medicine, so that you don’t have to read through Italian ingredients to figure out what medicine is which).

**What resources were available in case you needed medical attention?**
There are hospitals, doctors, dentists, etc. A buddy of mine broke his foot, and had an appointment the next day, and turned out fine. Another had to have a root canal, and he made it out ok.

**Travel**

**Where did you travel while abroad?**
A lot of places: Florence, Rome, Ireland, Belgium, Prague, Como, Belaggio, Menaggio, Lugano, Barcelona, Venice, Verona, Nice, Monaco, Cinquetera, Germany, Amalfi Coast, London, Paris, Greece... and more

**Did the host university organize any trips?**
Yes, they had ski trips, trips to Venice for Carnival, etc. They were also at much better rates than you could book individually.

**How much did you spend on traveling abroad?**
A lot. More than I thought I would. I also did not plan far enough in advance, and therefore paid a bit more for airfare than I thought I would. I’d say a good estimate for any given trip would be: 80 euro round trip flight (60 euro if train – less for day trips), 20 euro per night in hostel (increases as you get toward warmer months), and 30 – 50 euro getting to and from airports. Plus of course spending money for the days you are there anywhere from 100 to, well, let’s just say “too much.”

**Are there any guidebooks or websites that you would recommend?**
For flights: easyjet.com, ryanair.com, skyscanner.net. For lodging: facebook (staying with friends can save you a ton of money), hostelworld.com. For trains: trenitalia.it. Also, Rick Steve’s Guide to Italy was, from what I’ve been told (never actually saw it, but went on trips with people who had it), very useful.

**Overall exchange experience**

**Did you get a good picture of the country? The local and school culture?**
Absolutely. Was definitely different than what I expected, and not in a bad way.

**How did the exchange experience affect you from a cultural and social viewpoint?**
Really opened my eyes to the fact of how different culture is over there. In addition, taught me a lot about how to live even more independently than Cornell does, and also increased my already sensitive view of the value of money.

**What influence do you think the experience had/will have over future career possibilities?**
Not really sure to this point. I am definitely a little more open to the idea of working overseas, but not sure I would want to live there for a long period of time (at least not in a non-English speaking country).

To conclude, I had the best semester I could possibly imagine. From meeting tons of new people (both Americans and foreigners), to traveling the European continent, the past 6 months were a blast. There really isn’t much more to say than that. There are two things that I think make this program the best. First, living in a dorm with 150 other exchange students was something I didn’t hear happening in many other places, and something I didn’t value in making my decision, but wouldn’t change for anything. Second, Milan is the perfect city to study and live in. It isn’t too touristy, it has enough different things to see, three airports to travel from (and a train station), and a great nightlife that trumps many of the cities I traveled to.