

Soc. 389

Cultural Contexts:



Florence, Italy
Maymester, 2019

Dr. Karyn Loscocco
kloscocco@albany.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course, we examine how people are shaped by the cultural contexts in which they live by comparing Italy and the United States. Using sociological concepts and methods, we will go below the surface, attending to patterns that often go unobserved and unquestioned.

We will investigate key elements of culture including habits and customs, norms and values, language and communication. The course makes use of the rich artistic heritage of Florence as an important backdrop to our investigation of contemporary Italian life in Florence and beyond.

Key social institutions such as the media, the economy, and the family shape everyday life and worldviews in Italy and the United States. We will compare the cultural scripts of these and other major institutions. It can be especially difficult to study a culture in which we have grown up because we have little perspective on it – it just seems to be “the way things are”. One of the best ways to really understand our own culture(s) is to be immersed in that of another country. The more we learn together about Italy, the more we will learn about the culture(s) we know best.

Students will build cultural competence, or the ability to analyze, understand, and navigate another culture (or subculture) appropriately. This is a set of skills prized in many different fields of employment today. Throughout the course, each student will hone analytic skills, as you collect and interpret data, and evaluate data collected by others; these skills are also very important to jobs and to civic life.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

At the end of the course, you should be able to:

- ▶ Identify key aspects of Italian culture
- ▶ Explain how people’s attitudes and behavior are shaped by their culture
- ▶ Understand how sociologists collect and analyze data to explain social patterns
- ▶ Demonstrate cultural competence

- Describe and *explain* differences and similarities in Italian and American societies

PLEASE NOTE:

The reading will be on Blackboard or handed out in class. The reading should be done **before** the day it is assigned. You will be in-class quiz questions to motivate you to complete your reading carefully and on time. This will also help me know whether you are getting what you need from the reading.

It is important to take good notes both during class and on field trips. You will need them for assignments. If you are not sure how to take good notes, please be sure to ask about this early!



OR ANY OTHER ELECTRONIC ACTIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

This is a brief overview of course requirements. I will explain each in more detail in class. Be sure to ask if you have any questions about what is expected of you.

1) **Participation.** Everyone is required to participate actively in all aspects of this course. This includes: reporting on reading or assignments, discussing observations, answering questions, completing in-class activities, and asking thoughtful questions/ taking notes when on field trips. If you miss a class, disengage or disrupt (by using electronics, sleeping, chatting and the like), it will not be possible for you to obtain a participation grade higher than 70. This applies to presentations and lectures outside of the classroom as well as inside the classroom.

2) **Cultural Competence.** There will be a variety of short assignments to assess cultural competence, including research on Florence and Italy, the use of important Italian words and phrases, and other key aspects of “getting by” in your new environment.



You should have a notebook with you at all times. Write down anything that you notice as you become acquainted with Italian and Florentine culture. Some examples: what do the social norms seem to be; how do different types of people interact with one another? Does it vary by social status? (e.g. gender, race-ethnicity, age, occupation?); how are physical spaces organized? Record in your notebook what you see, and (*this is the key*) note your reactions to, and interpretations of, what you are observing and experiencing. *Pay particular attention to what*

surprises, confuses, or frustrates you, and write about why. We will then analyze reactions using the conceptual tools of sociology introduced in class.

Each student will report observations to the class, and I will look at the notebooks to provide feedback. You will write a thematic summary and analysis of your observations. Papers (approx. 2 pgs.) should emphasize significant observations and provide social scientific analyses of those observations. We will discuss the difference between a journal entry and a social scientific entry in class. For those without social science backgrounds I will hold an additional brief session to make sure everyone is clear on how to fulfill this assignment.

3) Research Project. You will each investigate a topic of your choice, making a comparison between Italy and the United States. Ask a sociological question and provide some research findings on it. What do you want to know more about? General topic areas include (but are not limited to) families, occupations, advertising, gender, sexualities, work/family policy, crime, immigration, art, health. The project can be in the form of a power point presentation, with about 10-15 slides, or a written paper of about 8 -10 pages. It should include full citations and *incorporate course material to the fullest extent possible.* See Blackboard for further detail.

Please note: You cannot get a passing grade on the research project if you do not integrate course material. This is very important.

Do choose your topic early and work on it little by little. I am available to help you frame a question in sociological terms. Just ask.

4) Assignments.

Group Systematic Observation & Data-Gathering Assignments. Sociological methods include systematic observation. You will take field notes as you observe a particular aspect of Italian life, & compare it to the U.S. using course material. You will also compile data on one or more aspects of Italian culture.

Cultural Exchange Interview. Each student will conduct brief interviews with Italians to answer a research question about some aspect of Italian culture. It makes sense to tie it to the research project topic, but it is not necessary.

In-Class Assessments. You will answer brief questions that assess your understanding of the reading and your ability to connect the reading to lecture material. You should be prepared to answer such questions each day that reading is due, though you will not necessarily be graded on your answers every day. There will be a more formal assessment toward the end of the course: expect a series of short answer questions and a few mini essays on key material from readings and lectures.

Blog Posts/Documentary There is an optional blog post (or video) assignment documenting and reflecting on your experiences.

GRADING:

Final grades will be computed as follows:

CLASS PARTICIPATION.....10%

CULTURAL COMPETENCE..... 25%

RESEARCH PROJECT 30%

ASSIGNMENTS (weighted)..... 35%
(includes in-class assessments)

I will use a scale such that, for example, 90-93= A-, 94-96=A, 97-100=A+, 80-83=B-; 84-86=B
87-89=B+ and so on.

The optional blog post or video is the only extra credit available.

Topics, Readings and Assignments

1. The Sociological Study of Cultural Contexts 05/28 pm (1-4)

- ☐ Cherlin, "When is a Fact a Fact?"
- ☐ Mills, "Sociological Imagination"
- ☐ Schutt, "Field Research"
- ☐ Becker, "Becoming a Marijuana User"

Survival Italian 05/28 am (9-11am)

Discuss Topics for Research Project & Cultural Interview Assignments

How to Observe like a Social Scientist

2. Culture as Meaning: Rituals of Everyday Life 05/29 (10am-1pm)

- ☐ Charon, "Ethnocentrism"
- ☐ Canedy, "The Hurt between the Lines" (perspective taking)
- ☐ Goffman, "Presentation of Self"
- ☐ Swidler, "Culture in Action: Strategies and Symbols"

Reports on Analyses of First Notebook Observations of Italy and Italians

Italian Language Practice

Group Assignment Due Today: Research on Florence & Italy #1

3. Cultural Diversity, Cross Cultural Values & Structures 05/30 (10am-1pm)

- ☐ Ranker, Global Mindset
- ☐ Park, Robert "Reflections on Communication and Culture"
- ☐ Caver and Livers, "Dear White Boss" (Harvard Business Review)
- ☐ Moore, "Racist Stereotyping in the English Language"

Italian Language Practice: Postcard Assignment

Group Assignment Due Today: Research on Florence & Italy #2

4. Gender and Sexuality 05/31 (10am-1pm)

- ☐ Lorber, "Night to His Day" (Group A)
- ☐ Toffanin, "The Role of Neoliberalism in Gender Inequality in Italy" (Group B)
- ☐ Katz, "The Invention of Heterosexuality" (Group A)
- ☐ Messner, "Becoming 100% Straight" (Group B)
- ☐ American Psychological Association, "Masculinity Guidelines"

5. Research on Gender & Sexuality in Italian Culture 06/03 (10 am-1 pm)

Find Internet Data: Power Point Presentation: Small groups

Conduct Systematic Observation Assignment: 1) public life 2) media

Research on Paintings in the Pitti Palace

Report on Your Observations thus far; incorporate course material to the fullest extent possible.

Optional Visit to Metalworker (2:45 pm)

6. Reflections of Culture in Visual Imagery 06/04 (10am-1pm)

- ☐ Jhally, "Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse"
- ☐ Kilbourne, "You Talkin' to Me?"
- ☐ NHMC, "The Impact of Media on Attitudes toward Latinos" (Groups A & B)
- ☐ Readings on the Pitti Palace and the Boboli Gardens

Second Reports on Analyses of Notebook Observations

Pitti Palace Museum Tour; Bring your Observation Notebooks 2 pm

Group Dinner 9 pm

7. Food in Italian Culture 06/05 (10am-1pm)

- ☐ Ward et al. "Sociology of Food and Eating"
- ☐ Labelle, "Bridging Production & Consumption" (Groups A and B, different sections)
- ☐ Popham, "The Slow Food Movement"
- ☐ Readings on the links between eating and health in Italy

Italian Language Practice

Pizza & Tiramisu Making Class (5-7:30 pm)

8. Social Inequality 06/06 (10am-1pm)

- ☐ Loscocco, "Persistent Work Inequalities"
- ☐ Grazian, "The Public Life of Cities"
- ☐ Franzini and Giannoni, "Determinants of Health Disparities between Italian Regions"
- ☐ Lareau, "Cultural Knowledge and Social Inequality"

Quiz on Key Aspects of Cultural Contexts

Italian Language Practice

9. Day Trip to Lucca 06/07

Bring your Observation Notebooks

Italian Language Practice

10. Immigration and the Global Economy 06/10 (10am-1pm)

- ☐ Johnson et al., "Cross-Cultural Competence in Business"
- ☐ Cecchi, "Criminalization of Immigration in Italy" (Group A)

- Frisina and Hawthorne, “Italians with Veils and Afros” (Group B)
- Perrotta, “Behind the Cheap Tomato: Migrant Workers in Southern Italy”
- Kelly, “Immigrants and Business”

Group Assignment Due: Research on Florence and Italy #3

Systematic Data Collection: Immigrants 6/10 pm (3:30-6:30)

11. Marriage and Family 06/11 (10am-1pm)

- Falcinelli and Magaraggia, “Gender Innovation in Italian Families”
- Newspaper accounts of contemporary issues such as marriage equality (LGBTQ), “mammismo”, and work-family conflict.
- Johnson and Loscocco, “Black Marriage through the Prism of Gender, Race and Class”

Italian Language Presentations

12. Cross-Cultural Comparative Summary: Italy and the United States 06/12

Reports on Observations of Italian life

Cultural Exchange with Italian university students (8:30- 10:30 pm)

MAKE A NOTE!

Cultural Exchange Interview Due via Blackboard July 10th

Research Project Due via Blackboard July 30th

Arrivederci! Mi mancherete molto . . .