

Soc. 389

Cultural Contexts:



Florence, Italy
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Overview

By comparing Italy and the United States, we examine how people are shaped by the cultural contexts in which they live. Using sociological concepts and methods we go below the surface, attending to patterns that are often unobserved and unquestioned. The course makes use of the rich historical and artistic heritage of Florence, while also investigating contemporary Italian life in Florence and beyond.

Active learning is emphasized, both inside and outside the classroom.

We will investigate key elements of culture including habits and customs, norms and values, language and communication. Key social institutions such as the media, the economy, and the family shape everyday life and world views in Italy and the United States. We will compare the cultural workings of these and other major institutions.

I will use the interests of the class to decide which specific topics we will emphasize. A sampling of past topics covered includes: the environment; marketing; health; immigration; race, gender, and sexuality. In addition, each student will do a short project on a topic that fits well with their particular academic interests.

Skill Building

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. Thus in addition to all of the benefits of studying in another country, students will be able to demonstrate their ability to engage productively with people who are different from themselves. Our classroom work on cultural competence will be reinforced by the fact that you will be immersed in your new culture, living with your classmates among Florentines, buying food at the local markets, and engaging in cultural exchanges with Italian students.

Throughout the course each student will hone analytic skills, as you collect and interpret data, and evaluate data collected by others; these are also very important lifelong skills.