



# *The Signpost Online*

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## **Studying abroad provides more truths than cliches**

By **Claire Zulkey**  
Campus Correspondent - *Georgetown University*

I could go ahead and say that life as I know it will never be the same, that I have become completely well-rounded and mature, and that now I'm ready to face anything in this world with a confident and appreciative attitude.

But that would not be true, and, possibly worse, it would be a cliché. And I don't believe that somebody should study abroad to pursue a cliché.

I spent my entire junior year in Italy, studying in Fiesole, a small town located just outside Florence.

I'll spare you the summer-vacation-book-report version of my studies abroad, but must provide some background info: Instead of a salad or container of Raman for lunch, I ate a four-course Tuscan meal every day. Instead of schlepping across a quad to get to class, I stepped out of a century-old villa and into famously tended gardens. My classroom had a view of the Duomo, and road-trips took me to Austria, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Germany, Russia and Switzerland.

All right, so there were some downsides, too. Because of visa labor restrictions, I was completely financially dependent on my parents. I had to take a 15-minute bus ride to get access to the Internet. The time zone between my boyfriend and me wasn't one hour, but six. And yes, there were times when it seemed as if my brain didn't have enough storage space for all of the directions, languages, rules, regulations — and, ah, yes, academics — I was introduced to over the last year.

Despite the hassles, would I recommend studying abroad? By all means yes. For how long? That's a personal decision, but I can say I know a lot of people who studied for one semester who wished that they had stayed longer. I don't know anyone who wishes they'd cut their time short.

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I have a feeling some of the lessons I learned abroad will come to me years from now and that I'll be saying goofy things like, "Gee, I bet I picked that up during my junior year." But there are some benefits I can clearly identify already. For starters, I've become infinitely more independent. I'm more comfortable with being on my own and with making important decisions for myself.

I'm also less of a whiner and much better about establishing — and honoring — priorities. I don't complain as much about small things I can't change, and I've decided to make more of an effort to do the things I want, not the things I feel obligated to do.

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Believe it or not, I'm also a much better student and worker. OK, so this is partly because there was no American TV in Italy, partly because I wanted my parents to know that I wasn't squandering their money and partly because I realized it was time to grow up and start doing my homework.

I've become a big proponent of taking time to study abroad, but at the same time squirm when I hear those general marketing phrases: "the chance of a lifetime," "priceless experience," and so on. Taking time to study in a foreign country is not something that can be glossed over and described in a few trite adjectives; it demeans the experience to do so.

Not every instant of living in Italy was picture-perfect. Sometimes, it was downright annoying, lonely and frustrating. But I recommend study-abroad programs to all college students because I think we deserve the opportunity to reach for that well-roundedness, maturity and ready-to-face-anything-in-the-world ideal.

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