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CWIL Travel Grant Essay

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My Trip to Siena

This summer I spent a month in Siena, Italy. My time there consisted of taking Italian lessons at a local language school while living with an Italian couple. I went to Siena because I spent my sophomore year on Saint Mary's Rome program and, of course, I fell in love with Italy. I wanted to go back to Italy to learn more about the Italian culture. I didn't want to be just another tourist; rather I wanted to be immersed in the culture and I wanted to improve my Italian language skills.

Since my time in Siena included four weeks of Italian lessons, the bulk of my experience revolved around going to school and speaking the language. I was enrolled in the Dante Alighieri language school. My favorite part about going to school there was the variety of students that were enrolled in the school. There were students from American universities who used the school for their Italian abroad programs. This was actually very funny because the same day I arrived, students from the University of Utah arrived. Since my information included that I was from Utah the school was very confused and thought that I was with that group. Aside from young American students there were students of many different ages who were from all over Europe. Many of them were adults, with already established careers and lives who were just learning another language, maybe for a job or just maybe for themselves. I was thoroughly impressed with these people. I loved that no matter how old they were or what they were doing with their life; they choose to

continue their education. I often think that I have to cram all that I can into my education now as if I will no longer have opportunities to explore other areas of interest outside my college career. However, these people helped me understand that, as nerdy as this sounds, I have a lifetime to learn new things and to explore new areas of life.

In addition to going to school I lived with an Italian couple. This part of my trip was amazing. Living with a family made such a difference. Because I lived with them I had the opportunity to speak with them all the time. Since my Italian is still very elementary I couldn't understand everything that was being said but I learned so much anyways. It is hard to explain but just being there in the culture and being around all the little things that make up life really give you a sense of the culture.

One of my favorite parts about living with the family was, of course, dinner time. It was not really about the food (although that helps) but rather it was about the time I spent with the couple. Everyday the woman would cook the meals and since I like to cook I would watch her so I could learn. I couldn't really help her because she was doing so many things at once I would have just gotten in the way. This time usually included the woman and I trying to figure out what I wanted to eat. It didn't really matter that much to me but since I was a vegetarian she didn't really know what to feed me. Meat in Tuscany is a big thing so for me to be a vegetarian was shocking to her. Shortly after she started cooking, her husband would come home and help her get ready for dinner. During this time we would usually talk about random things or watch TV. It was a great time for me to get to know the couple and to just watch and listen to an Italian family interacting with each other. I loved it.

The best part of going to Siena for me was not seeing the sites or traveling but instead it was my interaction with the people around me. I loved talking with them, learning where they were from, what they liked to do, and just basically who they were. I loved that I got to know so many people from different places and that I got know the family that I stayed with. My suggestion for anyone who is traveling abroad is to really get to know those around you and you will find that you will learn so much.