

*We sat upon gritted leather, upholstered decades ago, within the echoed, boxy living room of our Florentine apartment, ceilings near twelve feet tall. French windows creaked back and forth in a light, early-spring breeze, cool air blowing onto our statuesque faces. Minutes ago, I saw an email from Muhlenberg: “Updated COVID-19 Recommendations For All Students in Italy.” It was recommended that we leave, return to the United States with our peripheral tails between our legs, dragged on the ground, getting caught on lost experiences and possible memories. We had to leave.*

*We ran, with unrepentant glee and abandon, shouting into the moonlit streets. “We have to do something! Climb a tower! Find a midnight bakery! We have to do it all!” We tumbled up the serpentine cobblestone path up to Piazzale Michelangelo, a piazza that overlooks all of Florence, affixed with a gargantuan marble church that stands atop the hill. At the center of the piazza is David. Not the real David, but a replica, an artist so interested in being a part of this grand city’s DNA that they cloned the most famous man in Florence and stood him in its most famous square to gaze down at the slurry of yellows and browns and beige.*

*I sat on the stairs across from Him and looked down at the slurry. Street lights danced like little lucciole on a moonlit lake, and they illuminated the past two months of our lives. I could see where I watched two children play soccer below the statue of Ferdinando I atop his horse. I could see where my friends and I danced on top of the walls above the Arno. I could see memories and possibilities of memories all amongst those stones, the best storytellers of all.*

Though Florence and Italy have an obvious magic, my Italian Studies minor undoubtedly deepened my experiences there beyond what would’ve been possible without it. I could immerse myself more, try my best to speak Italian to the locals (despite their best efforts to not speak Italian to me), and feel intimately connected to everything around me. Italian Studies allowed me to connect with a host family in Florence, have meals with them and speak only Italian. My minor was something that I never would’ve thought I would graduate with.

Before Muhlenberg, I studied German in high school. After that, I took two semesters of French at Moravian. I didn’t even consider taking Italian until it came time to pick my language credit at Muhlenberg, sadly (but fortuitously) the only credit that didn’t transfer from Moravian. I chose Italian solely because my older sister had studied in Florence a few years prior, and my family had visited her for ten days, Florentine magic coloring my own first experience outside of the United States.

It goes without saying that Italian Studies is fascinating, fulfilling, and the study of any language deepens your linguistic skills in every way. But maybe what surprised me most is that Italian was consistently *fun*. Being in one of Dr. Leisawitz or Daniela’s classes, or coming up with events for the Italian Club while I was president, was endlessly fun, engaging, and even when it was

difficult, it was never a chore to be in class. Going forward, I'll always be grateful for the skills I gained through the study of a language, but while I was actually studying and in class, I was most grateful for it always being fun.