



Lynette Lobban

Within the walls of a 13th-century Italian monastery, University of Oklahoma students are getting a 21st-century education in engineering, business, political science, art history and almost any other class they might take during a semester on OU's Norman campus. But one component offered at OU-Arezzo isn't available in Norman — learning how to feel at home in the world.

“I had not lived anywhere other than Norman,” says Cheyenne Hale, an entrepreneurship sophomore, who spent the fall semester at OU-Arezzo (OUA). “My dad told me that to be open-minded you needed to see other cultures. I learned about Italy, but I also learned a lot about myself. It gets you out of your comfort zone.”

Hale is one of more than 2,000 OU students who have studied in Arezzo since 2006. Most of that time was without a physical campus to call their own. But President David L. Boren had a vision for a permanent OU presence in Italy, and in the summer of 2016, the former Santa Chiara monastery in Arezzo became the “Kathleen and Francis Rooney Family Residential Learning Center.” After seven years of renovations, the center includes classrooms, conference centers, kitchen and dining areas, faculty suites and living quarters for 48 students.

Opposite page - Students enjoy the view from the bell tower at the former Santa Chiara monastery, where they can grab a quiet moment among the city rooftops under a gorgeous Tuscan sky.

“It was a facility for cloistered nuns, so it worked for student-residential space,” says Kirk Duclaux, director of Italian programming and professor of art history at OU-Arezzo. “Plus, it has the added bonus of a large Tuscan garden in the back.”

The center, in the heart of the old city, is both functional and beautiful, blending the best of OU tradition with Italian art and architecture. Even the landscaping seems to have the familiar touch of OU First Lady Molly Shi Boren. Students love it.

But more impressive than the place is what happens there.

“I see big changes in our students' maturity,” says Duclaux. “It's transformative. They see what's wonderful and what's problematic about Italy and they gain a new appreciation for the United States. They have a greater appreciation for the world in general.”

Faculty and advisers on both the Norman and Arezzo campuses work closely to give students a study-abroad experience without falling behind in their required classes. Each summer, Price College of Business offers six courses that have become so popular there is now a waiting list. For the spring semester, Price has expanded its offering to include 15 hours of marketing and supply-chain management. And each fall OU engineering professors visit Arezzo for a month at a time, teaching four core classes in rotation.

“People used to talk about how engineers don't have a very good chance to study abroad without losing credits or taking another year of school,” says Billy Ramsey, Norman senior. “For someone like me, who is working their way through school, that's a big issue. But here, I not only kept up, I was

The Best of **Both Worlds**

From earning capstones to making tiramisu, students who attend OU-Arezzo get the rich taste of study abroad without losing credits at home.

By Lynette Lobban

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Founded by the Etruscans around 800 B.C., Arezzo grew into a bustling urban center during the medieval ages. Today, the town of 100,000 in the heart of Tuscany celebrates its rich past while fully integrating into the twenty-first century world.

able to complete my capstone — and it’s not just engineers. They make sure they offer courses that are relevant to your major.”

With the help of John Dyer, OU professor of electrical and computer engineering, Ramsey completed his capstone in Arezzo, while teaching robotics to middle schoolers.

“We did a pilot program,” says Ramsey. “But we also worked out a lesson plan for next year, so middle schoolers can continue STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) outreach. At the end of the semester they will build robots to compete in jousts since jousts are really popular here.”

This coming fall, David Sabatini, David Ross Boyd Professor of Civil Engineering and Environmental Science, will teach on water sources and water conservation. “All of us try to bring the relevance of being in Italy to our courses,” says Dyer. “You’ve got the aqueducts and moving water back to B.C. times. So, we try to fit in the history and Italian culture to help students get the most from their onsite experience.”

In addition to business and engineering, students can take Italian, art history, chemistry, biology, political science, history, international studies and other disciplines from the faculty in residence, who stay a year at a time and teach two courses each semester. Josh Landis, director of the Center for Middle East Studies and professor in the College of International Studies,

will begin his faculty in residence at OUA this coming fall.

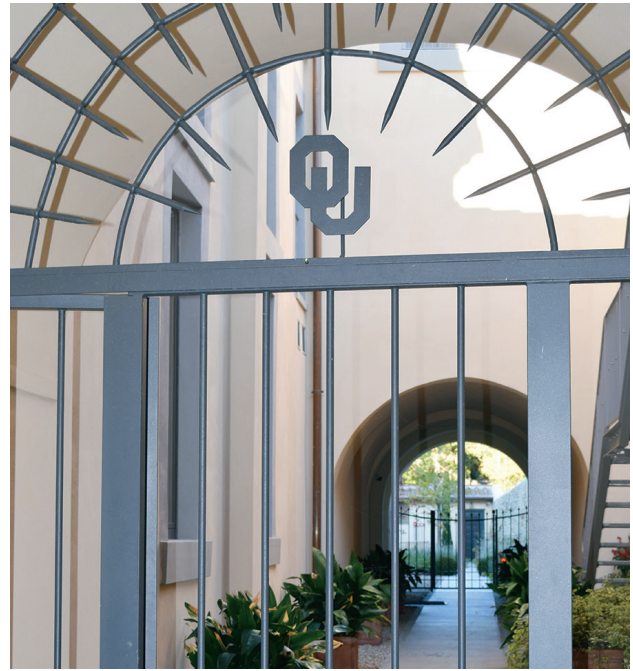
Since Arezzo is in proximity to some of the greatest museums in the world, Duclaux has an advantage few art history professors can offer. “I don’t talk about Michelangelo unless we’re standing in front of a Michelangelo,” says Duclaux. Even engineering majors take his classes.

In addition to coursework, students are encouraged to participate in outreach programs that give them international work experience. Edmond junior Abigail Agosta, an international development major, interned with the Museo Archeologico, a natural history museum built over the ruins of a small colosseum.

“When you go outside of the museum, there are the ruins of its former life,” says Agosta, who is minoring in art history. “After it was a colosseum, it was a monastery. So, there are artifacts in the museum that they found on site. Pottery, coins, it’s really cool.”

Agosta edited English translations of label text throughout the museum. She also researched areas that needed more clarification, learning about past civilizations along the way. “It was an amazing way to get my foot in the door,” says Agosta, who is now considering museum work as a career option.

Hale interned at a local high school, teaching English. “The teachers were really happy to have a native speaker come in



Above left - OU students Cheyenne Hale and Billy Ramsey, both of Norman, say that their time at OU-Arezzo gave them a greater appreciation for the world around them and the confidence to be a part of it.

Above - OU-Arezzo is making its mark on the community through engagement with local businesses and schools, and with philanthropic outreach, including a fundraiser for victims of the central Italy earthquake in 2016.

Left - Food is a big part of Italian culture. Marco Polverini and his family own a café near the OU-Arezzo campus, but they also prepare meals for OU students five days a week.

Photos by Lynette Lobban

and it was a great way to integrate with the community,” she says. “The kids were very enthusiastic. And at the same time, they helped me with my Italian. We laughed at each other’s mistakes.”

Lucio Bianchi, student services coordinator and Arezzo native, helps pair students with meaningful outreach during their time at OUA. Bianchi attended OU on a grant in 2008 and has an affinity for the university and its students.

“There are many opportunities for OU students to participate in Italian life,” says Bianchi. “‘Cugino Aretino’ is a translation of the OU Cousins program. Students are invited to have lunch or dinner with an Italian family. They can also choose to live for a whole semester with an Italian family.”

Students also work with faculty and staff to host a “Thanksgiving Big Event” for the community each semester and provided relief for victims of the central Italy earthquake in August 2016.

“When you live in the same place as your professors, there’s more interaction,” says Hale. “I did have a bit of homesickness

around the holidays, but it’s easy to Skype family and stay in touch.”

At Arezzo, the OU family is not just a metaphor. Duclaux’s wife, Charlotte, is OUA’s director of Student Affairs and oversees student housing, incoming orientation and student cultural activities. The couple’s young sons, Max and Alessio, are growing up as international citizens.

“We want every OU student to experience this,” says Duclaux. “All of our disciplines, from engineering to art history, are similar to the mosaic of a stained-glass window. Students can look through that glass and see a different reality. They can leverage that experience when looking for a job or in everyday life. I truly believe this is a life-changer.”

OU has study abroad opportunities in more than 80 countries and 200 cities around the world. In addition to Arezzo, OU has campuses in Puebla, Mexico, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. For more information, visit http://www.ou.edu/content/cis/education_abroad/.