It was an intense three weeks abroad. We all returned exhausted, yet somehow changed. It is an art historian’s dream to teach on site, in front of a “real” work of art or architecture, and at last I had fulfilled the wish that I had expressed so many times in the classroom: “If we could travel here right now—if I could ‘beam’ us over—this is what we’d see.”

It is an entirely new experience for students to examine an art object in its physical context, rather than isolated on the wall of a museum or in a slide. We shared the students’ excitement as they discovered a masterpiece in person for the first time and grappled with the day-to-day challenges of living in a foreign country.

Maria Frank, associate professor of Italian, who co-taught the course with me, describes it this way: “Despite things in common, Italy and the United States are, nonetheless, different worlds, especially when it comes to daily life.”

Domenic Barrett ’06 shares some of his initial bewilderment. “The supermarket was a little challenging. I needed some cream for my coffee. There were all kinds of milk, but I couldn’t find anything that looked like half-and-half. I basically guessed, and I’m still not sure what it was, but it worked.”

Our Italian journey began and ended in Rome, Italy’s lively—and, at times, chaotic—capital city. Our first full day there, we fought off the jetlag to embark on an eight-hour tour through the ruins of the Roman forum. This was the dramatic beginning of a series of walks through medieval towns; the churches, palaces, and museums of Renaissance Florence; and miles of corridors in the papal palace of the Vatican, where our voyage culminated with a visit to Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel.

“Everything in Rome was so amazing,” says Kristen Shaw, a sophomore. “We saw the Colosseum—I mean saw, stood in front of, and took a picture with, the Colosseum…. Everything here makes you feel small. It really reminds you that you are only one person in this huge world… not to mention the billions of people before our time.”

Those seven days in Rome proved to be in marked contrast to our two-week stay in quiet Prato, a medieval town nestled in the heart of Tuscany. In Prato we resided in a renovated 13th-century palace in the ancient, walled city center. Our Renaissance culture and literature courses took place in the classrooms of the 18th-century Palazzo Vaj.

For the art, architectural, and urban components of the study trip, students braved long walks through the cold, wet climate of Italy in the winter. In exchange for battling the elements in the low tourist season, we often enjoyed almost private viewings of Renaissance masterpieces, buildings, and monuments in Rome and Florence.

I am proud to report that our students adjusted to the rhythm of life in Italy with grace, open minds, and good humor—all important assets for living abroad.
Eight Days a Week
TWO NBC INTERNS PUT IN LONG HOURS AT 2006 OLYMPICS

BY TRISH CHARLES

For some Americans, the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy, were a bit disappointing. No Michelle Kwan, no successful “Hurricane” jump from Speedy Peterson, no Bode Miller anything. But two University of Hartford students had a completely different Olympic experience.

Mark Goodell, a sophomore in The Hartt School’s music production and technology program, and Chris Heerema, a senior majoring in audio engineering technology in the College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture, traveled to Torino in early January to begin internships with NBC Olympics. For Goodell and Heerema, that meant taking a crash course in real-world remote-production engineering condensed into nine weeks of intense, 12-hour days.

Was it worth it? “Absolutely,” says Goodell, after returning to the United States. “There was never a day when I was bored with what was going on around me. And I felt like my program had given me a sufficient amount of preparation so that I wasn’t eaten alive out in the field.”

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As soon as the two students arrived, NBC staff wasted no time getting them oriented to the network’s operation, starting them off in the International Broadcast Center, which was part of NBC’s master control center for the Olympics. After a few days, Goodell and Heerema moved to the field shop, where they helped build and test racks of audio and video equipment for various venues.

Eventually both would work on a number of sites with the professional engineers, helping to set up and test the audio at the snowboarding half pipe, the Piazza delle Medaglie (Medal Plaza), the curling venue at Palaghiaccio, and speed skating at the Oval Lingotto in Torino, to name a few.

How did two Hartford students become part of the largest broadcast production in the world? In February 2005, representatives from NBC’s Olympics production team came to campus to recruit student interns. Bob Dixon, senior audio designer with NBC, is a longtime friend of Scott Metcalfe, director of music production and technology at Hartt.

Dixon was looking for college students trained in music and technology with the listening skills to make subjective decisions about what they were hearing, as well as students with extensive electronics training to help with setting up and troubleshooting audio systems. Enter Goodell and Heerema.

“This is the first time that students from the University have been involved with the production of the Olympic Games,” says Metcalfe, adding that this internship may be the first of many, since NBC Olympics has contracted to broadcast the Games through 2012.

Both Goodell and Heerema received very high marks for talent, dedication, and enthusiasm from their supervisors, Mark L. Butler and Lloyd Jacobsen, both professional audio integration engineers with NBC Olympics. And Bob Dixon is very pleased with the results.

“I think this has been a perfect internship. These two have been stars here. They are talented, hard working, and extremely professional, and they have contributed more than we ever could have imagined. They are wonderful representatives of the program at the University of Hartford. The school should be very proud of them. I know I am.”