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Dear Parents:

I am writing to you as a fellow parent and UC Davis faculty member. I team-teach the Painting in Rome and Umbria class with my colleague and husband, Hearne Pardee. This has been one of the most exciting teaching moments for me in my twenty- five years of teaching, as I witness our students learning how to live in Italy. Another lovely outcome of this class is getting to know my students well. We have run the class for the last two summers, and all of the students have made lasting friendships with one another and with us.

Many of our students had never traveled outside of the US before this class and within a couple of days, everyone finds their footing. We are housed in a beautiful villa in its own park-like setting outside of Corciano, a small hill town in central Italy. The setting is perfect for new travelers, as the local village is so welcoming to American students. The staff at the Villa also assists our students in myriad ways, everything from how to mail a letter to buying a train ticket and finding hotels for optional travel on weekends.

The most fun for me is seeing our students experience great art in person such as the Sistine Chapel and the Vatican in Rome. They are astounded at the scale and difference of seeing these masterpieces up close versus in texts or on line. They become inspired in their own painting, as they are exposed to more art in Italy.

We punctuate our daily classes in painting with field trips to such renowned art cities as Florence, Siena, Assisi and Perugia. Students paint four mornings a week and then we take all day field trips on Fridays. We fit in other local trips and activities, with the help of our hosts, who introduce us to experiences individual travelers would not have. For example, last year we went to an artist's studio and he invited all thirty of us for a barbeque and dinner afterwards! Weekends are used for optional travel or just relaxing at the Villa. All students who travel on weekends have to sign out with very specific instructions for contacting us or them.

When we move to Rome for the last ten days, we make sure to give tips for safe urban living to the class. Students all are in touch with one another and us by cell phone. I have been amazed at how everyone watches out for one another.

In the present financial climate, paying for this program can be a challenge. But traveling in a group and taking a class offers students so much more than if they did a cheap trip on their own. I want to point out that the fee includes living accommodations and three scrumptious meals on most days at the Villa, that students get 8 units of upper division art credit, and that all field trips (transportation and museum admissions) are covered. We also try to add into the class as many extracurricular activities as we can, and cover those expenses.

Please e-mail me if you have any questions about anything. The Italy program has been a life changing experience for all of us, students and faculty alike.

With best wishes,

Gina Werfel
Professor of Art