

Camila Marino
UC Davis '15
Florence: September – December 2013
Scholarship Recipient 2013

Dear County of Santa Clara/Province of Florence, Italy Sister County Commission,

I want to thank you so very much for providing me with this scholarship opportunity that I benefitted from during my last four months in Florence. This scholarship gave me the ability to not only pay for my textbooks, but also gave me the opportunity to enjoy so much that the beautiful city had to offer. During these four months, I tasted new foods, took an Italian cooking class, participated in Florence's annual breast cancer run called "Corri La Vita", ate gelato on the Ponte Vecchio, climbed onto the terrace of the Duomo which is only open once a year, and saw so many of the gorgeous pieces of artwork in the various museums throughout Florence.

The first week that I arrived in Florence, I was filled with so much excitement for what was in store for me those next four months. I had no idea what to expect, and had no idea what to see first upon my arrival. I was very lucky to find out that every year on September 8th (Virgin Mary's birthday), the terrace of the Duomo in Florence is open to the public. One of the pictures that I attached is from that day, in which I climbed up many stairs to be able to see the view from that portion of the Duomo. I took advantage of many of the tourist opportunities during my time there, and I also climbed the Bell Tower of the Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore, went to the Gucci Museum, took a nice walk through the Boboli Gardens behind the Pitti Palace, stared in awe at the detail of Michelangelo's David in the Accademia, and enjoyed Sandro Botticelli's lovely *Birth of Venus* and *Primavera* paintings in the Uffizi. Not only were the museums and tourist attractions beautiful, but also simply walking through the streets of Florence was a very satisfying way of listening to the language and experiencing a typical day in the life of a Florentine.

My main purpose for studying in Florence was to have the opportunity for personal growth, to practice the language, and to appreciate authentic Italian cuisine. I am very happy to say that I improved in the language a great amount, and I can proudly say that I can hold a conversation with a native Italian. I successfully watched Italian movies with no English subtitles, practiced my Italian whenever I went out to restaurants or stores, and picked up many of the local habits and unspoken traffic, gastronomic, and even every-day life rules that Florentines abide

by. For example, I learned that in Florence it is not normal to order a cappuccino after 11 am, Italians do not eat eggs for breakfast, their bread is made without salt in order to prevent it from becoming stale, it is considered rude in [non-touristy] places to ask for parmesan cheese to add to your pasta (the dish is made perfectly and asking for anything that will alter the chef's masterpiece is an insult), men do not wear shorts in public no matter how hot it is outside, flip-flops and gym clothes are not appropriate attire outside of the beach and gym, there is no such thing as personal space, and traffic laws are basically non-existent (they call their red lights "partial reds"; if there are no cars around, the red light does not count). I was amused by many of these practices. I appreciated learning and adapting my living habits so that I could really integrate myself in their culture. Since food is a huge part of Italian culture, I took a cooking class where I learned to make a three-course meal of eggplant appetizer, fresh pasta, and tiramisu. Taking this class was so much fun, and a great introduction to learning how to use local ingredients to cook meals for myself. I have attached a picture of some friends and I flattening the fresh pasta through the pasta maker.

My experience in Florence was everything that I had hoped for (and more!) and I accomplished everything that I wanted. It truly was a life-changing experience and I look forward to being able to go back one day. This trip could not have been made a reality without the support of my friends and family and without this very generous contribution from the County of Santa Clara/Province of Florence, Italy. I am so very blessed to have been able to call Florence my home for these past four months thanks to all of you.

"Grazie Mille"!!!

Sincerely,

Camila Marino