

Erin McDonnell
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Dear Class of 1955,

Thank you so much for the gift that allowed me to study abroad in Florence. Over the course of my months in Italy with the Associated Colleges of the Midwest program, I was given the opportunity to pursue my love of art history in the birthplace of the Renaissance, study fine art under the guidance of practicing artists in an historic atelier, begin exploring and immediately using a new language, and expand my understanding of Italy's unbelievably rich history and culture with side trips to cities such as Rome, Venice, and Padua, all while getting to spend time with amazing professors and a wonderfully welcoming (not to mention culinarily gifted) Italian host family. This was, in the first place, an utterly invaluable academic experience, and also an experience that has allowed me to bring to the Cornell campus a broader perspective and a deeper respect for the importance of finding common ground with others; for instance, on many nights with our host family we sat down to dinner with not only their visiting Italian relatives and friends but with students like ourselves, coming from Brazil, Switzerland, Japan, etc., and on those nights we all had to fumble around with our Italian in an attempt to communicate but still managed to celebrate and sympathize with each other. Such experiences have given me a renewed sense of the importance of supporting one's own community (wherever that may be), and are also that reason that I think I will look back on my semester abroad as a time that was in many ways character-forming. After all, aside from underscoring the value of empathy in a world that is becoming increasingly globalized, every day spent stepping into and navigating a totally foreign world filled with people vastly different from myself gave me skills and insights that I could not have gotten in any other way, and I was ultimately left with a more mature worldview and a better sense of myself as an individual and as a global citizen.

What's more, the study abroad experience you helped me to have has been invaluable in more tangible and immediate ways, in that it has given me much more confidence in my post-graduate plans and in my ability to meet my future career challenges. Having pursued this particular program because of my passion for art and my goal of becoming a studio art professor, I have come through not only more dedicated to that goal but more qualified in every way to pursue it. So, as I enter my last year at Cornell and come ever closer to taking my next steps into the world, I can treasure my study abroad not just as a time of personal growth but as one of the best preparative experiences I could have asked for to get me ready to pursue the career I've always wanted.

For all of these reasons, it is difficult to express just how much my study abroad has meant to me. Once again, thank you for having helped to make this experience possible, and for your continued support of these life-changing opportunities.

Sincerely,



Erin McDonnell, Class of 2013

