



Inaugural Exchange Students Share Language, Culture

Being the first to do something can be exciting and challenging. You may not know exactly what to expect, and you may not know exactly what is expected of you.

For Aurora Brescia, Paul Gagliardi, Dan Leiting, Antonella Piperno and Thomas Wood – the first exchange students between the University of Wisconsin-Parkside and the Università della Calabria in Italy – learning meant more than keeping your nose in a book.

Gagliardi, Leiting and Wood traveled from southeastern Wisconsin to the southern portion of Italy in the fall of 2005 for their studies at the Università della Calabria. Brescia and Piperno came to UW-Parkside in January for the spring 2007 semester.

“I told Aurora and Antonella, we’re the first students to be doing this and to expect things to be different – not to expect things to be comfortable right away,” Gagliardi said. “Once you get comfortable, you can begin to enjoy your experience.”

Gagliardi spent 10 months in Italy and called it “the experience of a lifetime.” However, it wasn’t always smooth sailing.

“When I arrived (in Italy), I did not know one word in Italian besides ‘ciao.’ For that reason, things were a little bumpy in the beginning,” he said. “After a few months, I began understanding and speaking enough to get by and I could do the things I needed to do.”

Wood described his time in Italy as a “great series of moments which have created a unique memory.”

Brescia and Piperno agree that attending classes in the United States is the best way to learn English. “Not only the language,” Piperno said, “but the culture and the different style of life. You can improve a language by studies, but to touch – in a certain way – the culture and the style of life, you have to see it in person.”

One of the things the young women from southern Italy had a chance to see in person was snow. “I brought my boots and coat because I know the weather is very different,” Brescia said. And while southeastern Wisconsin is home to many families of Italian descent, Brescia and Piperno

said the food is not like at home – but that’s OK.

“Every flavor is different, Piperno said. “I think the best way when you visit a foreign place is not to miss your things. You have to enjoy the peculiarities of every country – not (try to) find what you miss.”

In Italy, Gagliardi found an important part of his life. “The Università della Calabria is in Cosenza, the city that my father’s family emigrated from,” he said. “One of the most memorable parts of my trip was when I went to see my great grandmother’s house, which is still how it was over 100 years ago. For me, it was a very emotional experience and it is something that I will never forget.”

When Brescia and Piperno return to Italy they’ll have many stories to tell, including the one about how much paperwork an exchange student must fill out. Brescia says they will also tell their friends to “come here because it’s nice and it’s the best way to learn and improve a language.”



Paul Gagliardi

Antonella Piperno and Aurora Brescia

Dan Leiting