

The Umbra Institute

Community Engagement and Service Learning



Students who engage in their communities reap far more from the study abroad experience than those who don't. This is why Umbra has cultivated programs to foster a mutually beneficial relationship between American students and the Italian community. Community engagement at the Umbra Institute enables students to collaborate on meaningful work with schools, businesses, and other local institutions. The Institute personalizes these projects to meet the needs of both students and community partners.

Service learning is a type of community engagement that combines community service with traditional classroom work. The integration of these two components allows students to directly apply academic knowledge, skills, and awareness while collaborating with a local community partner. Service learning goals include achieving service reciprocity and program sustainability, as well as incorporating students' reflections into the academic course.

True to the Umbra Institute's mission of immersing students in the local culture and developing their skills and motivations, community engagement in Perugia offers a hands-on interpersonal and intercultural experience. Umbra works hard to provide a transformative, student-centered learning environment through feedback, personal reflection, and experiential opportunities.

This experiential learning method moves students beyond the casual engagement with the local community that is often associated with study abroad. Instead, it offers them an opportunity to give something back. Participation in community engagement while studying abroad can lead to many positive short- and long-term academic and personal outcomes. The chief objectives are to immerse students in the local community, broaden their cultural perspectives as a way of developing intercultural awareness and sensitivity, and help them see their home communities from a more comparative, global perspective.

Types of Community Engagement Opportunities at the Umbra Institute

The Umbra Institute has developed a variety of curricular initiatives and projects grounded in experiential learning, including:

1. Community Engagement-Based Courses
2. Courses with a Service Learning Component
3. Honors Program and Independent Study
4. Direct Enrollment at Local Universities
5. Directed Activities and Outreach Initiatives

1 Community Engagement-Based Courses

This model provides an opportunity for community learning through classroom discussion and student-based research with a final product including a project defined by community needs. Umbra offers the following community-engagement-based courses:

INIT 350 Academic Internship and Seminar

This course has two main components, one experiential and one reflective. The first component is an internship placement with a local school, cultural institution, or business. The internship is a means of applying intercultural communication skills and gaining practical field-specific experience. The second component is a seminar that provides students with a theoretical framework and develops critical thinking skills through guided journals, reaction papers, and the completion of a final project.

SOIT 350: Perugia's Urban Fabric—Past, Present, & Future

The purpose of the course is to develop an awareness of how contemporary culture bears the imprint of the past and how future solutions to urban problems must recognize and build upon the past. Students deepen their knowledge of the city and understand the role individual organizations play in the creation of local culture.

2 Courses with a Service Learning Component

This model integrates experiential and traditional learning by applying analytical methods and concepts developed in the classroom to a specific project or case study. The Umbra Institute strives to develop projects that fit both course goals and the current needs of its community partners. As a result, projects can vary from one semester to the next, often giving American and Italian university students the opportunity to work together.

BSEU 390: Business in Europe: Environment & Practices BSIM 390: International Marketing

Both courses include a group project in which students conduct an analysis of an Italian company's internal organization and its external ambitions, or plans, for conducting business internationally. Students visit local companies, meet with managers, and perform elaborate business analyses where the set of problems to be analyzed are defined in collaboration with the companies. Students have partnered with a wide range of businesses, from small, family-run companies to those with an international profile, including the Perugia soccer team, the Lungarotti winery, and the regional government of Umbria.

SOIT 360: Contemporary Italy: Culture, Society, and Trends

Students from this course are given the opportunity to apply and participate in the service learning program called La Famiglia Italiana Project. Selected students are assigned in pairs to a host Italian family in Perugia. Each week, students meet the families and participate in their typical routines and cultural activities. Through La Famiglia Italiana Project, students gain a clearer understanding of course themes discussed in class, along with knowledge of Italian customs and practices from an insider's perspective. The host families appreciate the opportunity to improve their English language skills and to learn about the student's culture, while Umbra Institute students improve their Italian language skills and learn firsthand about Italian culture.

PYHD 430: Human Development in Culture

This course introduces students to theory related to the ecology of human development. Using the course readings, students work in small groups preparing an action-based research project in collaboration with local elementary schools. The goal is to critically reflect on the processes of ecological development, enculturation, and socialisation by applying theory to practice. To conclude the project, students prepare a group report and present their findings at the end of the semester.

3 Honors Program and Independent Study

This model welcomes students with a desire to move beyond the standard academic program while thinking critically and introspectively about the immersion experience.

The honors program consists of two tracks:

- Independent Research Track
- Community Engagement Track

The Independent Research Track allows students to engage in an independent research project of their choosing while working closely with a faculty advisor. The core courses in this track are *ISRM 400 Research Writing & Methodology Seminar* and *ISIR 499 Research Project*. Students who wish to conduct an in-depth study without enrolling in the honors program can choose an independent study as a stand-alone course. Working one-on-one with a faculty advisor, student research projects have ranged from studies in psychology and sociology, to a student-curated exhibit of works by local women artists, to an exploration of the Italian food system.

The community engagement track combines the interdisciplinary honors course with a community-engagement-based course or internship (*INIT 350 Academic Internship and Seminar* or *SOIT 350: Perugia's Urban Fabric—Past, Present, & Future*).

4 Direct Enrollment at Local Universities

Umbra students have the opportunity to gain a truly immersive experience in Italian culture and in the European style of education through Direct Enrollment at a local university. The chief objectives of these programs are for students to integrate language proficiency with a deeper understanding of the Italian culture, to be fully involved in Perugia's university life as a local resident, and of course, to become fluent in Italian.

The two Direct Enrollment options are:

- The University of Perugia
- Italian Language and Culture Program at the University for Foreigners

Students find it to be a rewarding and personally defining experience to take all their electives in Italian, studying alongside Italian and international students. By choosing one of the two Direct Enrollment options, students become active members of an Italian academic community. In addition to living with international and/or Italian students, they have full access to the facilities at the local universities and a wide variety of sports and social activities.

About the Umbra Institute

Nestled in the historic center of Perugia, Italy, the Umbra Institute offers semester, summer, and year-long study abroad programs for American and Italian college students. Since its origin in 1999, the Institute has continued to set itself apart as a provider of distinctive academic programs, allowing students the opportunity to learn both in and beyond the classroom in the vibrant city of Perugia. Continuing its tradition of excellence, the Umbra Institute offers exciting opportunities for service learning and community engagement, internships, and volunteer activities. Umbra semester programs include:

- The General Studies Semester Program (Free Elective program)
- Italian Language & Culture Program (Direct Enrollment at the *Università per Stranieri di Perugia*)
- Direct Enrollment at the *Università degli Studi di Perugia*
- The Food Studies Program
- Academic Internships, Service Learning, and Honors Programs

Our Ideal Location

Perugia is located about halfway between Florence and Rome in Umbria, a region known as the "green heart of Italy" for its lush natural treasures and central location. Umbria is a large and diverse region—abundant with mountains, lakes, river valleys, and agricultural fields—and is well-situated for those enticed by the local hilltop towns and scenic luminescence of Umbria and Tuscany.

As the regional and provincial capital—known in Italian as "capoluogo"—the city of Perugia is a focal point for many visitors to the region. This authentic and intimate town exudes regional pride for its art, tradition, and cuisine, not to mention a history that spans over 2,500 years.

Remarkably, the historic center of Perugia has preserved an old-world feel, uniquely characterized by its Etruscan walls, medieval churches, winding cobblestone streets, and Renaissance and Baroque architecture. Against this charming backdrop, you'll find many modern amenities. Corso Vannucci, which pierces the city center, is a broad pedestrian thoroughfare constantly pulsing with energy from the countless restaurants, jazz cafes, pubs, and cultural exhibits nearby.

One of the most appealing aspects of Perugia is its population. Nicknamed Italy's "University City," Perugia is home to tens of thousands of students—the largest single group in the city—who attend the *Università degli Studi di Perugia*, the *Università per Stranieri di Perugia*, and the many studio and performing arts schools in the area. Living and studying in Italy's preeminent university town offers extraordinary educational and cultural opportunities. Students have the opportunity to interact on a daily basis in and out of the classroom with both local Italian students and their professors. It's difficult to find a more appropriate backdrop for truly immersive student life in Italy.



Discover More

For additional information about community engagement and service learning, please send an email to info@umbra-institute.com or visit the Umbra Institute website at www.umbra-institute.com.

THE UMBRA INSTITUTE

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5 Directed Activities and Outreach Initiatives

The Umbra Institute seeks to supplement the in-class academic community engagement programs with a series of extra- and co-curricular activities and outreach initiatives—like opening the Institute to local Italian students. Umbra actively pursues and develops opportunities to work closely with various charitable institutions, businesses, and social groups within the community to provide students with a vast array of opportunities to integrate themselves in their new surroundings and learn from first-hand experience. These initiatives include:

Italian University Students at The Umbra Institute

Italian university students can earn credit by enrolling in elective courses at Umbra. Sharing the classroom experience with Italian students stimulates discussion on course topics and heightens intercultural awareness and knowledge. As a way to build further ties between American and Italian students, they also participate in various community engagement activities such as volunteer workshops, language tutoring, and the Tandem program.

Using Perugia as a Classroom

Perugia is a medium-sized city with a strong tradition of hosting students from around the world who come to study the Italian language. It is a regional setting in which students are offered an "authentic" environment where Italian can and often must be used. This sets the stage for a richer study abroad experience. The language classes at the Umbra Institute include a strong cultural component and use the city of Perugia as a living laboratory. Each semester, all students begin with a week-long immersion in the Italian language in which afternoons are dedicated to "Getting around Town" and include outside-the-classroom exercises and excursions, all conducted in Italian.

Co- and Extra-Curricular Activities

Engaging with a variety of volunteer associations and other institutions in Perugia helps students become active participants in the local community.

Volunteer Programs (UNICEF, Monimbò)

The Umbra Institute offers a variety of opportunities for students to become involved in the local volunteer community. With UNICEF, an international children's rights and relief organization, Umbra students work side-by-side with Italian students from the University of Perugia and local UNICEF volunteers to design and sew dolls known as "Le Pigotte." These dolls are the very symbol of UNICEF in Italy and are sold to raise money for children's vaccination kits. Students may also volunteer with Monimbò, a local fair trade cooperative, promoting goods that protect workers' rights and the environment. Examples of collaborative work with Monimbò include assisting with store operations, the monthly fair trade market, public education and awareness campaigns, and marketing projects.



"The Independent Project I conducted through the Honors Program provided me with a unique opportunity as an undergraduate student. Not only was I able to engage in direct ethnographic research—it was in a global setting. Working directly with a faculty member mentor exponentially improved my academic writing skills, while interviewing locals helped me pick up Italian quickly."

Gabriella Paiella, Northeastern University, Honors Program, Fall 2010

Study
abroad
in Italy



Experiential Learning: Let Perugia Be Your Classroom

**Community Engagement and Service Learning
Programs at the Umbra Institute**



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