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University professors split their time among a wide variety of tasks, primarily research, teaching, and committee work. Hopefully, our scholarly research adds to the body of knowledge in the professors' fields. Personally, I have had some success in this endeavor, and my own research has been mentioned in the New Yorker, as well as been cited by professors at Ivy League institutions. At a minimum, working on research keeps professors actively engaged in their discipline in a way that keeps them up to date with the advances in their fields. Personally, I find myself frequently discussing recent research findings in my classes that I only became aware of through my own research.

Of course, professors teach traditional classes on their institutions' campuses. In some ways teaching on the university level, in several different fields at least, is akin to working as a translator. We take a body of knowledge that exists in a highly technical and sometimes mathematical format, and we figure out how to explain and apply this knowledge in a way that is comprehensible to students. In economics, professors break down sophisticated models into easily understandable small steps, and then the professors show how all of these steps can be brought together, so that students can use our models. In my own teaching, my aim is for my students to be able to do economic analysis, using our various models, and not just be familiar with economics. A student who can perform economic analysis has received a better education than one who merely recognizes and is familiar with the economics done by others.

Aside from research and teaching, professors spend a substantial amount of time doing committee work. My role on committees is typical of the role played by most professors. I have contributed to the efforts that have led to the hiring and retention of several excellent faculty members. I have helped steer scarce resources to the most productive uses. I have also helped change the rules the university follows in ways that influence the interaction between faculty on the one hand and administrators, students, and other faculty on the other hand.

Like most professors, I can point to successes in research, in teaching traditional classes, and even in serving on committees. However, I am becoming convinced that my most significant job related impact may occur each summer. Along with two other faculty members, I lead a study abroad trip that allows students to spend the month of June in Florence, Italy.

Over the years, most of the students on our trip have identified their study abroad experience as the single most important academic experience in their undergraduate education. This trip even offers teaching moments when the classes are not in session and when the students are on their own, which I will discuss below.

When we are in Conway, Arkansas, many of us go through life, at least partially, on autopilot. We do many things out of habit without giving any thought to what we are doing. When students go to Florence, so many things are different that their autopilot will not work and they have to actively think about what they are doing almost constantly. For instance, students have to weigh their own produce in the grocery store, navigate cities and travel between them without a car, find drop off locations in the city for their garbage, and figure out how to talk with merchants with only a few words of Italian and an abundance of hand gestures at their disposal. Because Italians are not as punctual or reliable as Germans or Americans, students often find that things do not go as expected. For instance, one year our class was visiting Orsanmichele Church. We got there right when the church was supposed to open its doors, but the church opened 30 or 40 minutes late. The class used some of the now unscheduled time to catch up on their journals and to discuss the material that we were seeing that day. Because things are not as predictable in Italy as they are in the U.S., students learn to readjust their plans as unexpected events unfold. The ability to be flexible and not be tied to an idea or schedule that is not working is a lifelong skill that will serve the students well in the United States.

Italians live their lives much differently than we do in the United States. When students see this different approach to life, they will see some aspects of this life that appeals to them and they will start incorporating these aspects into their own lives. For example, a restaurant never gives you a check until you ask for it. Many students find that they appreciate the slower pace of Italian life. They come back to the U.S. with the idea that a meal is an event and that the social aspect of a meal is important, so consequently the fast food culture that students may have immersed themselves in before our trip may be discarded and replace by the Italian mindset. Further, Italians shop for food every day. Consequently, their stores stock food that tastes good, while in the U.S. we often shop infrequently, so our stores stock food that has a long shelf life. Once students taste the food in Italy, many of them change the types of food that they eat. In short, travel exposes students to different approaches to life. It makes them realize that the way that they have been doing things is not the only option available. Travel gives them alternatives, which allows them to more easily reexamine the lives that they are living.

I have been lucky to team teach the classes in Florence with two of the finest educators at the University of Central Arkansas, Dr. Ken Sobel and Dr. Ann Bryan. Every year the three of us come back to Conway exhausted, but strongly suspecting that the study abroad trip may have been a life changing event for some or even most of our students.

Every June, I have students go on our trip that have never been on a plane before. The study abroad trip gives them the confidence and the ability to travel on their own after their time in Florence is over. My Mom likes to recite a quote by Saint Augustine that perfectly captures the benefits students gain from a study abroad trip. St. Augustine said, "The world is a book and those who do not travel read only a page." I think of the study abroad trip as a way to provide students with a second page to read, as well as an experience that allows them to obtain additional pages to read.

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