

1 [CONFIDENCE]

# BLESSING IKPA

**College Degree Program:** Criminology–Sociology  
**Study Abroad Program:** Italy

*"I chose to study abroad because I wanted to take control of my life again and push myself completely out of my comfort zone. I knew that I wouldn't see the personal growth in my life that I hoped for without this opportunity, so I decided a mere five months beforehand that I was going to Italy for a semester. I never looked back!"*





*"And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." - Marianne Williamson*

As the plane prepared for landing, I looked out my window and instantly thought that I had made the biggest mistake of my life. When I stumbled through the line to officiate my presence in Italy with a bright, red passport stamp, I hoped I would somehow get rejected and be forced to go back to the comfort of the United States. When the bus made its way down the winding roads towards the speckled city of Arezzo, the phrase "cat got your tongue?" could not describe me better than in that very moment. From the moment we landed in Rome and through the entire two-hour ride to Arezzo, I had not made a peep. I could not believe that I was actually going to spend five months in Italy. From dreaming about this moment since freshman year to the preparation during my sophomore year, I was finally in Italy for my junior year. And I thought it was all a complete mistake.

The nerves ran their course the first few days in my new home (the nerves even caused me to sleep past an orientation I had the next day – oops!) and I remember calling my mother, voice shaking, saying "... I made it!" In my opinion, I made it through the most difficult part, which was

leaving behind the familiarity of Norman and my loved ones. Even with my brief hesitations, I was ready to make the most of my study abroad trip in Italy. I had dreamt about this moment ever since freshman year, but I had no idea my dream would ever become a reality. Myself, along with so many others, made this trip happen. My mom always told me to "go confidently in the direction of my dreams," and I was going to spend five months doing just that.

I never understood how the concept of love could be applied to a physical place until I lived in Arezzo for a semester. We arrived after the holiday season, but all of the lights were still strung around the city, and I could not believe that I had the opportunity to make a home out of Arezzo. The sense of feeling as though I had made a huge mistake in studying abroad completely vanished. Wandering around the streets of Tuscany with my newfound friends, I felt a sense of confidence. When I thought that I could not possibly study abroad and leave home for five months, here I was, living a completely new life hundreds of miles away. I was smiling more, eating tons of gelato, practicing my Italian and truly immersing myself in Italian culture. I could not walk out of my apartment without my heart bursting for joy every single day because I was living in the most beautiful place in the world (at least, in my opinion)!



I had days when I felt less than confident with being abroad. In choosing to study abroad, I turned down many opportunities. I would check social media and see what all of my friends were doing back at OU. I was consistently trying to live two lives – my life in Italy and my life at OU. But I knew that if I wanted to get the most out of my study abroad trip, I would need to devote my time to engulfing myself with everything I could about Italy, and Europe in general, before my time was up. Once I was able to put aside my life at OU for the time being, I fully became entranced with all that Arezzo had to offer me. My confidence grew because I realized I had the strength to create new paths for myself. I was able to leave behind the comfort of home in order to experience something even more spectacular.

I never felt more like myself than during my time abroad in Italy. I miss the days of sitting on the patio of my apartment with my roommates or (poorly) attempting to cook Italian cuisines. I miss the days of walking to my favorite restaurant, Bar Stefano, with my friends and chatting it up with the people who worked there. Arezzo became home because I took the time to make it a home. I learned that I had the ability to go anywhere in this

world, and make something new out of it. I could move away from home, make new friends, have new experiences and be confident that everything happens for a reason.

My biggest lesson learned while living in Italy was that I am completely in charge of my destiny. Many people did not believe I could actually live in a foreign country for five months and most people were waiting for me to fail. I was scared that I would also fail myself, and I would have to live with that failure. I believed in myself and believed in what I was capable of achieving. The little seed of confidence I had in myself when I first made my appointment to speak with the OU in Arezzo advisor fully bloomed during those five months abroad, and I did not even recognize myself when I stepped foot back onto American soil. I learned a completely new way of life, and I wanted to make sure that I brought these aspects into my American lifestyle. Like my mother always said, "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams" and you will never be wrong. She could not have been more right.