

Introduction

In the Spring semester of 2013, all the teachers of Writing II (the second semester writing course for first-year students) at NYU Florence were asked to develop a global reading list and to replace the research paper we usually assigned with a multi-media research project. In this essay, I will describe the results of those innovations and their implications for our program and study abroad in general.

Innovations in Writing II: A global reading list and a multi-media research project

In our first meeting on designing global syllabi in the Fall semester of 2012, a visiting faculty member from NYU Manhattan stressed that our work on it should involve thinking about what the word “global” means.^[1] In my view, there’s bad global and good global. The former is a hangover from imperialism: it seeks to impose the ways of the dominant actor on the rest of the world.^[2] (An obvious example of this is the spread of McDonald’s.) The latter is about diversity and cultural encounters that are not at all imperialistic in that they involve the meeting of different cultures as equals, with no agenda to preach, convert, or exploit but aiming simply to learn from one another, to learn about otherness.

Some might argue that study-abroad programs have a lot in common with McDonald’s: they are sprouting like mushrooms all over the world, and their effects on local communities are sometimes detrimental.^[3] Some Florentines, for example, resent the fact that a significant number of the most beautiful, valuable, and historically important villas in Tuscany are now owned or occupied by foreign universities, such as Harvard at Villa I Tatti, Georgetown University at Villa Le Balze, NYU at Villa La Pietra, The European University Institute at Villa Sciffanoia, Villa Salviati, and the Badia Fiesolana, and the University of Paris at Villa Finaly. On the other hand, our presence certainly boosts the local economy, and the effects of study abroad on students are – for the most part^[4] – a fine example of “good global.”

In August 2012, about 100 eighteen-year-olds moved into Villa Natalia – the dormitory on the NYU campus in Florence – where they lived together for a year before moving on to New York. Sixty percent of the first-year class were U.S. citizens, the rest were from various countries, including Austria, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, India, the Philippines, and South Africa. About thirty five

percent were non-native speakers of English.

Though their intercultural experience on campus is extensive,^[5] many first-year students have little engagement with their host city. The campus is a mile out of the city center, students have a full schedule of classes from Monday to Thursday, and they often travel to other European countries on the weekends. For these reasons, most of them rarely go into town during the day and meet few Italians. They spend their free time in Villa Natalia, checking their social media, playing computer games, and partying together. They go into the center in groups at night to frequent the pubs and clubs.^[6] When we first discussed asking students to do a multi-media research project instead of the usual research paper, it struck me as an opportunity to improve this situation.

The 2013 syllabi for all teachers of Writing II in Florence shared two main elements: a multi-media research project and a global reading list. The former – as I saw it in December 2012 – was an effort to get students out of Villa Natalia and into town, to get them to think about their own cultures and those that surrounded them;^[7] it seemed an excellent idea. The latter was a little more problematic. That semester, we read Shakespeare, Baudelaire, Maupassant, Pirandello, Mansfield, Rhys, Borges, O'Connor, Einstein, Walcott, Garcia Marquez, Soyinka, Morrison, Rushdie, Mandela, Murakami, and Pamuk. In previous years, my readings for Writing I and II were entirely made up of texts originally in English and therefore the authors were predominantly British and American. Since the first-year Cultural Foundations and Social Foundations courses^[8] are both “global” in the positive sense of not being centered on Anglo-American art and thought, it seemed to me that the writing course could justifiably focus on literature originally in English (the course is, after all, designed to improve students' writing in English). It was with some reluctance, then, that I set out to develop a reading list in which nearly half the texts were in translation. I now consider that the gains in diversity of ideas and newness offset the losses to close reading that translation obviously entails. Most of the class had never heard of many of the authors, even those who were Nobel Prize winners.^[9] Another emphatic plus was that the authors were as ethnically diverse as the readers.

This is the assignment for the multi-media research project I gave the class at the beginning of semester:

Choose some aspect of Florence and produce a multi-media research project on it. You will have as much freedom of choice as possible, but I have provided a list of suggestions below for those

paralyzed by freedom. You can work alone, in pairs, or in groups of three, as you please. The research project will have a written component (max 2000 words), some of which (at least 1000 words) should be in essay form, presenting the research and citing the sources. The rest can be various kinds of writing: transcripts of interviews, poetry, journal entries, restaurant reviews, whatever you like. There must also be an accompanying Power Point or Prezi with other media of your choice: photographs, video clips, drawings, maps, collages, music, you name it. At the end of semester, you will present your project to the class.

For example, pick a piazza. Spend time there taking photographs and/or making short videos, interviewing the owners of local businesses, getting a sense of the life of the piazza now and of its history. Is there a market there in the morning? What is the nightlife of this piazza like? What happened there during the Second World War or the flood of 1966? When were the buildings that define the piazza built and for what purposes? If you write poetry, write a poem about it. If you draw, do a few sketches of it....

I went on to provide eleven more examples of aspects of Florence that might interest them, from African street vendors to the Accademia, gay rights to Galileo. Most of the end-of-semester presentations that resulted from this assignment were interesting and original.

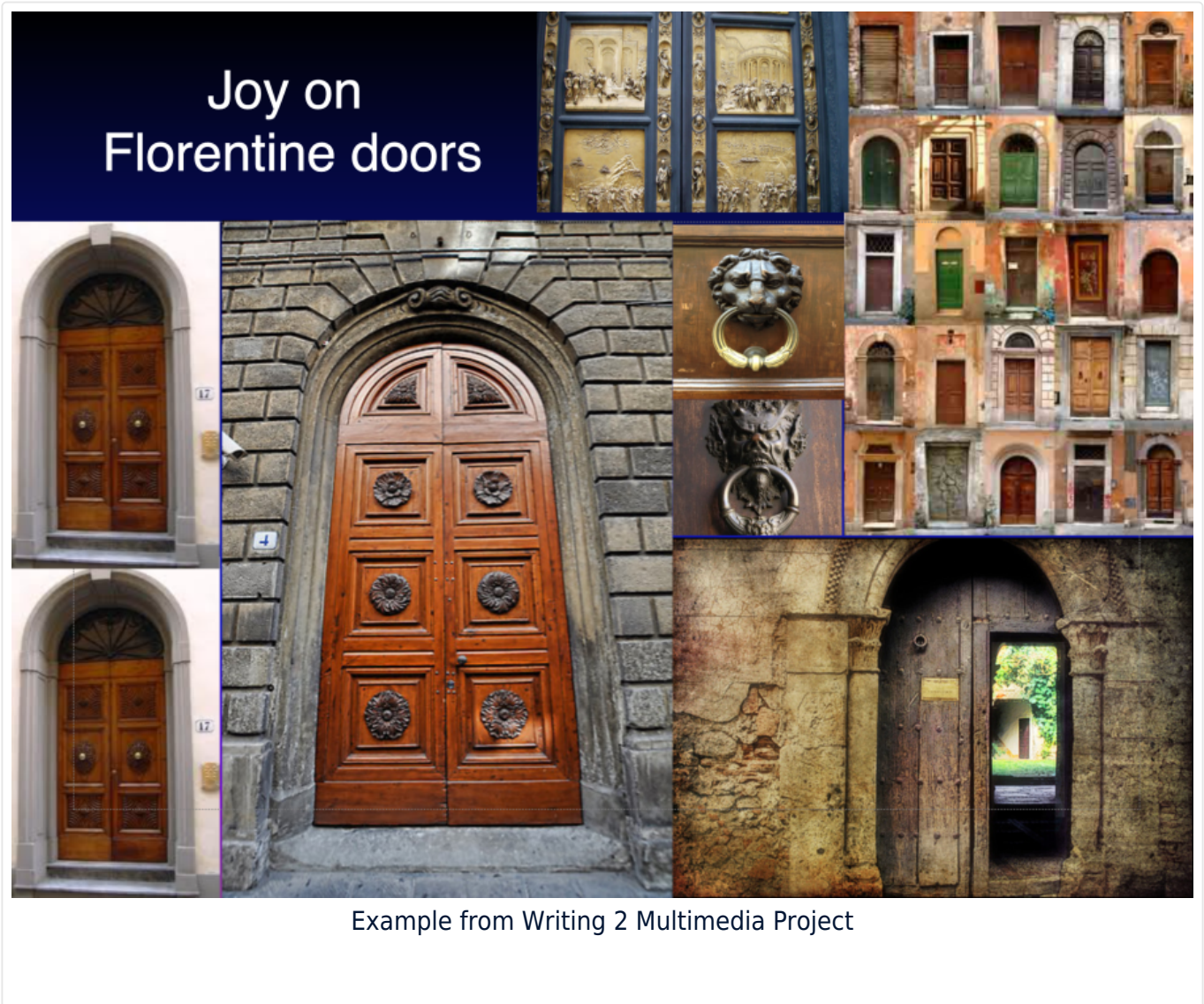
Seven multi-media research projects from Spring 2013

The projects my students completed that semester were all interdisciplinary, importing techniques and analyses from different fields of study, including art history, architecture, political science, economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, and marketing. I would like to focus, in various degrees of detail, on seven of them.

Joy, from Nashville, Tennessee, chose to work on Florentine doors. She was one of the few who addressed the issue of what “global” means directly, and she did so with the wit, charm, and incisiveness that characterized all her writings for the class:

To me, this is as universal as it gets: our most utilized objects telling our histories for us. “What’s more global than doors?” I thought. “Practically everyone knows what a door is. Most people can probably claim at least one as their own.” Plus, doing a project on the doors of

Florence would give me a solid reason to wander completely random side streets, with the aim of experiencing new doors.



Lila, from a small town in Maine, researched the history of the Boboli Gardens and became a frequent visitor there. She took photographs at different times of day, in different weather conditions, and - over the arc of the semester - in different seasons, as the Boboli slowly moved from winter to spring. The intensity of this young American woman's gaze on an Italian Renaissance garden was at times almost poetic:

I took a special interest in this fountain, after I realized that, on several of my visits to the gardens, the same heron perched on the sculpture of Neptune. The heron often stood directly below Neptune's trident, a striking image as the dynamic sculpture captures Neptune in the act

of plunging his trident. I find the combination of the live but completely still bird and the inanimate but dynamic sculpture in a narrative situation captivating.



Amanda, from Brazil, researched the 2013 Italian election. When she began, the election was just two weeks away; when she completed the first draft of her project, over two months later, Italy was still without a government. This is the opening of the essay component of draft 1:

After years of Silvio Berlusconi's flawed leadership, Italy had Monti's technocratic government struggling to deal with rising economic problems. In February this year, Italians had a great opportunity to choose their new leader, and yet the situation is still muddled: there seems to be no apparent solution, as all involved in the matter refuse to cooperate. In an effort to explicate the elections and what resulted from them, as complicated as it is, I will begin by explaining the Italian electoral system, move into describing the candidates and conclude with the reality of what happened and speculations on what will happen next.

Amanda on the 2013 Italian election

Year	Real GDP Growth %
2002	1.0
2003	0.5
2004	1.8
2005	1.0
2006	2.2
2007	1.8
2008	0.5
2009	-5.5
2010	1.9
2011	0.5
2012	-1.5
2013	0.5

Year	Spain (%)	Italy (%)
1995	65	115
1996	65	115
1997	65	115
1998	65	115
1999	65	115
2000	65	115
2001	65	115
2002	65	115
2003	65	115
2004	65	115
2005	65	115
2006	65	115
2007	65	115
2008	65	115
2009	65	115
2010	65	115
2011	65	115
2012	65	115

Example from Writing 2 Multimedia Project

Amanda attended a series of conferences at NYU at La Pietra, in which Italian and American scholars debated the issues and analyzed the results of the election. She wrote an article on one of these conferences for *La Stampa* newspaper, which she included with her essay as a second written component. The multi-media element was a Power Point with photographs of the politicians, political cartoons, and charts. Three days before her presentation, Italy finally got a government. I told Amanda she did not need to discuss these new developments, but she did, doing more research at the last minute and adding more slides to her Power Point.

Tin, a Romanian American from Atlanta, Georgia, wrote about local hip-hop dancing. He explained why in the opening of his presentation:

When I was accepted at New York University, I was excited about joining the breakdancing

scene in New York, but then I heard my acceptance required me to reside in Florence for my freshman year. I assumed there would be no hip-hop scene in Italy and felt disappointed. Nonetheless, I had to dance, so I created the first dance club on campus. It gave members the chance to collaborate and expand one another's dance knowledge. We have already had sessions for hip-hop, Venetian waltz, jive, ballet, modern, and belly dancing. Then I discovered that there was a hip-hop scene in Florence, so I attended Danza in Fiera, an annual ballet and hip-hop event that allows upcoming and experienced dancers to take classes taught by world-renowned dance teachers.

Tin's study of the Florentine hip-hop scene was both historical and sociological, or perhaps anthropological. After outlining the history of hip-hop worldwide and in Italy, he compared and contrasted the dress, manners, and attitudes of Italian and American hip-hop dancers. He found the Italian scene more fashion-conscious, less aggressive, and more open to influences from other kinds of dance, such as ballet. The multi-media elements of his presentation were a collage of hip-hop posters and a Power Point with video clips of performances and interviews.

Koret, from Turkey, began by researching the history of perfume-making online and found that perfumery in Europe originated not in Paris, as she had previously assumed, but in Florence, as a byproduct of work on medicinal herbs done by Dominican monks in the Middle Ages. She visited the Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella (founded in 1612), and interviewed Lorenzo Villoresi, a leading Italian perfume-maker. The questions in her interview were subtle and thought-provoking; Villoresi's answers betrayed a very Italian kind of creativity. Here are two examples:

Q: What is the right way of wearing a perfume?

A: There is no such thing as a "right" way of wearing a perfume. Traditionally, perfume is dabbed or sprayed on the wrists and on the neck because these are warmer parts of our body and the warmth allows a better diffusion of the fragrance. But it is also true that some people prefer to spray the fragrance in the air and then walk in the cloud of mist so that tiny drops of fragrance go also on their clothes and hair. Other people prefer to put a little amount of fragrance just on the cleavage, beneath the clothes, so that the fragrance is hardly perceptible by the others and becomes a very private pleasure.

Q: How would you describe the relationship between someone's psychology and his perfume? What would you suggest to people who want to choose the best-fitting perfume?

A: *The "perfect" fragrance must reflect your personal taste and in some cases it should be like a psychological dress, a vade-mecum that speaks about your story, your psychology, your tastes, your personality as well as your dreams and desires.*

In her presentation, Koret showed a Power Point with images of Villoresi's studio and the Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella and handed round a tiny vial containing a trace of *Acqua della Regina*, a perfume created for Catherine de' Medici in the sixteenth century (Koret had obtained the vial from the Farmaceutica the previous day). It was a startlingly original interpretation of "multi-media," and Koret's classmates were surprised and intrigued by the opportunity to sniff the scent of a Renaissance queen in their classroom in 2013.

Jimmy, from the People's Republic of China, researched the Fiorentina soccer team. He attended several soccer games at the local stadium, interviewed soccer fans, took photographs, and researched the history of the Fiorentina team online. Although he himself became an enthusiastic fan, he saw the negative side of soccer fans' group behavior. In his introduction, which was about soccer in general, he had this to say about dedicated fans:

They show their loyalties even to some traditions and cultures that lead to controversy. Take Premier League as an example. The soccer teams here are like different tribes in the Stone Age. Some big tribes, including Manchester United, Liverpool, Arsenal and Chelsea, detest each other for even a hundred years. The soccer games between them are more like fights. Players are encouraged by home fans to display martial arts, rather than simple soccer skills. The stadium becomes an arena, and players are the gladiators. Filthy fouls, bleeding scenes and red cards are abundant in this kind of game. When they go out of the stadium, the fans of rival teams are gifted in humiliating others. They make up insulting songs, draw sarcastic cartoons. In the worst case, sanguinary conflicts take place.

Sam, from Monterey, California, did his project on walking through Florence by night. One of the most interesting things about Sam's project was the reason for his night-walks. In the first semester, he saw that his fellow-students were taking full advantage of being able to drink legally. He didn't want

to attend parties every Friday night, so instead he left Villa Natalia and went walking through the city. He wrote about it in his introduction. As an African American, and often the only one present in any given situation, he felt that he represented his community and that it was his duty to contradict stereotypes:

If society expects me to act no better than the “average unruly college student,” I display only extreme maturity and tact. If society expects me to speak improperly, then I speak with the utmost eloquence.... That “black tax” does, without a doubt, weigh heavily on my shoulders, my heart and my mind; however, I carry that great weight proudly, careful to exclude pride. It makes my individuality a significant part of a greater whole. My own actions can change the perception of the black community. Being an African American has unquestionably changed my life experience in terms of how I am perceived and treated, but what it has done even more is given me a higher sense of social responsibility that I know I will never lose.

His night-walks gave Sam a completely different perspective on the town center:

In the absence of those generally present, going about their business and personal interests, the city takes on a quaint serene beauty. In the absence of light, Florence humbly reveals its nature, not gaudy yet grandiose. In the night, it takes on an entirely new air. In every empty piazza and on every silent street, the city divulges the purest account of its greatest stories.

Assessing the advantages and drawbacks of the innovations in Writing II

Towards the end of semester, when the students had all done their presentations and submitted the final drafts of their projects, I asked them what they thought of the assignment. Was it more interesting than the traditional research paper that used to be required for Writing II? It was okay, they said. At first, they hadn't liked the idea, but by the end they didn't mind it. They thought the instructions were unclear. Some of them would have preferred a simpler assignment with clearer instructions, even if that meant less freedom of choice. These opinions were expressed not only by the weaker students but also by those whose projects had shown complex and creative engagement with their chosen subjects.

Well, that was rather disappointing. In order to understand it more thoroughly, I gave out a questionnaire on the last day of class, asking for more detailed written answers to the question I had asked the previous week, among others. The results were enlightening and affected my adjustments to the Writing II syllabus for the following year.^[10]

First, students were anxious about grades: they felt that the grading criteria on a straight research paper were clearer, so they knew what they needed to do to get an A.^[11] Not only did the project involve elements some of them had never done before but they didn't know how these elements would be evaluated. In order to address this problem, the following year I arranged one-to-one meetings to check the progress of each project before the deadline for the first draft. In the meeting, I indicated how I would evaluate each element of that particular project.

Secondly, they were dismayed to find that their Italian language skills or lack thereof would affect their grades in Writing II as well as in their Italian course (in which many of them were doing rather poorly). I had already addressed this problem at the beginning of semester by referring them to the Italian teachers for help developing interview questions and suggesting that someone with weak Italian-language skills should team up with someone who was more fluent. No one acted on either of these suggestions. One could have taken a tough stance on this and conclude that they had only themselves to blame, since they had ignored my advice. Another tough stance would be to dismiss their discomfort with a platitude: "Real learning experiences are rarely comfortable."^[12] But it seemed to me that the students had a legitimate point here, and it related to their first anxiety about the other media and grades: why should an excellent writer in English do poorly on an assignment for an English writing course because she has poor Italian communication skills or doesn't know how to put together a good Power Point? The only solution is to give students the option of doing traditional research papers instead if they wish, and I adopted that solution in 2014.

Despite their lukewarm appraisal of it, the multi-media research project was a success in that it got some of them out of Villa Natalia and was the occasion of interesting interactions with Florentines. For example, after a day spent researching their projects in town, Amanda (from Brazil), Jimmy (from China), and Sam (from California) spent the evening walking around the city center together; they ended up eating kebabs on the Ponte Vecchio, discussing the Italian election and soccer with two Italian students from the University of Florence, whom they had met in the kebab shop.

Now, that's my kind of globalization.

Postscript: 2020

Since the first experiment with the multi-media research project in 2013, I have offered it as an assignment but always made it optional (they can do a traditional research paper instead, if they wish). Each year, several students choose to do a project instead of a paper, and it produces interesting and memorable work.

In 2017, Ace, a student from the People's Republic of China, did a project on "The Truffle Experience," a tour offered by a Tuscan truffle-hunter named Giulio. Ace and three of her friends signed up for the tour, which involved going into the woods with Giulio and his dog to hunt for truffles and eating a meal prepared by Giulio, using the truffles they had collected that morning. Ace interviewed Giulio and filmed the interview, the truffle hunt, and the lunch. She created a website on which to display the written element and the videos. I was struck by how professional the website was and how vividly the project conveyed an aspect of Tuscan culture that most of Ace's classmates had never encountered.

In 2019, Xavier, Pati, and Jack, all from the USA but of three different ethnicities, did a project on the "elephant salesmen" - the African street vendors in Florence. They interviewed six street vendors, asking about their families, how they got to Italy, their experiences here, and their plans for the future. They discovered that all of these men had families back in Senegal, and they sent these families most of their earnings, while they themselves lived in difficult and crowded conditions and frequently experienced homesickness and racism.

Early in the project, the students realized that these were delicate subjects, and the wrong approach might offend or alarm the vendors. They learned to wait until a vendor came up to them, offering goods for sale, then they would buy something and ask the vendor if he would mind being interviewed. They were careful to explain that they were students doing a project, so that the vendor would not be afraid that they were from the immigration authorities or the police. When Xavier, Pati, and Jack presented their project to the class, they gave us all bracelets and tiny elephant statues that they had bought in the course of their research. All three of them individually expressed their gratitude to the vendors for giving them what they considered a profound learning experience. One of

them expressed shame that, before doing the project, she had ignored vendors in the street, not even replying to their questions or returning their greetings. During and after the project, she returned their greetings, smiled at them, and occasionally bought something. The multi-media elements of the presentation were a Power Point and a magazine the students had created, containing their commentary on the project, transcripts of the interviews, and photographs of the vendors selling their wares in various piazzas. Some of the vendors asked for copies of the photographs, so that they could send them home to their families.

In Spring 2020, our students had to leave campus at the end of February because of the Covid 19 pandemic. Even though they were in lockdown in their respective homes in China, Chengji and Yichen did a joint project on a computer game that is very popular in China. The multi-media elements were two Power Points containing still images and videos, which they presented to the class on Zoom at the end of semester. The presentations were spellbinding for the other students, because most of them had been playing this game for years, but they didn't know how much Chinese history was woven into the game; this was the focus of Chengji and Yichen's presentations. The content was all about the presenters' own culture, both the contemporary culture of young Chinese computer gamers and the ancient culture of historical figures like Confucius, one of many Chinese historical figures that appear as characters in the game. However, the medium was English, and the way in which they explained and presented the material was unmistakably American. I found this complex combination fascinating, and I was delighted that, in spite of remote learning and lockdown, Chengji and Yichen had managed to produce a project that was both enjoyable and informative for them and for the class.

Conclusions

Students' responses to three of the questions in the questionnaire at the end of the Spring semester 2013 were particularly illuminating.

The majority said that their work on the multi-media research project had increased their contact with Florence and Florentines. However, only seven of the twenty students had chosen topics that would necessitate talking to Florentines, and two of those were researching something they had been doing all year (Tin's project on hip-hop dancing and Ann's on the local Baptist church she had been attending since August). Most of Amanda's research on the Italian election, for example, was done

online and on campus, although I had suggested going to the various party headquarters in town or attending demonstrations and rallies. All those whose research involved initiating new contacts with Florentines responded “Yes” to this question and conceded that it had deepened their study-abroad experience.

Eight students said that they found the global reading list more interesting and stimulating than the reading list in Writing I because of the greater cultural diversity of the authors.^[13] Five of the eight were from ethnic minorities in the US or from other countries. The implication seems to be that those from other ethnicities or nations are more likely to be interested in the representation of that diversity in the reading list. Since these students were in a minority, democratic principles would logically lead us to discard their preference and go with the majority decision. An undemocratic but arguably more progressive approach would be to force the minority’s preference on the majority in the interests of teaching the (white American) majority democratic values such as tolerance and respect for diversity.^[14] You will notice that here the inculcation of democratic values can only be achieved by undemocratic means. In my opinion, the whole notion of inculcating values is itself neither democratic nor progressive but authoritarian and paternalistic; my aim is to teach them *different ways to think* rather than *what to think*.

In response to whether Florence had expanded their view of the world, ten replied “Yes” and two replied “No.” Both of those who answered “No” did so because they had traveled a lot and had lived in foreign countries in the past. Five of the ten who responded “Yes” were interpreting the question to mean “Has *your experience in Florence* changed your global perspective?” In their explanatory comments, they cited the multi-cultural student body on campus – rather than the city itself – as the cause of the changes in their global perspectives. Since ten out of seventeen students, including some of the best students in the class, did not include interaction with Florence and Florentines as an important catalyst of change in their global perspectives, we should ask ourselves what justifies us in making it a criterion for good grades in an English writing class. In my opinion, there is no justification for doing so, and therefore from 2014 onward I offered the multi-media research project as an option rather than a required assignment. One could interpret the paucity of reference to the host city in answers to this question as a result of the infrequency of their contact with it, which I explained early in this discussion (see p. 2, paragraph 1). However, their comments suggest that the reason is more to do with a lack of interest in cultural interaction. It is possible – even likely – that, as international education expands and becomes the norm,^[15] students with little interest in intercultural experience will choose to study abroad anyway. If this is the case, we must ask ourselves how we can best meet

the needs of those students. The first step is to find out what their needs are.

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ENDNOTES

1. We also have to consider the meanings of "globalization." Muqtedar Khan defines it in a tripartite way, dividing it into "phenomenon, philosophy, and process." Khan's discussion calls (rather

- dizzily) for a globalization of the term itself, transcending definitions specific to particular academic disciplines (Khan 7). [↑](#)
2. Pasi Sahlberg, a former senior education specialist in the World Bank, points out the disadvantages when uniform standards are applied in schools worldwide, regardless of cultural differences among various student bodies. In short, there are many kinds of “bad global.” See also notes iii and iv below. [↑](#)
 3. Callan, Otten, and Whitsed & Volet have produced critical reappraisals of the internationalization of education, a refreshing contrast to the knee-jerk approval it often enjoys. Whitsed & Volet look at international education as a money-making ploy by governments, for example. Otten’s discussion is more student-centered, emphasizing the stress students experience in unfamiliar environments and their reluctance to work in culturally mixed groups. [↑](#)
 4. Certain aspects of the program are disadvantageous to non-American students. The medium of instruction is English, and the academic culture is American, so that, for example, a student from China has to do much more than one from Connecticut to get an A in my writing class. Obviously, since English is not her or his first language, the Chinese student has to work longer and more intensively on writings, but there are also less obvious obstacles. American academic culture encourages students to be active, to ask questions and make points in class discussion, whereas the Chinese model is Confucian (the perfect student quietly takes notes of what the professor says and memorizes them to reproduce them on exams). In my course, as in many others courses at American universities, class participation counts for 20%, so that the ideal student in Confucian terms – one who is silent but attentive – will get a B- for class participation, whereas the student from Connecticut, who is used to speaking up in class, can get an A without violating his or her idea of good classroom behavior. [↑](#)
 5. In the literature, cultural diversity in a student body is often termed “internationalization.” See Kimmel & Volet for a student-centered study of the effects of it in the classroom and Bostrom and de Wit for discussions of the nuances of meaning in the various terms applied to intercultural encounters in and outside the classroom (Kimmel & Volet 7; Bostrom, and de Wit 29). [↑](#)
 6. The legal drinking-age in Italy is sixteen. All the information about the students’ lives was provided by their free writings for my class over the past ten years. Some of them see staying in Villa Natalia as a weakness; they feel guilty about never having been to the Uffizi Gallery, and yet quite a few of them return home after their year in Florence without having crossed that off their to-do lists. [↑](#)
 7. I use the plural because not only were our students of many nationalities and ethnicities but also Florence itself was a multi-cultural city: tourists from all over the world flooded the center daily;

- every year close to 8000 students from American universities attended its many study-abroad programs (Dionisi); there were several communities of long-term residents, most notably the British and the American; and there were large immigrant and migrant populations, such as the Southern Italian, Romanian, Albanian, Chinese, Indian, Somalian, Senegalese, and Rom. [↑](#)
8. First-year students take four courses in the Liberal Studies Program at NYU at La Pietra: Cultural Foundations, Social Foundations, Writing, and Italian. [↑](#)
 9. Some of the authors were suggested by students. At the end of the first semester, I asked them what they wanted to read in the second, keeping the idea of a global reading list in mind. Baudelaire, Mansfield, Garcia Marquez, and Pamuk were their choices. [↑](#)
 10. For further discussion of the results of the questionnaire, see “Conclusions” at the end of this essay. [↑](#)
 11. This is an obvious element that teachers often overlook; in our efforts to optimize students’ learning, we forget that their first priority is grades (understandably, since their future careers depend on them). Kimmel & Volet found that students’ reluctance to work in culturally mixed groups was in large part due to their belief that the final product of the group-work would be better if the people working on it shared the same academic culture and work ethic. It would be easy to interpret students’ reluctance to work in culturally mixed groups as simple xenophobia, but the study supports the conclusion that it was in fact the result of a pragmatic and apolitical desire to get good grades. Something similar was going on in my class. [↑](#)
 12. This platitude would be deployed on the assumption that we all consider intercultural contact a self-evident educational good. Many university teachers and administrators share this assumption, especially in the field of international education (not surprisingly, since it pays our gas bills). However, it is increasingly apparent that many students disagree with us. See “Conclusions” at the end of this essay and Otten. [↑](#)
 13. One distorting factor affecting these answers may be that I was teaching many of the Spring 2013 authors for the first time, whereas I had been teaching all the Fall 2012 texts for years. Obviously, the quality and density of a teacher’s commentary improves over time, so the old reading list had an unfair advantage that would decrease each subsequent semester. [↑](#)
 14. Since 2013, the demographics of the NYU student body have changed. In my Spring 2020 classes, for example, fourteen out of twenty-eight students were of other nationalities and eighteen of the twenty-eight were of non-white ethnicities. [↑](#)
 15. “Since the 2000s, [...] study abroad, once seen as an attractive option for some students, is increasingly seen as something important for all students, reflecting the belief that study abroad is indispensable for everyone to survive and thrive in this globalizing world” (Taïeb & Doerr, 43).

See also Petzold & Peter. [↑](#)

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