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NDNU says "ciao" to new Italian class

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Notre Dame de Namur University's Modern Languages and Cultures Department has launched Introduction to Italian, a new language course that emphasizes the culture and contemporary relevance of Italy, spearheaded by Lorenzo Giachetti, who lectures in Italian as well as French.

"This is beyond national borders. This is beyond language. This is really just facilitating a central point of the university's mission, which is to train global citizens," Giachetti said. "We as a department are firmly committed to doing that and teaching people different languages, teaching people different cultures, encouraging them to travel, encouraging them to study abroad."

Within the first four weeks of the Fall 2013 semester, students have learned the Italian alphabet, adjectives, and phrases, as well as the all-important verb *essere*, translated in English as "to be." Additionally, the course textbook *Parliamo Italiano* is not a traditional grammar text, but rather it focuses on communication and speaking.

The class currently holds fifteen to sixteen students, some of whom claim Italian

ancestry.

"There's a lot of Italian Americans who live in this part of the country. The Bay Area has a huge Italian American community. A lot of my students are of Italian heritage," Giachetti said. "So it's great to see people maybe in a way want to reconnect with their roots and not just be okay with having an Italian name, but also wanting to learn the language."

"You need to create the language," Giachetti said during a Basic Practical French class last February.

Would that sentiment apply not only to French or Italian, but to other languages as well?

"Absolutely, it's a building process and it's a creative process," he stated. "Textbooks don't encourage creativity. Textbooks are essential because you need to know the tools and the grammar and the verbs, but those are just tools. They're like bricks. Bricks by themselves



In spring 2013, students traveled to Italy, and enrolling in the new Italian class is one way many students are preparing to go on this year's trip.

Taken by Derrick Chinn

don't do anything—it's what you do with them, and that's what I mean to be creative with language and to create it and that's personal."

Giachetti grew up in Italy. His mother, who is American, met his father, an Italian, while she was studying abroad for her master's degree.

Giachetti has been at NDNU since the Fall 2012 semester. In addition to teaching language classes, he is an advisor for the Study Abroad program. He is also finishing his PhD at Stanford.

"I always knew I wanted to

teach in a small place where the emphasis is on teaching and not on doing research, and I found that here. I found an incredibly

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close, warm community," he said.

In addition to successfully teaching first-year Italian students this semester, future objectives for the program involve maintaining a solid student enrollment base, working with these individuals in continued studies, and someday being able to offer more advanced intermediate and conversation classes.

"There's a genuine interest in learning Italian and I think probably because Italy's a country that people want to visit," Giachetti said.

Last spring, Professor Lawrence Lujan led a group of NDNU students on a trip to Italy in mid-May. Lujan, who has guided Notre Dame travelers in southern Europe six times in the past with groups ranging in size from three to twenty-one, holds tours to the country because it is a place he knows well and admires.

"I love Italy," Lujan said, citing the beauty of the countryside, the cities, and the people as well as Italian art, music, literature, food and wine, and the region's rich history.

But what about the Italian language in Italy?

"Nothing, really. Most of the Italians, at least those you'd meet in a restaurant, shop, or museum in a major city, speak English as a second language," Lujan said. "Knowing Italian is an added bonus, not a requirement for the trip."

"Even language, you don't necessarily need to immerse yourself in culture. That's what we do. We teach language. We help, but that's just one tool," Giachetti said. "Going to the country regardless of how much of the language you speak, that's probably the most valuable experience and it can be life changing."

"Above all, people visiting Italy are exposed to a very different culture, a very different lifestyle, than in the US, which nevertheless works," Lujan added. "Visitors are surprised that the American lifestyle is not the only one possible—it opens up their minds to consider other options."

Lujan and six NDNU stu-

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South America Great Britain Semester at Sea

Graphic created by Derrick Chinn

dents attended the trip two weeks after the 2012-2013 school year ended. The flight eastward over the American continent and then across the Atlantic marked the beginning of the journey towards a memorable experience.

From the rain-drenched cobblestoned streets of Milan to the flooded narrow alleyways of Venice, a great adventure was underway.

Art major Anthony Palomo, who graduated from NDNU last spring, went on the trip this past spring.

"My favorite parts were going to Rome," Palomo said. "There was a lot to see, like the Ruins and the Vatican. The food was great everywhere of course, and I loved Venice when the sun finally came out."

Together, the NDNU group visited the cities of Milan, Venice, and Florence.

This past year it was rumored that students taking the introductory Italian class in the current fall and upcoming spring semesters would be primed for the 2014 trip to the Italian mainland, where

they will employ their newly acquired repertoires and be immersed into the atmosphere of Europe's southern shores.

Giachetti is directing many of his students to get in touch with Lujan in anticipation for next year's two-week excursion to Italy.

"We're going to try to recruit students from the Italian language class," Lujan confirmed.

The core of the language program boils down to not only how individuals exist and communicate in a society, but furthermore to how those individuals respond to and embrace the larger social and cultural context surrounding them.

"It's not promoting one language over another. It's not promoting one culture over another. It's being able to make culture and language accessible to everybody," Giachetti said. "And to hopefully encourage people to be aware that culture does not end in our immediate social space. There's a big world and we need to see it and we need to learn about it to become better citizens."