

NYU Florence Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, November 20, 2019, 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM EST

383 Lafayette St, Room C-06

Attendees

- Bruce Edelstein (NYU Florence; Coordinator for Graduate Programs and Advanced Research)
- Brendan Hogan (Liberal Studies)
- Deb Willis (SSAC Chair; Tisch, Photography & Imaging and Department Chair)
- Delia Baldassarri (CAS; Sociology)
- Eliot Borenstein (CAS; Russian & Slavic Studies)
- Francesca Tarocco (NYU Shanghai; Buddhist Cultures)
- Francesco Arneodo (Abu Dhabi, Physics, and Associate Dean, Science)
- Gail Segal (Tisch; Film and Television)
- Giampiero Gallo (NYU Florence; Economics)
- Hallie Franks (Gallatin)
- Janet Alperstein (Global Programs)
- Jesse Bransford (Steinhardt; Visual Arts and Department Chair)
- Larry Wolff (NYU Florence Co-Director)
- Linda Mills (Global Programs)
- Mosette Broderick (CAS; Art History)
- Nancy J Morrison (Global Programs)
- Perri Klass (NYU Florence Co-Director)
- Ryan Bedell (Global Programs)

Meeting Minutes

Larry Wolff and Perri Klass, co-Site Directors at NYU Florence, discussed new curricular developments and activities at the site, as detailed in their Site Director's Report (see attached). They discussed the Food Studies course, which connects to an overall goal to strive for sustainability. Additionally, they discussed the initiative to develop Childhood Psychology courses in Florence, where a conference about this topic was recently held with notable student participation.

Representatives from Global Programs discussed feedback from students that many do not study away due to cost. Several current and possible options for funding study away for students were discussed. This led to a discussion on student evaluations overall, and how their insights should be further leveraged to recruit students and give them the best experience while studying away.

The committee discussed international student and visiting student populations. It was mentioned that many international students may see their abroad experience as coming to NYC, which could impact their study away participation rate. However, internships are sometimes more accessible outside the US versus in NYC. A question was also raised about "visiting" students. Connections with faculty/staff at Vassar College were discussed, and the committee suggested Art History and Renaissance Art as a topic of interest for visiting students.

Global Programs staff mentioned that they were exploring further connections with outside institutions.

NYU Florence Site Director Report: Fall 2019

Curriculum:

- We're particularly pleased to introduce the first "Texts and Ideas" Core course at any NYU study away site at NYU Florence, and we are teaching that course ourselves, on "Children and Childhood" (Larry is history of childhood, Perri is pediatrics.) This course is important to us because it points to new directions that we'd like to gradually develop at the Florence campus: thinking about pre-health courses, medical humanities, education courses, and child studies courses that could connect with the UNICEF presence in Florence.
- The other important new course this semester is a 2-credit course on Food Studies which takes advantage of the gardens of Villa La Pietra and introduces students to ways of thinking about food and nutrition in the context of sustainability and environmental concerns. This is being taught by new professor Olivier de Maret, who is also working closely with head gardener Nick Dakin-Eliot in order to make the course fully site-specific. We are keen to make this into a flagship course for thinking about issues of food and gardening in the context of sustainability and environmental studies.
- We are in a conversation with NYU Abu Dhabi about their physics offerings in Florence in the coming years, to pick up on the theme of science and the humanities.

New Developments:

- The June Season was a tremendous success with the presentation of a contemporary opera at Villa La Pietra, the presentation of a Verdi concert, and the presentation of a Sondheim cabaret (this last prepared by the Tisch program). There was a very strong response from the Florence community as well as from students (the Tisch students participated in the opera), and we estimate that a total of over 800 Florence community members attended these events, in addition to NYU visitors. We are working toward similarly ambitious programming for June 2020.
- The fall began with an Acton Lecture, delivered by Joanna Waley-Cohen, provost of NYU Shanghai, on the artistic presence of the Jesuits in early modern China. It was attended by 75 people including the Florence community and our own students, with special outreach to our students from NYU-Shanghai and the significant community of Chinese students in GLS.
- NYU Abu Dhabi Professor in Global Liberal Studies Mahnaz Yousefzadeh presented a lecture on Persia and the Medici which was also attended by students as well as faculty on campus.
- Our biggest programming event for the fall (so far) was a full day symposium to discuss the 18th-century tapestry "Palace of Circe"—just out of restoration and restored to the wall of the ballroom— and we discussed both issues of tapestry restoration, tapestry as

- an art form, and the figure of the sorceress Circe both in classical literature and 18th century culture. The scholars included Professor Peter Sahlins of Berkeley, Professor Giulia Sissa and Anthony Pagden of UCLA, Professor Costanza Güthenke of Oxford University, and Dr. Loretta Dolcini, the leading tapestry expert in Italy. This event was very fully attended, filling the ballroom where the tapestry hangs, and included leading museum experts and officials from all over Italy, but also our own students. For the GLS students, who were reading the *Odyssey*, the discussion of Circe was directly relevant. We also spotlighted the expertise of our own extraordinary textile conservation studio which has recently been asked to undertake a tapestry restoration for the Uffizi.
- Finally, NYU Florence prepared a high-level session on “The Future of Europe” for a meeting of Global Council members in Paris in September and our own Francesca Baldry, the Collection Manager, offered a guided tour at Musée Jacquemart-André of the Alana Collection: Masterpieces of Italian painting.

Co-Curricular Engagement:

- We had a very highly attended and well-received introduction to Italian politics for our students, with a completely redesigned format that highlighted diverse perspectives on the political situation. As it happened, Italy was forming a new government as the semester got underway, and we seized upon this as a teaching moment.
- Three of our lecturers put together a program for their students (as a course-related program) as part of a series on migration and gender. The students filled the big room at Villa Sassetti, the program focused on forced labour, and featured a prominent Italian photographer.
- The most highly appreciated student event of the fall (so far) was organized by Lecturer Angelica Pesarini, who invited a famous Nigerian-Italian rapper to come to campus and talk to the students, and then perform for the students, in the Limonaia. This was considered a very successful event that not only offered entertainment but touched upon crucial issues of race and inclusivity in Italy.
- In October the women’s festival in Florence (L’eredità delle donne) presented a Renaissance drama at Villa la Pietra — “The Worth of Women” by Moderata Fonte, translated into English by NYU Professor Virginia Cox. A hundred students, accompanied by their GLS professors, watched a troop of actresses carry out a dramatic symposium on the problems of gender as understood during the Italian Renaissance. One lecturer noted that the class was so engaged by this that they spent a good part of the next session discussing the play’s perspective on gender. In addition to students we had members of the Florence dramatic community present for the performance.
- A group of students, including the students taking our opera class with Lecturer Gaia Varon, attended a performance of *La Traviata* at the Teatro Maggio Musicale.
- Finally, we ourselves have sponsored two “pop-up” museum club visits to small museums in Florence: sending out an email announcement that we would take a group of students to a museum on a weekend morning: the places filled up in minutes; all the students who signed up did in fact come to meet us at the designated museum (Palazzo Medici Riccardi and Museo San Marco); they were eager for background on the museums and the art and history, and they showed real enthusiasm for these encounters with the Florentine museum world.

Student Evaluations and Planning for the Future:

- First-year students evaluate their experience very positively; 100% would recommend the Florence program to a friend. These students have a very high rate of attendance at non-required programs but we would like to see it go still higher. Finally, they note a high degree of satisfaction with housing arrangements.
- We continue to develop our resources for students around IDBE needs. Lecturer Angelica Pesarini is the Faculty IDBE (Inclusion, Diversity, Belonging and Equity) Liaison. For the second year in a row, we have a Global Equity Fellow (GEF) who is a student representative on issues of IDBE. Lecturer Pesarini convenes NYU Florence's (student) IDBE Council. The primary purpose of this committee is to advance diversity and inclusion efforts at NYU Florence. Students, staff, and lecturers with varying spiritual and/or personal practices can request prayer and meditation space. Spaces are located at Villa Colletta. We know that these efforts help the diversity of our students feel included at NYU Florence and will continue to advance these efforts.
- We have extended our counseling services by 20%, with two counselors working on campus now. Students always praise these resources.
- Students are seeking structured socialization at the beginning of the semester to meet one another and expand their circles of friends. To that end, we're eager to build such structured socialization into our program.
- We are keenly focused on having more students visit museums, as noted with our early programming this Fall.
- While challenging at times, we are continuing to think about identifying more study spaces for students.
- It is so wonderful to note comments such as, "The exposure to Italian culture was wonderful" and "The campus is the coolest in the whole world."