



Blog from Abroad

Days One and Two



Planes, Trains and Automobiles (Saturday and Sunday, January 17 and 18, 2015)

In 2008, the SEC entered into a unique exchange agreement with the Politecnico di Torino in Italy to provide education abroad opportunities for SEC engineering students. To date, more than 115 students from SEC universities and the Politecnico have participated.

This week, SECU is in Torino, Italy, with members of the Auburn University Education Abroad office and the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering to see the Politecnico campus, meet with program administrators and to tour laboratories and off-campus study sites. (We will also visit education abroad centers run by Auburn and the University of Arkansas near Rome.)

But, first, we had to get here.

We flew out of Atlanta, Georgia, at 3:30 p.m. central time on Saturday, January 17 and arrived in Rome, nine hours later ... as scheduled thanks to Delta Airlines ... at 8 a.m. Rome time on Sunday, January 18 (seven-hour time difference). We took a cab to Rome's Termini train station, waited for four hours (managed not to fall asleep in our espressos) and were on our way to Torino. The four-and-a-half hour train trip with four stops along the way went smoothly and saw everyone in our delegation taking the nap that had alluded him or her on the plane. After a 10-minute walk in the brisk, Northern Italy late afternoon air, we were at the hotel by 5:30 p.m.

There was little time to get acclimated though as we were expected at the home of the exchange program's Italian director for dinner at 7 p.m. Thankfully, Professor Donato Firrao understood our fading energy, as he makes this trip himself several times a year, and encouraged us to return to the hotel shortly after dinner concluded.

"Try to rest," he said looking at his watch and counting back the seven hours in his head. "Don't you feel like it's 3 p.m.?"

Day Three



Cars are a Big Deal in Torino (Monday, January 19, 2015)

The SEC exchange program with the Politecnico di Torino does not focus on automotive engineering, but as discussions here shifted to expansion beyond the mechanical area, Politecnico's administrators took the opportunity to showcase the unique relationship between the institution and Italy's cars.

Our delegation, which you'll recall includes members of the Auburn University Education Abroad office and the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering, was treated to an entertaining session with several Politecnico students who design and build energy-efficient cars. The team, H2politO, has won numerous awards in the Shell Eco Marathon, a European competition involving more than 200 teams, and gave us a hands-on look at their almost lighter-than-air vehicle. (Auburn administrators hope their experience translates to similar Formula 1 racing competitions in which several SEC schools participate, making this exchange even more valuable.)

After visiting with the students, we walked across the street, but still on campus, to the Torino General Motors Engineering Center. There, we learned how Politecnico students and alumni are engaged with GM employees to develop fuel efficient diesel engines for drivers world-wide.

And in the final activity of the day, we received an insider's tour of the Avvocato Giovanni Agnelli Plant, which will always be remembered as the Maserati place. Fiat makes two models of its luxurious Maserati in Torino and many Politecnico students are employed by the company. While on the tour, we learned how the Maserati is built, assembled and painted, and countless levels of safety and efficiency protocol.

According to our tour guide, it takes about six months from when a customer orders a vehicle until it's delivered, and the U.S. is Fiat's leading customer for the made-to-order autos. We didn't get a certificate for a discount on the \$100,000 vehicle, but we did get to sit in them!

Day Four



Competition ... A Universal Language (Tuesday, January 20, 2015)

Intercollegiate athletics is a uniquely American endeavor. Competing in sports against students from another university as determined by some sort of national body is virtually non-existent abroad. But, competition is world-wide, and I found it fitting that on the final day of our visit in Torino, we learned about the competitive sports opportunities available to SEC students studying at the Politecnico di Torino.

SEC students participating in the engineering exchange program have access to Torino's Centro Universitario Sportivo (CUS). The CUS is a comprehensive recreational sporting organization that provides opportunities for students and local citizens to participate in various "recreational" activities like basketball, golf, skiing, tennis and swimming. There are several facilities in Torino with courts, weight rooms and dance studios, and CUS organizes group outings to the coast for sailing and the mountains for tandem sky-diving.

Although there aren't always trophies to win or medals to award, being first is always the goal. To be the first person down the mountain or to touch the wall in a pool is the aim of each competitor. And the SEC students, who are encouraged to wear their university colors while in Torino, bring the same spirit to their CUS activities as their intercollegiate counterparts do to NCAA competition.

We won't be here to know for sure, but we hope each time an SEC student comes in first, or leads a team to victory, his or her conference companions will send up the familiar chant: SEC ... SEC ... SEC.

Day Six



SEC Satellite Office in Rome? (Thursday, January 22, 2015)

In 1989 the University of Arkansas opened the doors to its Rome Center, a semester-long study abroad program with about a dozen architecture students. The venture was successful, according to Director and native Roman, Dr. Davide Vitali, but not yet reaching its full potential, namely having other universities participate. Eleven years later, in 2000, Auburn University began regularly sending students and faculty, and the course offerings expanded to include graphic design, art and fashion.

Today, the Rome Center is located in the Palazzo Taverna, one of the hardest buildings to access in the city. It's a palace that once served as the site of the French Embassy. Students and faculty are housed in apartment-style buildings in quaint Roman neighborhoods not far from the Palazzo.

Participating SEC universities now include Louisiana State University and the University of Tennessee. Also, students can now take Italian language courses. Approximately 100 SEC students study at the Center each year, and we had the good fortune to meet a few Razorbacks, Tigers and Volunteers during our morning visit.

Although it poses a logistical challenge, in an on-going effort to encourage cultural diversity, classes are often a mix of students from different universities, and there are workshops with Italian institutions.

Arkansas continues to focus on the future. Plans are underway to once again expand available courses to other disciplines and to welcome additional SEC universities. To me, if a few other universities join the Center, I saw a room that would serve nicely as a satellite SEC office ...

Day Seven



In Italiano ... Aquila di Guerra (Friday, January 23, 2015)

The final day of the SECU visit to Italy in many ways ended as it began, with me and representatives from Auburn University. The difference today though is that rather than me getting them more acclimated to the SEC engineering student exchange program, they were educating me about their study abroad program in Ariccia, Italy.

Ariccia is about 30 kilometers from Rome (a 45-minute car ride through the scenic Italian countryside) and is a small town like Auburn, Alabama. Contrast its approximate 20,000 population with that of Rome's four million, and it's no wonder Auburn's College of Human Sciences students have enjoyed studying here for 12 years. They get the community pace of Ariccia and the city possibilities in Rome.

Since 2002, Ariccia, specifically its Palazzo Chigi, has housed the 20 or 22 students (both men and women), provides classroom space and supports group excursions. The program, which gives students enough credit hours to earn an international minor, is endowed by the Bruno family who have a connection to the coastal Italian island of Sicily.

According to the program director, Linda Cain Ruth, the Ariccia experience is meant to be culturally wholistic and to teach students important life skills like conflict resolution and time management while giving them a global perspective to their classroom studies.

With the global perspective and presence comes global visibility. That visibility, on T-shirts, hats and notebooks, is distinctly Auburn. But perhaps nothing is more "visible" than the Auburn cry, which can be heard here year around, just maybe not in English. Here, it's not always War Eagle, it's just as likely to be the Italian version ... Aquila di Guerra (Eagle of War).