

## The Narrative Pathways Project at Ostia Antica: A Pedagogy of Place for Classics Study Abroad Programs

The AAC&U and IIE consider study abroad a high-impact practice, an experiential learning opportunity important for enhancing student success as well as for building global skills and intercultural competency and awareness. Many Classics programs in the United States, including my own, also encourage students to study abroad as a way of immersing themselves in the past and deepening their appreciation for the Ancient Mediterranean World. In addition to numerous short-term study abroad programs, as of 2013, AACUPI reports 28 of its programs included a Classical Studies/Archaeology teaching model (Schneider 2013), two of the oldest among these being the American Academy in Rome (1897) and the Intercollegiate Center for Classical Studies in Rome (1965). Despite all of this, scholarship on the best pedagogical practices for Classics-focused study abroad programs is virtually non-existent. While the Roman Forum makes for an evocative classroom space, most programs are still predominately lecture-based, casting the student as a passive receiver of the professor/guide's expertise. Programs also tend to focus on "important" sites (e.g., Colosseum) (Costello 2020), which risks framing the student's experience with the past through a top-down, monumental, elite lens that reinforces the problematic power structures and colonialism (Pipitone 2018) that already plague Classical Studies as a discipline. I think the time has come for more critical engagement when designing learning opportunities and curricula for study abroad contexts.

This paper offers a response to some of these problems by sharing my Narrative Pathways Project, a place-based experiential learning project that asks students to embody an ancient Roman character as they explore Ostia Antica. The characters (Scribonia Attice the *obstetrix*, Rhodinus the *paedagogus*, Maternus the *tabellarius*, Decimus the *pistor*, Avidius the

*vigil*, and Aurelia Severa the devotee of Isis) are inspired by historical figures attested in the epigraphic record, and include sub-elite men and women, free born and freedpeople with different ethnic backgrounds. In groups of 3-5, students must follow in their character's footsteps, using their senses and cognitive mapping skills to navigate to four assigned destinations in Ostia. At each destination, they must sketch a plausible social interaction their character might have had in that space, applying what they have learned about Roman towns and social history to construct a narrative pathway through the urban landscape. In between destinations, they have time and freedom to explore the site, which creates space for autonomous learning and discovery, and aspect they enjoy. At the end of the assignment, each group presents their narrative pathway in the theatre. This project has never failed to engage my students, with many commenting that it was their favorite activity of the program.

One of the Narrative Pathways Project's goals is to move students toward a socio-cultural understanding of the built environment. Another is to offer a balance to the Colosseum, Villa of Livia Garden Frescoes, and Apollo Belvedere. At Ostia students repopulate the streets, bakeries, warehouses, insula, *mithraea*, fish shops, and latrines with diverse peoples, including marginalized groups who continue to walk below the thresholds of visibility (De Certeau 1988). While students have a choice in which character they embody for the project, I realize that asking anyone to embody a formerly enslaved character comes with risks (e.g., Dugan 68, Bostick 2018). It is important to scaffold learning for this project and provide crucial context on ancient slavery.

I have over a decade of experience as a study abroad educator. In addition to having taught at the ICCS in Rome as the Resident Instructor and Assistant Professor, I have also designed and co-led short-term (2 and 5 weeks) and long-term (semester) programs in Italy

(Rome, Campania, Sicily) for my home institution. Currently, the Narrative Pathways Project is designed for Ostia Antica, but I have used the activity at Pompeii, and it is easily adaptable for other ancient towns with decently preserved urban fabrics and could be brought into the classroom as a group assignment.

#### Works Cited

- Costello, B. McKenny (2020). "Travel as pedagogy: embodied learning in short-term study abroad," *6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Higher Education Advances (HEAd'20)*, *Universitat Politècnica de València, València, 2020*: 1417-1424.
- Bostick, D. (2018). "Teaching Slavery in the High School Latin Classroom," *Medium*. Web. 10 Oct. 2022.
- De Certeau, M. (1988). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press.
- Dugan, K. P. (2019). "The "Happy Slave" Narrative and Classics Pedagogy: A Verbal and Visual Analysis of Beginning Greek and Latin Textbooks," *New England Classical Journal* 46.1 (2019): 62-87.
- Pipitone, J. (2018). "Place as Pedagogy: Toward Study Abroad for Social Change," *Journal of Experiential Education* 41:54-75.
- Schneider, P. K. (2013). "Fifty Years of Growth in Study Abroad in Italy," *Association of American College and University Programs in Italy*: 1-45.