

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR GETTING SETTLED IN PERUGIA

By Lori Salzurolo

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on having received *una borsa* from the Seattle-Perugia Sister City Association! This guide, based on the experience of a former “*borsista*,” Lori Salzarulo, in June 2008, provides some tips on how to get settled in Perugia. I would be happy to talk with you about my experience if you have any questions that are not answered here or in your own research. My phone number in Seattle is 206-329-0309.

Andiamo Avanti!!!

COURSE OFFERINGS

I found the course offerings information on the University's website (and, even after I got to Perugia, in the University's written pamphlets) a bit confusing and, in some cases, seemingly contradictory. If you were able to figure it all out, *bravo* for you and there is probably no reason for you to read the following section of this guide. Otherwise, you may want to read through this section.

Basic Track. The core of the University's program is the “basic track” which contains six “stages” of course offerings based on ability level: first and second level beginner [A1 and A2], first and second level intermediate [B1 and B2] and first and second level advanced [C1 and C2]. After taking an entrance exam (discussed below), students are assigned to a stage (or ability level) in the basic track. Stage A1 is designed as a 1-2 month stage. Stages A2 through C-1 are designed as 3-month stages. Stage C-2 is designed as a 6-month stage (two 3-

month semesters). The 3-month stages start in October, January, April and July and the 6-month stage starts in October, July and April.

The idea is that a student will progress consecutively from one stage/level to the next. Thus, a complete beginner who enrolled consecutively in stages A1 through level C-2 would be enrolled in the University for about 20 months. As discussed below, however, students do not need to enroll in courses for the duration of an entire stage; they can, for example, enroll for only one or two months of a particular a 3- or 6-month stage.

Supplementary and Intensive Tracks. Besides the basic track with its six stages, the University also offers classes in “supplementary” and “intensive” tracks. As far as I could ever surmise, the classes in the supplementary track are intended as additional coursework for students who finish a stage in the basic track [for example, A1] but are not yet ready to advance to the next stage [A2]. The intensive track, on the other hand, is intended to provide students with the same coursework offered in the basic track in a more condensed format over a shorter period of time. Thus, for example, an alternative to attending one month of B-2, which is normally a 3-month stage, would be to attend a 1-month intensive track at that level. Note that intensive courses at stages C1 and C2 are offered only during the months of July, August and September (but are offered throughout the year for the less advanced stages).

Coursework

Beginner and Intermediate Classes. All courses for first and second level beginner students [A1 and A2] and first and second level intermediate students [B1 and B2] are mandated by the University and cover grammar, phonetics, writing and conversation drills. Beginner students [A1 and A2] can choose a basic track stage of 20 hours per week or an intensive track stage of 27 hours per week. First level intermediate students [B1] can choose a basic track stage of 20 hours per week or an intensive track stage of 27 hours a week. Second level intermediate students [B2] can choose a basic track stage of 23 hours a week or an intensive track stage of 29 hours a week.

Advanced Classes. The majority of coursework in the advanced levels [C1 and C2] is also mandated by the University although advanced students get to choose a concentration area – linguistic, cultural, or technical/business – and to choose a few classes in their chosen area.

First Level Advanced. In the basic track, the mandated course work for first level advanced students [C1], like the beginner and intermediate course work, covers primarily grammar, phonetics, writing and

conversation drills, but also covers some historical and cultural material. C1 students must choose an additional 3-hour class offered in their concentration area, for a total of 24 hours of class a week. In the intensive track, C1 students take 19 hours a week of mandated classes and must choose four additional 3-hour classes, for a total of 31 hours of class a week.

Second Level Advanced. In the basic track, second level advanced students [C2] take 15-18 hours of mandated “fundamental” classes in their chosen concentration area (which generally cover grammar, phonetics and conversation practice plus one or two history, culture or business classes that pertain to their concentration area), an additional 6 or 9 hours of “specific” classes that pertain to their concentration area, and an additional 3-6 hours of a “subsidiary” class offered in their concentration area (most of these have to do with the study of art, music, theater, literature or philosophy), for a total of 27 hours of class a week. In the intensive track, C2 students take 21 hours a week of mandated classes and must choose three additional 3-hour classes, for a total of 30 hours of class a week.

Course Descriptions. The University’s website has the titles of all the classes offered in each of the basic track levels and also lists the titles of many of the supplementary and intensive courses offered at each level. More detailed descriptions of the classes are not provided although one can easily surmise what might be covered, for example, in the “Contemporary Italian Literature” class or the “Medieval and Modern History” class.

Tutto Chiaro?!!!

WHEN TO ARRIVE; HOW LONG TO STAY

You need to decide when you will begin your program of study and for how long you will enroll at the University. Some factors you may want to consider are listed below.

Availability of Intensive Courses. If you are able to attend the University for just one month, an intensive 1-month course may be your best option. Intensive courses are offered every month throughout the year except, as noted above, for advanced students [C1 and C2], for which intensive courses are available only during the summer months. (**Note:** the University’s website states that you

must advise the University in advance of your arrival if you intend to take an intensive course.)

Basic Track Duration. As discussed above, the basic track stages are 1-2 months for A1 students, 3 months for A2 through C1 students and 6 months for C2 students. However, you can enroll in any basic track stage for just a month or two and most of the older students (those with careers and/or families) do just that. For example, a B2 student attending the University only for the month of January would enroll in the second month of the 3-month stage that started in January.

Course Content. Because the basic track is organized in multi-month stages, it is inevitable that a student who enrolls in only one or two months of a particular basic track stage will miss some course content. It was my experience that the professors and students alike, who are used to students enrolling in the middle of a stage, do their best to help these students get up to speed. When I started classes in June 2008 (the last month of the first trimester of a 6-month stage), most of the professors gave overviews of the material covered in the prior two months (seemingly not only to help the new students catch up but also to help the old students prepare for the first trimester exams scheduled for the end of June). On the other hand, it can be challenging for a new student to absorb one or two months of missed material in what in most cases will be no more than a one-hour overview (if it is given at all). Attending the first one or two months of a stage would avoid the problem of having to catch up but you would, of course, entail missing some course content on the tail end of the stage.

Exam Periods. During entrance and exit exams, some classes are suspended. Entrance exams are given the first two days of every month. Exit exams are given at the end of each 3-month stage. As an example of how the exam schedule can affect you, if you had attended the University in June 2008, as I did, you would have found that all classes were suspended June 2 (a national holiday), that most classes were also suspended June 3-4 (entrance exams) and that most classes were also suspended June 25-30 (exit exams). In contrast, in July – a month in which exit exams are not given and there are no national holidays – classes would be suspended for only the first two days of the month.

Gemelle Citta' Annual Fair. Perugia has its annual Sister City fair at the end of May. I arrived in Perugia in time to attend the fair. I would recommend this experience to others. I met people from all over the world (which of course you will also do when you start classes) as well as officials from the city government of Perugia. It gave me a sense of grounding to make these connections before starting school. I also gained a greater appreciation for the work of the Sister City Associations, especially our own. And, it was helpful to have people from

home (and within Perugia's city government) to turn to when I ran into a few bureaucratic issues with the University.

Weather. I've found that the weather in Italy, except for the summer months, is remarkably similar to the weather in Seattle during the same period. That is to say, if you go to Italy in the spring or fall, be prepared for either sun or rain and probably a little of both, the winter months are mild, and the summer months are hot (temperatures between 90 and 100 degrees are not uncommon).

Finances. There is at least one significant economy of duration. A \$1200 plane ticket amortized over three months becomes a \$400 monthly transportation expense. Of course, there are other expenses to consider. The *borsa* covers one month's basic tuition plus a portion of incidental expenses for that month. In order to stay longer than a month, you need to consider that basic tuition costs about 250-300 Euro a month, that housing will cost another 250-300 Euro a month, and that food and incidental expenses will likely cost at least that much a month, for a total of about 750 to 1000 Euro (all 2008 figures).

Orientation. No matter how long you decide (or can afford) to stay in Italy, you should try to get to Perugia at least a few days before you need to take your entrance exam. A lot of paperwork needs to be filled out and shepherded through the system (discussed below) before you can start classes. It can be a challenge to get everything done in just two days (during the entrance exam period), especially if you run into any problems, which seems to be an inevitable part of the Italian experience. I also found it extremely helpful to orient myself to the city and the University before classes started and to have a few days to get used to the time change. However, if you cannot arrive in Perugia before the entrance exams, don't sweat it. Just be prepared to wait in a few lines to complete the required paperwork and to drink a few extra cups of espresso to ward off the jet leg.

*Ultimo Avviso: Non Preoccupartene Tanto!!
Andare in Qualsiasi Periodo per Qualsiasi Tempo
E' Meglio che Non Andare Affatto!!*

WHERE TO STAY

Student Living. I had a good experience securing accommodations through Student Living, a private agency (not officially affiliated with the University) that matches University students with various housing options. The website for the agency is www.studentliving.eu.

Prices. The agency offers a range of accommodations for a range of prices. I paid 380 Euro (about \$500) for a private bedroom in an apartment with use of the common areas (kitchen, bathroom and living room). I also had to pay a 4.5% commission to Student Living, In my case, this was minimal, about 2 Euro (I guess the agency makes its money on all those students who stay for 3-12 months).

Logistics. When I used the Student Living site in May 2008, the hyperlink for the housing application did not function. I sent an email and fax to the agency asking for accommodations and received the application back by email and fax the next business day. I sent the application back to the agency and received a confirmation of a place to stay in just a few days. I was given the details of where I would be living (address, name of landlord, contact information, price of accommodations) in the agency's confirmation letter. I had to send the agency part of the rent (260 Euro) to secure the room before my arrival. I paid the balance of the rent and a security deposit upon my arrival. The agency is responsible for remitting the funds to the landlord.

Deposit. The agency's confirmation letter stated that I would have to put down a full month's rent as a security deposit. I dutifully got a money order for that amount before leaving Seattle. When I arrived in Perugia, however, the agency told me that my landlord expected only 50 Euro as a deposit. The agency agreed to refund the balance directly to me (although, when I went back for the money, the 50 Euro deposit had increased to 100 Euro). Bear in mind that it takes 15 days for a check to clear the bank in Italy; thus, I had to wait two weeks to get my money. Based on my experience, I would recommend double-checking the deposit amount with the agency before your arrival.

Affittasi. When I got to Perugia, I saw many "affittasi" signs (generally in the *tabacchi* and bus stops near the University and also at the University itself) for rooms for rent for less than I was paying for my room (many were advertised for around 250 Euro a month). My guess is that these signs are up throughout the year. Thus, you could probably wait to get to Perugia before renting a room in order to see first – and firsthand – what is available. If you decide to find a room this way, there are several factors to consider besides the rent amount:

First, is the rent all-inclusive? You must also make this determination if you rent through an agency such as Student Living. The cost of utilities is exorbitant in Italy and your share, if not included in the rent, could cost you an additional 50 to 100 Euro a month.

Second, what will the accommodations be like? Student Living vets rooms in advance and seems to do a good job of it. The room I had was

spacious, light-filled and clean and other students I met who used the agency were also pleased with their accommodations. I also appreciated that the agency was able to accommodate specific requests. I requested a room close to the University and was offered a room 2 blocks from the University. I also requested accommodations with a family or single woman rather than with other students (this option was not mentioned on the application, by the way, but does exist). I did not see any *affittasi* signs for this type of accommodation. The Little Blue Book (see Introduction, above) states that there are "little old ladies" who hawk rooms in their apartments by standing outside the entrance doors to the University but I never saw this during my stay in Perugia.

Third, will you have ready access to the landlord? If your *borsa* came directly from the University (as opposed to the Sister-City Association), you will need a "Comunicazione di Cessione di Fabbricato" from your landlord in order to obtain a "codice fiscale" so that you can actually receive the *borsa* funds (all discussed in more detail below). Even if you don't need this particular document from your landlord, you may need access to your landlord for other reasons. Many of the *affittasi* signs I saw appeared to be sublets. It might not be easy to contact the landlord in that type of rental situation.

Fourth, an agency may be able to assist you in resolving any problems that arise between you and your landlord (or otherwise). At least in June 2008, I found the employees at Student Living to be extremely helpful during my first few days in Perugia.

In short, if you are not familiar with Perugia, do not have a lot of time to spare, and/or do not (yet) have a good command of the language, it might be challenging to find a room on your own that meets your needs.

In Bocca a Lupo!!

DOCUMENTATION TO BRING WITH YOU

There are a few documents to compile before your departure from Seattle that will help you more easily navigate the bureaucracy you will encounter in Italy (discussed below).

- **Passport Photos**. You will need to attach passport-size photos to a number of documents. Take 4 passport-size photos with you.
- **Passport**. You also need to have a copy of your passport to attach to a number of forms. Take a few copies of your passport with you.

- **Borsa Confirmation.** Take at least one copy (and the original) of the document you received from the Sister City Association granting the *borsa* (you will need this to obtain the *borsa* funds from the University).
- **Financial Wherewithal.** For the *permesso di soggiorno* (discussed below), you may need to show proof of financial wherewithal; I did not get a *permesso di soggiorno* and therefore did not need to test the advice, but one website states that a copy of a credit card will suffice for this purpose.
- **Accommodations.** I also made several copies of the documents I submitted to and received from Student Living.

There are, of course, places in Perugia where you can get passport photos and make copies of documents, and in some cases you will have to make copies in Perugia (of documents you complete or receive for the first time there), but I found it easier to have as much at the ready as possible before I got to Perugia.

* * * **A word of advice:** Do not give away an original document unless you absolutely have to and make sure you keep at least one photocopy (preferably two) of any original document you bring from home, fill out in Italy, or receive from someone in Italy (many of the *tabacchi* make copies for 10 *centesimi* a page) so that in case a document gets lost you at least have a copy. The loss of a document could spell trouble, for example the loss of your *borsa*.

* * * **An additional word of advice:** In addition to making hard copies of documents to take with me to Italy, I scanned and emailed copies to myself so that if I lost all my originals and hard copies I would be able to print out substitute copies at any internet café.

Sia Preparati!!

LA BUREAUCRAZIA

Dichiarazione Di Presenza. I managed to walk out of the Rome airport without going through customs (although my passport was stamped in Amsterdam). Apparently, this is not an uncommon occurrence. If that does somehow happen to you, you need to go to the *Questura* (one is located at the University) and make a "*Dichiarazione di Presenza*", which basically substitutes for the passport stamp. You fill out two identical forms and give the *Questura* a passport photo and they give you back a stamped copy which you are told to

carry with you, along with your passport, wherever you go (and which must be shown to any public security official who asks to see them).

*** * * A note of caution:** I carried copies of my passport and *Dichiarazione* with me, leaving the originals at my apartment, so as not to be in a world of hurt should my purse get lost or stolen. These copies were readily accepted as identification at internet cafes and the bank.

*** * * Another note of caution:** My landlord was quite upset when I told her (by chance) that I had filled out the *Dichiarazione* because she had not yet submitted her own documentation of my stay to the *Questura*, which all landlords are required to do within 24 hours of a renter's arrival. It is an anti-terrorism measure but also serves as a declaration of income. (My landlord was out of town when I arrived, which may have been why she didn't do this in a timely manner, or she may have been trying to avoid paying tax on the income by not declaring it.) I didn't have a passport photo with me when I submitted my *Dichiarazione* to the *Questura* and my landlord knew someone in the main *Questura*, so she was able to submit her declaration before my *Dichiarazione* was processed (I assume hers was backdated), thereby avoiding a 1,000 Euro *multa* (except that my landlord likely had to pay the tax, which she may not have intended to do otherwise). My advice: if you have to make a *Dichiarazione*, you may want to explain this to your landlord before you do so, to avoid starting off on the wrong foot. Better yet, make sure you go through Italian customs and get your passport stamped upon your arrival in Italy.

*** * * A third note of caution:** Without the stamp of entry into Italy on your passport, you can run into trouble in other circumstances. For example, I was initially told by the "gatekeeper" at the *Agenzia d'Entrata* that I couldn't get a "codice fiscale" because I did not have the stamp (see below). The gatekeeper couldn't care less that the *Dichiarazione*, at least for the *Questura's* purposes, substituted for the stamp. I refused to leave the agency without seeing an actual government agent (it took about 5 minutes of argument to get past the gatekeeper) and the government agent (much nicer than the gatekeeper) didn't notice that I didn't have the stamp so I was able to obtain the codice fiscale. Although overcoming the Italian bureaucracy is a proudly-won feather in my cap, I would not recommend going to battle against the system. I will certainly make sure I get the stamp myself the next time I enter Italy.

Permesso di Soggiorno. I never determined whether this was required. Before my arrival, I was told that I would need to get one at the *Questura*. When I arrived, I was told by the *Questura* that it was not necessary. Thus, I am not able to provide any tips or advice on how to get one. I believe that the *permesso di soggiorno* is now required only for a stay of more than 3 months, but

this is something that should be explored further. There are a number of internet sites that provide information on the documentation and process.

Benvenuto in Italia!!

OBTAINING THE BORSA FUNDS

I received a *borsa* directly from the University of Perugia rather than from the Seattle-Perugia Sister City Association. Therefore, upon my arrival, I had to make arrangements to get the funds.

First Stop: l'Ufficio di Borse. The first step is to make your presence known to *l'Ufficio di Borse* at the University. This office is located in the basement of Palazzo Gallenga, which is the main building that houses most of the administration offices of the University and the classrooms for all of the advanced level classes (the beginner and intermediate level classes are held in a complex of buildings located about a 10-minute walk from Palazzo Gallenga). In order to receive funds from the University, a foreigner must have a "codice fiscale," something akin to an EIN or a social security number, which registers you with the government (although you do not pay taxes on the *borsa*, at least not in Italy; I'm not sure whether this is considered reportable income in the U.S.). *L'Ufficio di Borse* gave me a document that had a list of all the other documents I would need to submit to the *Agenzia d'Entrata* in order to get my *codice fiscale*.

*** * * A note of clarification:** *L'Ufficio di Borse* has nothing to do with actual enrollment in the University. The function of *l'Ufficio di Borse* is limited to processing your *borsa*. You enroll (register for classes) after taking your entrance exam by presenting the results (a piece of paper) along with a copy of your passport photo to one of the enrollment secretaries, who are in an office in the basement of Palazzo Gallenga located next to *l'Ufficio di Borse*.

Second Stop: Agenzia d'Entrata. The *Agenzia d'Entrata* is not in the University district. It is near the train station. It takes about 25 minutes by bus to get between the two. To get to the agency from the University, you take the C bus that stops in front of the *Arco Etrusco* located steps away from Palazzo Gallenga. That bus stops across the street from the train station and you have to walk a few blocks to the agency. To return to the University, you walk back to the train station and take the C bus again (make sure you get on at the stop that is directly in front of the train station and not the one at which you got off). As alluded to above, the "gatekeeper" at this *Agenzia* is formidable. If you do not have all your documents perfectly in order (and perfectly legible), she will

not grant you access to the "inner chambers" where the government agents process the paperwork and give you the *codice fiscale*. I know several students who were turned away for want of the proper documentation. Once you get through the gatekeeper, you wait your turn to see an agent. That wait can be long (I waited 30 minutes), but after your number is called and you are seated before an agent, it takes just a few minutes to obtain the document that sets forth your *codice fiscale*.

Third Stop: Back to l'Ufficio di Borse. You need to bring a copy of the document with your *codice fiscale* to l'Ufficio di Borse at the University. At that time, they will tell you when to return. It will be about two weeks from the date you provide them with your *codice fiscale*.

Fourth Stop: La Banca. On the appointed date, you return to l'Ufficio di Borse for a document that you take to the bank (located on the first floor of Palazzo Gallenga), which gives you your funds.

Ci Vuole un po' di Pazienza!!

ENROLLMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY

Entrance Exam. Entrance exams are mandatory for all new students enrolling at the University to determine the course level into which they will be placed -- either first or second level beginner, intermediate or advanced. The entrance exam (oral for beginner students and both a written and oral component for intermediate and advanced students) takes less than an hour to complete. However, in order to accommodate the various arrival schedules of the students and in recognition of the other tasks that need to be accomplished upon arrival in Perugia, the exam is given several times a day during the first two days of each month. Note that there are two rooms for the exams, one for beginner students and one for intermediate to advanced students. The schedule (and room assignments) are posted on a huge computer screen in the lobby of Palazzo Gallenga as well as on lobby bulletin boards. You need to determine for yourself which exam to take (beginner or intermediate/advanced). However, if you make a wrong turn (I initially made my way to the beginner exam, not knowing there were two), you will eventually be pointed in the right direction.

Registration. After you complete your exam, you will be given a piece of paper that indicates the level into which you will be placed. You take this piece of paper, along with a copy of your passport and two passport photos, to the

registration office on the first level of the basement of Palazzo Gallenga. There will be a long line of other students with the same documents in hand. When you finally arrive at the counter, you will be asked to declare a concentration area or “*indirizzo*” (linguistic, business/technical or cultural) if you are an advanced student [C1 or C2]. In all cases, you will be given a schedule of classes. You will also be given a student ID or “*tessera*” which you must carry with you at all times when you are on campus grounds. This never happened while I was there, but there can apparently be building “sweeps” and without your ID you will not be allowed back in.

Attending Classes. After registering, you can start going to classes. Don't be shy! The professors are used to an influx of new students each month. They may ask for a show of hands of new students. They may ask you to state your name and where you are from. In each class, the teacher will have an attendance list or “*appello*.” You will need to add your name, nationality and student ID number to the list as it makes its way around the classroom to you and each day that you attend class you will need to mark your attendance with an “X.”

Buone Lezioni!!

CONCLUSION

I hope that this guide provided you with at least a few tips on how to make your stay in Perugia enjoyable. Please note, however, that some of the information presented in this guide may be out of date for your stay. You would be well-served to surf the internet to confirm or clarify what is stated above.

One site in particular you should peruse, of course, is that of *L'Universita' per Strainieri* in Perugia: www.unistrapg.it. There you will find information about classes and schedules. I also found it helpful to study a map of Perugia to acquaint myself with the location of the University in relation to where I would be living. Maps of Perugia can be found on www.mapquest.com. I also determined in advance how to get from the Rome airport to Perugia. Train timetables can be found at www.trenitalia.com. Bus timetables can be found at www.perugiaonline.com/buspgus.html. Once you get to Perugia, you will need to find your apartment. Bus and light rail timetables for Perugia can be found at www.apmperugia.it. Another great resource is The Little Blue Book, written in English by an ex-Pat. You may have received a copy from the Sister-City Association. If not, that guide is distributed all over Perugia and you can also check out the e-version at www.thelittleblue.it.

Final words of advice: Remember that you are in a foreign country, that you want to be in a foreign country, and that it is a grand adventure to be in a foreign country. The Italians do things differently than we do (meno male!). Although you may run into problems or get frustrated from time to time, remember that you are in Italy to learn the language (and culture); try to profit from every opportunity to do just that. And remember that you are an ambassador not only of the United States and Seattle, but also of the Seattle-Perugia Sister City Association; make it a point to "fare la bella figura" with everyone you meet. But most importantly: *divertiti!*

Che Abbia Una Buon'Avventura!