Villino Dufault, the living and learning facility of Assumption’s Rome campus. The campus welcomed its first class of students one year ago.
Life at Assumption’s Italian campus

“A semester in Rome offers such an exotic experience for students,” says Richard Bonanno, Ph.D., program director of Assumption’s Rome campus and associate professor of Italian. “They gain a very different perspective on what matters in their lives. They appreciate the world more, look at things with new eyes, and become more involved with the Italian people and their culture, which is ultimately very healthy for them.”

Marking its one-year anniversary, students and faculty are thrilled with the Rome program’s success. “There is a tremendous opportunity with the Assumptionist order, which is global, and Rome is a site that integrates with much of our curriculum, coupled with the special spiritual significance of the city,” said Dean of Undergraduate Studies Eloise Knowlton, Ph.D.

Students trumpet the civilized pace, historical sights, delicious cuisine and community feel. “Similar to the community found in Worcester, being in the heart of the city and taking classes on site aided the numerous possibilities that Rome offers,” said Tracy Baldelli ’15, a spring 2013 participant.

Bonanno, for his part, is impressed by how well the students have adapted to their new surroundings. “The curious, engaged and engaging group of students here this [fall] semester has built a strong community, and each new meal, city and experience is the best they’ve ever had ... they’ve embraced everything that’s been offered to them here.”

Dean Knowlton explained Rome’s significance to Assumption and its mission. “As a Catholic liberal arts college, Rome is important to Assumption in two ways: as the center of our faith tradition past and present, and as the shaping conduit of our intellectual tradition, as Rome took in and transformed Greek thought,” she said. “Students studying in Rome experience the historical foundations of the West and the living richness of a great city. They also experience living in a community, an idea dear to Augustine’s heart, and they learn what is learned best when studying, traveling, eating, talking, and laughing with each other.”

Open to sophomores, juniors and seniors, the Rome campus courses are taught by Assumption faculty and include art history, theology, business studies, philosophy, history, comparative literature, Italian and human services. Academic work and learning opportunities are enhanced and supplemented by trips and excursions throughout Italy. “Rome and the historical sites throughout the peninsula are essentially part of our open-air classroom,” said Bonanno. “We have a great, modern facility in
a safe, inviting residential area, but most of our instructors typically venture out and about with students. We take full advantage of the vibrant atmosphere here.”

This includes experiences beyond the classroom, including a trio of three-day excursions and other expeditions. Students visited Florence, Napoli, Capri, Pompeii, Urbino, Perugia and Assisi, among other locations. During the fall, they took a bicycle tour of the Appian Way, went on a day-trip to Tuscany to see how olive oil is made, and visited a winery to witness its manufacturing process and develop an appreciation for one of Italy’s most important exports.

“Between our academic excursions and traveling with fellow students, I visited 20 cities throughout Italy,” boasted Baldelli. Jenna Warren ’14, in Rome during the fall, added “The history engulfs us as we travel around Rome. It’s unlike the history we study in America. When I stood where the emperor used to sit in the Colosseum, I was overwhelmed by the events that occurred in that exact spot hundreds of years ago.” The location adds significantly to the academic content of the courses. “When else would I take a theologically-based or art history-based tour of either St. Peter’s Basilica or the Colosseum?” Warren asked. “It’s mesmerizing.”

At the conclusion of the academic year, Lance Lazar, Ph.D., associate professor of history, will replace Bonanno as Rome’s program director. Dean Knowlton lauded Professor Bonanno’s contributions and Prof. Lazar’s credentials. “Prof. Bonanno has established a very high standard of leadership on all fronts: deep knowledge of Italy and Italians, an excellent teaching and mentorship relationship with the students, both matched with the hard-headed business sense and ability to problem-solve it takes to start a new program and do business in Italy,” said Knowlton. “Prof. Lazar will continue this tradition of deep connection with the place and its opportunities for students. A former Fulbright scholar to Rome, he’s designed a great new history course that takes full advantage of Rome as a living classroom.”

The opportunity for future faculty development exists in Rome as well, according to Bonanno. Many faculty in various disciplines have already taken part in the program and as it expands, and summer courses are offered, more opportunities will arise.

That expansion is already underway. As a member of the
Association of American College and University Programs in Italy (AACUPI), Assumption has entered into agreements with Anna Maria, Albertus Magnus and Regis colleges to admit their students to study with Assumption students in Rome, starting in spring 2014. “In addition to the financial benefit, our Rome program will enhance the College’s reputation and visibility,” said Knowlton. Currently, Assumption is one of only four Massachusetts-based AACUPI member colleges offering courses in Rome and the only one with a campus in the city.

The immersive experience in Rome, or any of the College’s many study abroad programs, has transformed the students more than they had anticipated. “I gained a new level of independence that I wouldn’t have if I hadn’t gone to the Rome campus,” Baldelli said. “Also, being abroad helps you realize what you really appreciate in your life since you’re so far away from your family, friends and routine.”

Warren summarized, “I am getting a sense for the world through the Italian culture, not only from a historical and academic point of view. The world is full of people just like us, but from different backgrounds, cultures and religions. I’m learning so much about the Italian culture by interacting with the people and witnessing how they live each day. Experiencing Rome is an overwhelmingly academic, cultural and personal journey. I’m so glad I took advantage of it.”

For more information, visit www.assumption.edu/rome.

Visiting Capri in the fall were Lucas LaRoche ’16, Marisa Halpin ’16, Colleen Grace ’15, Adam Bourque ’15, Devan Costello ’17, Shelby Reed ’15, Jenna Warren ’14, Sinéad Sinnott ’15 and Professor Richard Bonanno.