

Student Development in Italy

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Many students around the world choose to study abroad where they know the institution will be all encompassing and support their overall 'student experience', but when they choose an alternative method such as to direct enroll in an Italian university, they encounter an entirely different point-of-view regarding their educational experience if they are not from the area. Residence life is often an afterthought in Italian universities, and the desire to give an added component to the student experience through residential initiatives is a relatively new phenomenon in Italian culture¹.

In part, the lack of focus on residence life is fostered by two elements of the institutional setting in Italy. First, most Italian Universities are public. The amount of resources they receive from the government does not depend solely on performance indicators such as graduation rate and enrollment, which has an impact on the degree of interest that universities have in students' affairs services. Sometimes, the money is simply not there². Additionally, Italian law differs by region regarding accommodation and dining facilities for eligible students³. As a result, most universities leave students to take care of housing and their student experience on their own, and they focus solely on the academic experience.

This peculiarity made possible the birth of external companies (mainly non-profit foundations) that detected the need for student affairs initiatives for Italian students. The most widespread examples are outside agencies that collaborate with universities to create residences that are acknowledged by the Italian Ministry of Education. In these spaces, students receive services that expand their knowledge and personal growth outside of the classroom⁴.

In Italian, these services are called *collegi*, or simply, colleges. A pioneering example of *collegi* is *Camplus*⁵. Both the students and their staff take the initiative to create programs and get the most out of their university experience. *Camplus* offers co-curricular activities, study assistance through a tutoring service based on students' needs, and job counselling through a career service division. The students form relationships in a community setting where the focus can become about fostering growth and educating the whole person, bringing the overall mindset closer to that of American institutions. All of these services allow for a young, dynamic, and often very international environment of students. As students from abroad continue to direct enroll in Italian universities, the services that *collegi* provide can bridge the gap and provide a full university experience with an emphasis not only on academics, but also comprehensive personal growth and fostering cultural competency. The overall climate of the Italian university experience is becoming more and more multi-dimensional. As *collegi* become prevalent, the entire landscape of Italian higher education is developing for both domestic and international students.

Working at an American campus in Italy offers a very different perspective than what one might encounter at an Italian university. In many ways, when American universities create a campus in Italy, they bring their established student development program with them. In the United States, 'student life' is such an integral part of the university experience Residence Life and student services often become major selling points for universities to potential students. At Loyola University Chicago's John Felice Rome Center, for example, there is a student population of 235 residents and six live-on graduate assistants. The student life team are the main facilitators of the study abroad experience, providing programs and initiatives to connect the students with Italian culture. In many American universities,

especially at a Jesuit institution like Loyola Chicago, the 'college experience' is as much about the overall transformative experience as it is the academics. In turn, this follows the American study abroad programs to Italy, just as it has at the John Felice Rome Center. Often residence life falls under the umbrella of a student life department, less concerned with the residency and more with the entire student experience and the way the living experience affects it. The staff are often a part of the students' academics, co-curriculars, and their social lives.

¹ The Italian scenario is depicted in Catalano, G. (2014). *Gestire le residenze universitarie*, Il Mulino, Bologna; and in Catalano, G. and Periti, E. (2006), *I servizi agli studenti nell'attività gestionale dell'università* (editors), Il Mulino, Bologna.

² A deeper analysis can be found in Bauges, M., Sylos Labini, M., & Znovyeva, N. (2008), "Differential Grading Standards and University Funding: Evidence from Italy", *Cesifo Economic Studies*, 54 (2): 149-176; and in Perotti, R. (2002), *The Italian University System: Rules vs. Incentives*, Isae, Roma, http://www.aidafey.unibocconi.it/wps/allegatiCTP/Universita_6_4-02.pdf.

³ Gentile, G. (2006). "Le prospettive del diritto allo studio con la modifica del Titolo V e la riforma delle Università", in Catalano, G. and Periti, E. (editors), *I servizi agli studenti nell'attività gestionale dell'università*, Il Mulino, Bologna.

⁴ Rallo, G. (2006), "Il ruolo dei college universitari nel sostegno agli studenti", in Catalano, G. and Periti, E., *I servizi agli studenti nell'attività gestionale dell'università* (editors), Il Mulino, Bologna.

⁵ <http://www.camplus.it/en>. Other experiences can be found here <http://www.collegiuniversitari.it/en/index.aspx>.