

Studying abroad brings unexpected risks for students

BY HINA PATEL
The Battalion

Instead of the 100-degree weather of College Station this summer, Texas A&M students will be able to enjoy working for course credit in the cool weather of Italy.

However, the cool easy breezy lifestyle comes with warnings and precautions.

Lacy McSarland, Employee of the Study Abroad program and senior english major, said the University requires the students to sign a code of conduct.

"We also discuss safety at all the meetings and give handouts on safety which are meant to help the students when they are in a foreign country," McSarland said.

Each year, more than 2,500 American citizens are arrested abroad — about half on drug-related charges. According to Secretary of State Madeline Albright, many American students serve time in foreign jails or await trial in detention because they were unaware of the risks of using or possessing drugs while overseas.

There are 40 to 50 students going on the College of Architecture trip to Castiglio, Fiorentino.

Lauren Petry, a sophomore architecture major, said she will be travelling to Italy.

"It is necessary for me because I believe it will help me grow and understand Architecture," she said. "I will know what to expect in the real world."

Petry said the students traveling to Italy had to take a study abroad seminar sponsored by the College of Architecture where they learned all types of safety techniques.

"We are going to be travelling extensively by train and were told to sit in a car with

nuns," she said.

Petry said robbery there involves a lot of trickery.

"We were told about an incident when a girl was sketching the Parthenon with her bag on her lap and how it was stolen right out from under her," she said.

"In Italy, there is a lot of theft so you have to be cautious, but the thieves do not want to hurt you, they just want the money. Also, we were told not to sleep at the same time as the person that you are traveling with, so one of you can keep an eye out."

But an equally important issue is how students react to foreign countries' laws.

Since most college students are of age to drink in foreign countries, many use the opportunity to get drunk, McSarland said. Many young Americans are also arrested in foreign lands because of the inappropriate behavior associated with heavy drinking.

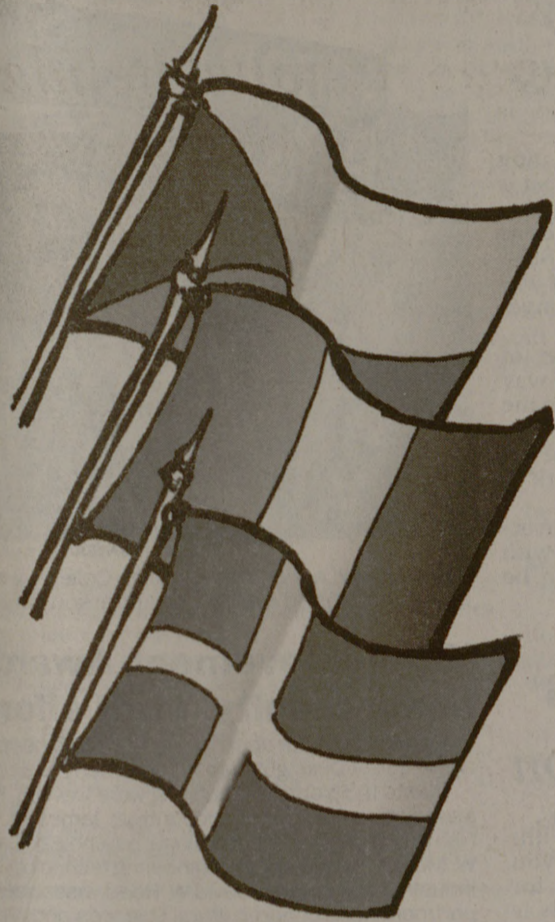
"Italians do not drink to get drunk, and when Americans do, it shows that Americans are disrespectful," Petry said.

The program directors have already informed us that they will come down hard on us.

"The program is fighting this, they said that the Italians will not speak English to you even if they know how, in jail, because you have shown great disrespect for both them and their culture," Petry said.

"If you are caught with drugs, the program will not tolerate it, they will call your parents and send you home. They have zero tolerance," Petry said.

Since the students are legal in a foreign country, they must behave accordingly McSarland said.



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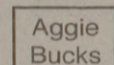
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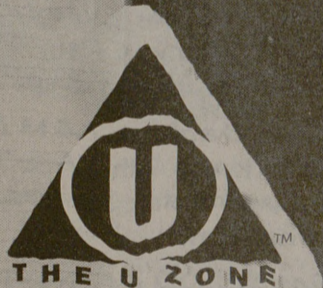
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