

*SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE
IN CATANIA*

SPRING 2009 HANDBOOK

INTRODUCTION

Cristina Anzilotti, the Director of Sarah Lawrence College in Italy, Daria Motta, your advisor in Catania, and I are delighted that you are joining the program.

Living and studying in Catania will probably be one of the most rewarding and challenging experiences you will ever have. You will have to make adjustments to many things: being surrounded by a foreign language; modern traffic in a city with Greek, Roman and baroque monuments; a different sense of time, pace and efficiency; a different schedule of academic work; less heat and hot water; more regular eating habits. You will also have the privilege of becoming deeply familiar with a culture which is the result of a mixture of different cultures, of enjoying beautiful topography, varied climate, excellent food and wine and rewarding contacts with warm, friendly people. The first weeks may include some perplexing moments, but by the end, you will be proud of your accomplishments.

By now, you are probably happily excited and happily confused about what to do—and when to do it—in order to end up in the right place at the right time. This handbook has been designed to help you with your preparations for Catania: you will find advice for settling in, and a lot of useful information that we've pulled together from a number of different sources. Be sure to bring this handbook with you!

It is hoped that this book will answer most questions you may have between now and your arrival in Catania. But if it does not, please feel free to contact any of us for further information.

I hope you enjoy planning your semester abroad.

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SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE IN CATANIA

SPRING 2009

Friday, February 20, 2009	Students arrive in Catania
Sat., Jan. 21 – Mon., March 2	Spring students orientation
Tuesday, March 14	Semester begins
Saturday, May 30	Classes end
Mon., June 8 - Mon., June 29	Examination Period
Tuesday, June 29	Semester concludes

(Please note that these dates are subject to change)

PRIOR TO ARRIVAL

You will need to bring the following with you in a purse, backpack, or other carry-on luggage:

- 1) **Passport** - You must have a valid passport to enter Italy. You should make four photocopies to use for processing documents and in case you lose your original passport; carry these separately from the passport itself.
- 2) **Visa** - You must have a valid student visa to study in Italy. After your arrival in Italy, you will need to obtain a *Permesso di Soggiorno*, a special permit issued to non-tourists. Our program director will assist you in obtaining this permit.
- 3) **Photographs** - Bring four extra passport-sized photographs with you. You will need them for school enrollment and various other purposes.
- 4) **Money** - Do convert approximately \$100 into Euros before you depart to have on hand for taxi, food, etc.

Packing

When packing, remember that you will probably return with more things than you initially brought over. **PACK LIGHT**, and think about how tired and frustrated you will be if you have to lug heavy, unwieldy baggage around the airports and train stations.

Check weight limitations for luggage with your airline; you should certainly be able to carry what you need with you on your flight.

Never pack anything valuable in your checked baggage. Every experienced traveler has horror stories about lost luggage. If you have any irreplaceable items, bring them in your carry-on luggage. Don't bring expensive jewelry, etc., at all unless these items are adequately insured. If you are bringing a musical instrument, call your airline for full instructions about packing and checking it through.

Remember to be kind to yourself. Your trip will be a long one, the time change does strange things to you, and sleeping on a plane isn't always comfortable. Even without heavy bags, you will find that first day in Italy to be tough going with them, you'll regret it! Bring only essentials, and ask family or friends to send anything else you may need after you have settled in with your family.

Shipping

While it is not possible to have anything sent before your arrival, once you are settled in Catania at your homestay, you may tell your family and friends to send you small parcels in care of your host family. Whatever is shipped must be declared for customs purposes as “personal belongings/used clothes.”

Some shipping services to consider are:

U.S. Postal Service/Air Parcel Post
1-800-275-8777

DHL Worldwide Express
1-800-225-5345

Fedex
1-800-247-4747

UPS
1-800-782-7892

Consult each company for specific size limits, costs, packing, and payment requirements and any restrictions (**Since 9/11 there are greater restrictions on what may be shipped overseas**).

Generally, if you are shipping anything, remember to ask the company what customs taxes (**usually very high**) you may have to pay to retrieve your luggage at your point of destination, as well as when you can expect delivery of your items. Surface mail may take up to three months!

If you are shipping a large box, you will find it expensive, and your Italian home-stay host(s) may look askance at such a large item, which you will end up storing in your room and which may limit your private space. Our advice is not to do it; even if you are used to being surrounded by a number of possessions, you will not need half as much as you may think while you’re in Italy.

Medicines and/or vitamins should travel with you since Italian authorities require a doctor’s prescription and high customs taxes in order to release them.

Overall, be sure to allow plenty of time for your shipment to arrive and be processed through customs. Don’t ship anything you will need during the first four weeks of the program calendar.

TRAVEL AND ARRIVAL

All students are responsible for their own flight arrangements. STA Travel is a student travel service, which can often find affordable fares to which many travel agencies don't seem to have access. Information on flights, as well as the ISIC (International Student Identity Card) can be found at www.statravel.com. They can also be reached at 1-800-781-4040. Another student travel site is www.studentuniverse.com (1-800-272-9676). Using the student travel sites we have mentioned include the added benefit of usually allowing you to change your return dates with little or no penalty. However, you should always check before booking as to any possible penalties for changing your ticket.

Upon your arrival in Catania, you will find Daria Motta waiting for you at the airport. So, be sure and arrange with her all the details of your journey. Then, you will immediately go to your homestay, which will be centrally located, and you will be introduced to your Italian family.

Always fly into Catania as this will be most convenient. Should you find yourself flying to Palermo, you should take a bus to Catania. In Sicily, buses are better means of transportation than trains. Be prepared for a 2 ½ hour journey by bus. Buses leave regularly from the Palermo airport to the railway station. At the station, you will have to change buses. Take the AST bus to the Catania airport. The ticket should cost approximately 20 euros.

Please note that housing is **not** available before the official opening of the program. Students who arrive in Catania before the program begins may want to stay at one of the following hotels (an average room charge is also provided).

Hotel Valentino
Piazza Spirito Santo n°39
95131
tel. 011-39-095- 2503072
(single: -€60; double: -€80)
www.hotelvalentinocatania.com

Hotel Catania Centro
Viale Regina Margherita2/d, angolo via Etnea
95125,
tel. 011-39-095- 7164085
(single: -€68; double: -€110)
www.hotelcataniacentro.it

San Placido Inn,
Piazza San Placido n°3
Tel. 011-39-095-315100
(single: -€35; double: -€55)
info@sanplacidoinn.com

Four Rooms
Via Monserrato, n°9
95128,
tel: 011-39-095-448239
(single:-€45; double: -€70)
www.4roomshotel.com

Orientation

The orientation period will last approximately two weeks, at which time you will become introduced to the “Italian way”. During this period you will participate in intensive Italian language and literature classes, excursions and social events. The excursions include trips to Siracusa, Taormina, Mt. Etna and Acireale. The majority of your time will be spent getting familiar with the city of Catania and the University of Catania. By the end of the orientation, you will feel comfortable moving about town and the university on your own. Catania’s cultural and night life can be quite lively and entertaining. During orientation you attend a variety of events (opera at the Teatro Massimo Bellini; theater, cinema; ballet). Your tuition fee covers virtually all of your orientation expenses.

ACADEMICS

Program Overview

That education should not be separate from life is one of Sarah Lawrence's foremost philosophies. Indeed, learning and living often become one for the Sarah Lawrence students in Catania. They frequently discover that ‘education’ means more than just academic encounters with professors. The students not only live and experience another culture and way of life, but also learn to cope with day-to-day existence that is different from that which they have known most of their lives. During the semester, there will be excursions to introduce you to the various regions of Sicily.

All students take three courses at the University of Catania. The courses at the University will be chosen in February. Students will be evaluated by written and oral examination at the end of the semester. For every course selected, students will meet weekly with a private tutor. The tutorial ensures that the course materials is well understood and also provides an opportunity for you to discuss the coursework with your tutor.

The academic life of universities in Italy will be unlike anything you’ve ever experienced. Be prepared for a learning experience that’s different and challenging.

Coursework at the University of Catania

All classes are held at the Monastero dei Benedettini, a beautifully restored baroque monastery which has been the seat of the University for the last fifteen years. This unique context makes the University of Catania one of the most fascinating universities in Italy, and you will have the privilege of studying in one of the most important and lively cultural centers in Sicily. Usually, a university course meets three times a week, and every lesson lasts two hours. In addition to this, you will have three tutorials per week.

Academic Credit

Fifteen Sarah Lawrence credits, the equivalent of a full Sarah Lawrence College semester, are awarded for the successful completion of all three courses at the end of the semester. All students are required to write course evaluations and hand in worksheets (records of readings and writings done in each course) at the end of each semester. Ideally, the worksheet gives the student and the professor a sense of intellectual progression and growth accomplished during the term.

Incompletes: No incompletes are granted in the Catania program. In exceptional cases, if final papers cannot be submitted on time, the matter must be discussed in advance, first with the director of the program and later with the professor. The Director must be consulted first, as the Bronxville office must grant permission for any extension.

Guest students: You will normally receive full credit from your home institution based on a full Sarah Lawrence load of 15 credits per semester. Prior to departure, however, you should discuss this question at length with your adviser and verify what requirements you may have to fulfill and in what areas your home institution may not grant you credit.

Computers

As soon as you arrive in Catania you will be given a card which will provide you internet access at an internet center. **Internet access should not be expected at your homestay.** We recommend you bring your own laptop, but make sure you do so as carry-on luggage.

A Few Points to Keep in Mind

- Guest students should consult with their own faculty/administrative advisers to make sure that their planned course of study in Catania will meet with the academic requirements of their own institutions. Students who have to fulfill specific requirements during their time in Catania should clearly indicate their requirements to the Bronxville office immediately. Failure to do so may result in the impossibility of fulfilling the requirements.
- All students should keep in touch during the semester with their adviser, counselor, or don. The home institution should approve any change in a pre-approved course of study.
- Keep your home institution's Study-Abroad Office informed of your activities, interests, and concerns.
- Course evaluations and worksheets must be handed in for each course each semester. All students must submit this material. No exceptions can be granted.

- Be sure that you are aware of the program calendar, as well as any other important dates. Please apprise your parents and friends as well. You will be expected to arrive by the date specified for the first meeting and to attend all classes and academic appointments regardless of their proximity to an impending vacation.

Libraries

Public libraries in Catania are generally open Monday through Friday, 9:00am - 5:00pm and Saturday from 9:00am until 1:00pm. **Libraries are closed on Sunday.** Keep in mind that if your work requires research, it will have to be done during the day, which may differ from your usual study habits.

LIVING

The following pages contain a range of information to prepare you for a life in Catania. You will find financial information; advising on housing and meals; information on where to go for health, illness, and a miscellany of data on clothing, weather, etc. Some sections will be given more detail and attention when you arrive in Catania, but this should get you started.

Financial Matters

Prior to your departure: Should you receive financial help from your college, see the financial aid office prior to your departure and make sure you know what amount of money you are getting, from which fund(s), in how many installments, and when these installments will arrive.

Changing money: The currency in Italy is the Euro. It is advisable to arrive in Catania with some Euro or to change some money (approximately \$100) in the airport. The current exchange rate is \$1.35 to 1 Euro.

Banking: We do **not** recommend setting up a bank account in Italy. It is more convenient to use your ATM card (better exchange rate) or travelers checks. **Please be aware that your ATM receipt will not include your available balance.** We recommend that you have access to your bank on-line for account information. I also recommend keeping approximately \$200 in travelers checks for 'emergencies.' **Please note that ATMs dispense euros and not dollars!**

Credit cards: Make sure, before your departure, that the credit cards you are planning to use are in fact international cards, and that you can use them in Italy. Clarify what services each card can provide and where you can get such a service: purchasing goods in a store, withdrawing money from ATM machines, etc. Find out if there are any additional fees or charges attached to using the card overseas. While credit cards are accepted in the most centrally located and frequented establishments, they are generally not accepted for small sums.

**** Keep a photocopy or record of all your credit cards (including ATM cards), as well as Customer Service contact information, in case of loss or theft****

Tuition coverage: Your tuition covers all academic expenses and most excursions. Your room and board covers your lodging, breakfast (everyday) and dinner (6 days a week) each semester. You can obtain inexpensive lunches (sandwiches, pasta) around the city center. Refer to your Sarah Lawrence bill for policies on payment and refunds in the event you have to withdraw from the program.

Housing

All students will be housed as paying guests in Italian homes. Breakfast daily and dinner for six nights per week (Saturdays off) are included in the housing fee. You might be living with a single person or with a small family; there may also be an additional international student living in the house but you will always have your own room. You can be part of the home you live in as much or as little as you like. Clearly, mutual consideration for privacy, property, and propriety should govern the relationship at all times. Be aware that Italians spend much time and effort keeping their houses clean and in order, and you should do the same.

The purpose of the home-stay is to allow you to live and study at home in Italy as an Italian, and not as a tourist or an expatriate, or to replicate an American university dormitory. At the very least, the home-stay will enable you to learn the language quickly and effectively. At its best, you may even form warm bonds that will last throughout your life. You should feel free to discuss your living situation with the director at all times.

Housing is located throughout the city. Some apartments are close to the program, while others may be 20 to 30 minutes by bus or on foot. The most important aspect of where you are placed is not its proximity to the program office, but the suitability of the household. All placements are made carefully, and students are encouraged to be flexible and be prepared for a different way of life.

You may find yourself farther from the center of the city than you had hoped; you may have imagined yourself in a family with children for whom you could baby-sit; the host seems distant, or else asks you more questions about yourself than you like—no match can be perfect in every respect, and everyone will find a point of compromise. The important thing is to give this relationship—like any other—time. You will find the unexpected, special aspects about your housing: the signora is a wonderful cook; you feel welcome after your bus ride home from the program; you have a view from your window of your new neighborhood that seems somehow personal.

Housing changes for any reason are made solely at the discretion of the director. Please do not hesitate to confer with her if you are having problems with any aspect of your living situation.

Telephone

Students are encouraged to make and receive short calls at their home-stay. Mainly because all family members use the home telephone, and also because landline telephone rates are exceedingly more expensive in Italy than they are in the States, you are strongly encouraged to purchase a cell phone for your stay. Everyone seems to have one in Italy and they are easy and relatively inexpensive to obtain. The staff in Catania will direct you to the best places to purchase a phone. **Most American cell phones do not work in Europe.** It is best to purchase a phone in Italy.

Health

Medical Insurance: You must arrange your medical insurance coverage prior to your departure. Make sure that you and your family understand the terms of your policy before you leave the U.S. (the type of coverage you have, what you must do to be reimbursed, etc.).

All students must have some form of medical coverage in order to participate in the program. If you are not insured yourself or by a family policy, or if your insurance plan will not cover you while abroad, a policy may be purchased through Sarah Lawrence. The cost is \$1,319 and will provide coverage from January 16, 2009 through August 31, 2009.

For serious and urgent matters: Emergency Numbers

The following numbers require someone who speaks Italian:

General number for urgent emergencies of any type, 113

Carabinieri (all-purpose police force, quite reliable), 112

Fire department, 115

Medical emergencies of any type, 118.

Mental health: Should students want to discuss any problems with a practitioner, the Catania office can provide you with a list of appropriate mental health practitioners.

Be prepared to pay cash for medical services. Doctors and hospitals will not allow patients to pay through their insurance plan. It will be up to you to seek reimbursement through your insurance company. **Always ask for receipts no matter how trivial the cost.**

Warning: Drugs

Italian law does not tolerate the possession or use of any illegal drugs. Anyone arrested for the possession or use of illegal drugs will be prosecuted and tried according to the Italian judicial system. This law is strictly enforced.

Work in Italy

Students are **not** allowed to work in Italy. All jobs are totally illegal in Italy. This includes even casual work like babysitting, being a waitress, giving English lessons, and anything else you may have in mind. Do not count on making money while you are overseas.

Business Hours

Most stores and all offices are closed Sundays. In Catania, most stores are also closed Monday mornings, opening in the afternoon (around 4 pm), with the exception of food stores and supermarkets. Ordinary business hours for both shops and offices are 9am-1 pm and 3:30 pm- 7 pm (4-8 pm in the summer). Public offices (state and local) are usually open Monday-Saturday 8 am-noon, but are often only open one or two afternoons a week, if at all. Some large department stores and supermarkets stay open during the lunch break.

Post offices are generally open Monday-Saturday 8:15 am-1 pm (Saturdays until 12:30pm). The central post office is located in Via Etnea.

Banks are open Monday-Friday only, 8:30 am- 1:30 pm; most re-open for an hour in the afternoon, from about 2:30 pm.

Note: **In Catania food shops are closed on Wednesday afternoons.**

Clothes

Even if Sicily is famous for its warm weather, winter in Catania may be cold and damp. February is usually the coldest month, and spring is in full force around April. Clothes in Italy are expensive. Bring what you need, but remember that you will have to carry it all back with you along with the new belongings you acquire during your stay in Catania. Student dress is casual, but you might want to bring a nicer outfit or two for a special occasion. Italian families tend to keep the heating at a low level during the winter months. We recommend wearing layers to fight the winter dampness and the chill you may feel at times.

Voltage Requirements

Voltage in Italy is 220, and although the three-prong round plug is preferable, a round two-prong also works. Many North American appliances have 220-volt switches and may be used in Europe. They may still require a plug adapter, however. If there's no voltage switch, a converter is required as well. Using cheap converters for computers is not recommended.

Tipping

Tipping is not obligatory since most restaurants include a cover charge per person (*pane e coperto*) and usually a 12% service charge (*servizio*) in the bill. Together, these make up a good tip. However, if you wish to reward especially good service, you might leave an extra 5%. It is quite common to round up the charges for taxis in Florence. For example, if the charge is 5.50 Euro, it's quite normal to round up to 6 Euro.

Weather

Summers are hot; spring and fall mild. Winter isn't particularly cold, but very humid. Although winter temperatures are not very low, dampness makes the cold quite penetrating. February, March and particularly November can be quite rainy. Average temperatures:

Jan. 35-49 F/2-9 C	Feb. 36-53 F/2-12 C
Mar. 40-60 F/4-16 C	Apr. 46-68 F/ 8-20 C
May 53-75 F/12-24 C	Jun. 62-81 F/17-27 C
Jul. 63-89 F/17-32 C	Aug. 62-88 F/17-31 C
Sep. 58-81 F/14-27 C	Oct. 51-69 F/11-21 C
Nov. 42-58 F/6-14 C	Dec. 37-50 F/3-10 C

Publications about Catania

- Nino Recupero, *Guida di Catania e provincia*, Giuseppe Maimone editore, 1991.
- Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi, Giuseppe Leone, *Sicilia. Le anime del paesaggio*, Bruno Leonardi editore, Palermo, 2001.
- Giuseppe Leone, Salvatore S. Nigro, *Sicilia barocca*, Rizzoli.

