

College-Level Course Descriptions

Italian Language - Elementary

From the late Middle Ages to the present day, Italian civilization has shaped cultures around the world, particularly in the arts, sciences, politics, religion, cuisine, and fashion. From Michelangelo to Marconi, Galileo to Gucci, the influence of Italian culture has been astonishing given the relatively small size of the country. In Italian 101, students will begin to understand these influences by learning the fundamental structures of Italian language and key aspects of Italian culture. Students will learn these characteristics and build a basic vocabulary through speaking, listening, reading, and writing in Italian.

Specific grammatical structures covered include nouns and articles, adjectives and adverbs, prepositions, subject, disjunctive, and object pronouns, verb conjugations in the present, *passato prossimo*, and *imperfetto* tenses, possessives, and reflexive and reciprocal verbs. Vocabulary and expressions for communication include greetings, education, sports and hobbies, weather and seasons, family and pets, technology, clothing, shopping, dining, and health. Students will also begin to learn about key linguistic and cultural differences by exploring geography, pastimes, education, family, commerce, cuisine, and the biographies of influential Italians. Through these and other topics, students will begin to understand and appreciate the profound reach of Italian language and culture throughout the world.

Selected Interdisciplinary Writing Seminars

Dante's Divine Comedy

Modern American life challenges our will to live ethically and to imagine a world ruled by love and justice. A late medieval version of this crisis haunted the Italian poet Dante, whose obsession with love and justice governed his vision of the afterlife. The poem recounting this vision remains unmatched for its intellectual and imaginative force, spiritual audacity, and political rage. Through selected readings, we will encounter these aspects of the poem as well as Dante's distinctive treatment of topics including courtly love, Christian theology, and intellectual history. The course will also emphasize the ways in which Dante's rhetorical prowess persuades readers to believe his insistence on the truth of his vision. Additional readings will focus on the practice of writing, particularly understanding style and how to support ideas with evidence. Critical analysis and writing skills will be developed through close reading, six essays, class and small-group discussions, and other brief written exercises.

Gender and Friendship in Pre-Modern Times

In many cultures today, people take for granted friendships between men and women, but were such friendships allowed before the modern era? Under what

circumstances were men and women friends, and what sorts of friendships were they? This course will explore some of the scant textual evidence by examining the 4th and early 5th century letters of St. Jerome, who was a central figure in establishing Christianity but also remarkable for his unusual correspondence with women. We will also read the famously controversial 12th-century letters of Abelard and Heloise to question what sort of friendship might exist between two people for whom a romantic relationship becomes impossible. In the 13th and 14th centuries, a new sort of interaction developed between women who emerged as spiritual leaders and the men who wrote for them, mentored them, but also learned from them and constructed their authority as holy women. We will read the letters of Catherine of Siena and Raymond of Capua to characterize their relationship. We will also read excerpts from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, a 14th-century secular text that claims to offer friendly advice to women especially in need and features several stories that deal with how gender influences friendships. Does the narrator's arguments suggest friendship, and what sorts of friendships might the stories encourage? This course will also include Cicero's treatise *On Friendship*, a text that was especially relevant to some of the above-mentioned writers.

The Fool, The Lover, the Priest: Humorous Literature of the Middle Ages

Medieval writers of western Europe often claimed that God provided stable truth and that literature should prepare souls for the afterlife, yet they also show the delightful power of humor to entertain and to mock conventional values, and they understood how language playfully evades as well as conveys meaning. In this course, we will explore humorous genres including short stories, lyric poetry, and riddles to investigate literary topics of major importance for medieval studies. These topics include the medieval tensions between sacred duty and profane pleasure, absolute truth and relative understanding, and chivalric ideals and the burgeoning middle class. To approach these ideas critically, we will also cover some of the historical, social, and methodological concepts specific to medieval literature as a discipline. Students will also learn to analyze style in primary texts, secondary sources, and in their own writing to begin to understand the relationship between form and theme in different genres. Critical analysis and writing skills will be developed through close reading, six formal essays, class and small-group discussions, and other brief written exercises.