



UNIVERSITY OF DALLAS

April 19, 2021

Dear Prospective Students and Families of the Summer 2021 Rome semester,

Greetings from Rome! I hope that this finds you, your families, and your friends well. A belated Happy Easter to you all.

The purpose of this letter is to announce a significant update to our summer 2021 anti-COVID-19 measures on the Rome Campus. These new guidelines may end up changing your own planning for Rome in the days and weeks to come, as we countdown to the opening of the summer semester about a month from now. Because of the urgency of this letter, we invite you to read its contents particularly carefully and be in touch with us as soon as possible in case of questions and concerns.

UD'S EXPERIENCE OF STUDY ABROAD IN FALL 2020 AND SPRING 2021

We have just completed our second "COVID semester" in Rome. In fall 2020, approximately 80 students participated in our Rome Program, one of the very few to open in Italy at the time. This spring, we hosted approximately 60 students and were still one of the few programs to dare to open our doors in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. The experience of these two semesters has demonstrated our willingness and ability to navigate the challenges of COVID-19 in order to give students the benefits of studying in Rome. It also offered our students an exceptional and transformative study-abroad experience at a time when [young adults face unprecedented challenges to their emotional and mental well-being](#) and badly need to see their lives go back to normal and horizons broaden.

So, we are convinced that we were right to persevere with our Rome Program despite the challenges, setbacks, and disruptions that could have (and then did) accompany our efforts. In both fall and spring, we experienced COVID-19 outbreaks on campus that led to weeks of campus lockdowns. In both fall and spring, too, a series of anti-COVID laws in Italy, Greece and indeed in all of Europe forced us first to cancel some of our most important trips, including the renowned Greece trips, and then terminate our in-person programs a couple weeks in advance of the end of semester. These were unfortunate developments in an otherwise fulfilling academic year. Most fall 2020 and spring 2021 students have told us, in fact, that they wouldn't have missed it for the world.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE COVID-19 ACADEMIC YEAR

The challenges we suffered last year have nevertheless forced us to pause and take a moment to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of our current approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic as a guide to and platform for future semesters. Basic questions include: What did we do right and what can we do better in the future? Prudence, caution, pragmatism, a concern for the welfare of our students and staff, the golden rule both on campus and in our relations with our Italian neighbors, and a shared sense of purpose have guided our thinking. The safety of our students has remained and will always remain our highest priority. After this priority comes the richness and integrity of our academic, religious life, student life, and educational travel programs, all of which have made UD Rome one of the premier study abroad programs in the world.

Three main lessons have emerged from the above process of evaluation and analysis:

The Eugene Constantine Rome Campus

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- **Student, Staff and Family Safety:** The safety of all people on the Rome Campus cannot be guaranteed unless and until all individuals living and working there are safe from the COVID-19 virus. Not only do students live on the Rome Campus, but also fathers, mothers and families with children. And not only do students and families conduct their daily affairs on campus, but so too do another 20 or so Italian employees and significant numbers of visiting technicians, consultants and visitors. Student habits and student travel necessarily increase the odds of local infection and contagion. To the extent students get sick from COVID-19, therefore, they not only pose a risk to their own health but also to the health of countless other people. The best way to avoid such sickness are vaccinations.
- **Avoiding Campus Lockdowns Ordered by Italian Health Authorities:** Without being able to guarantee—or at least nearly guarantee—that our campus is protected from even a single COVID-19 infection that could then easily lead to an outbreak, we can also not avoid complete lockdowns to our campus. This is the hard lesson that we learned twice this academic year, once in fall 2020 when an outbreak involving approximately 30 students led to nearly three weeks of lockdown, preventing students from leaving campus at all and for a time requiring them to be confined to their rooms. A lesser outbreak of 8 positive cases in spring 2021 produced the same result—nearly three weeks of lockdowns. These lockdowns were ordered by the local health ministry and therefore remained out of our control. The only way to have a lockdown lifted is by ensuring that every last individual on campus is shielded from getting the virus to the greatest extent possible. Violations of these lockdowns by any single individual could, in accordance with current Italian law, lead to criminal prosecution. The best way to drastically reduce the probability of such lockdowns in future is universal vaccination of all adults on campus, staff and students included.
- **Protecting the Integrity of our Programs:** Students come to the Rome Program to immerse themselves in the knowledge and experience of the rich cultures of Italy, Greece and Europe, not to sit in their rooms and wonder when and if the lockdown will be lifted. Without being able to guarantee—or nearly guarantee—that we will not face a lockdown owing to even a single case of COVID-19 infection, we can no longer guarantee the integrity of our programs, a sad fate indeed. The best way to protect our programs from disruption is to avoid an outbreak on campus, and the best to accomplish that is to have as many vaccinated people in our programs as possible.

NEW AND CONTINUING RISKS AND CHALLENGES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The United States of America, Israel and a handful of other pro-vaccine countries have and still are paving the way out of the present pandemic by offering their adult citizens full access to vaccines and then seeing infection numbers fall dramatically as a result. The very clear message here is not only that vaccines work, but that they are also a key tool in getting the world beyond this pandemic. Italy and Europe have not been so providential and fortunate in their planning. It would be an exaggeration to say that these countries are losing the war against COVID-19. Rather it can be said that they find themselves in a prolonged and potentially dangerous stalemate.

- **Lack of Progress in Italy:** Contrary to expectations, Italy continues to see [large numbers of new COVID-19 cases each day](#) and no rapid or definitive descent of the curve in sight. Furthermore, the total number of people vaccinated has fallen far behind expectations: only 13% of Italians have [received their first vaccinations](#) as compared to 60% (Israel), 32% (USA) and 8% worldwide. Universal vaccination and "herd immunity" will not therefore be achieved in Italy until sometime in 2022. The slow roll-out of vaccines is a clear weakness of Italy's approach to containing and defeating COVID-19 at this time.
- **New COVID Variants:** According to the CDC, the new variants ["seem to spread more easily and quickly than other variants, which may lead to more cases of COVID-19...to more hospitalizations, and potentially more deaths."](#) Such variants are long since active in Italy and attack the young—

children and adolescents—more easily and forcefully than the original COVID-19 virus. According to one study, as much as [90% of current COVID-19 cases in Italy are caused by the English-variant\(s\)](#). Our community is, therefore, just as subject to introducing the virus into our midst right now, if not more so, than ever before. Although vaccines have not yet been demonstrated beyond all doubt to cover individuals against variants, [initial reports suggest they are an effective deterrent](#).

UPDATED GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

In light of and in response to the above circumstances, our leadership team in the U.S. and I have consulted at length on how best to balance the goal of maintaining safety and safeguarding the integrity of our programs for everyone in Rome, on the one hand, while guaranteeing the individual rights and protections of each participant, on the other. The following four guidelines are a starting-point for striking that balance:

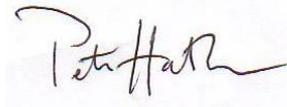
- **Vaccination Strongly Encouraged by UD for Rome Participation:** We have decided not to mandate vaccines for its incoming Rome students. However, given the risk (1) to student health, staff health, and the health of staff families, (2) of prolonged government-order lockdowns on the Rome Campus, and (3) to disruptions of academic programming, religious life programming, independent travel, school sponsored travel, and campus life programming and activities, we strongly encourage each and every student and staff member to get vaccinated in the USA prior to coming to study in Rome.
- **Possible Vaccination Requirement by EU or Italy:** Owing to the imminent introduction of a so-called [Digital Green Certificate](#) in the EU in general and Italy in particular, you may soon need to show proof of vaccination or some other form of immunity in order to enter the EU and attend the Rome Program. This outcome is by no means certain but is possible if not probable. A motion to bring forth legislation in favor of the Certificate was passed on April 14th in the European Commission and will be brought to a vote at the end of this month. Should this law come to pass and should it require proof of either vaccination or previous infection as a “passport” into Europe, students without either would be prevented from attending our programs. Therefore, once again, in light of the above proposed legislation and its possible adverse consequences for an individual who has not received a vaccination, we recommend that all students and staff receive the vaccination prior to coming to Rome.
- **Accommodation of Italian Health and Safety Norms:** Because Italy is a sovereign country, UD must follow Italian and EU laws in regard to protecting student, staff, and staff families from COVID-19 infections on campus and therefore may be required to institute any of the following policies in response to the threat of COVID-19 infections within the campus community:
 - periodic COVID-19 testing at student expense;
 - segregated meal times, class meetings, Mass, and recreation times to separate individuals at-risk from those not;
 - limited extracurricular activities, including parties, sporting events, movie nights, theater and talent shows, because of the threat of infection;
 - a period of lockdown (or quarantine), typically lasting a minimum of 14 days and possibly lasting longer if an outbreak is not contained;
 - the delay, suspension, cancellation or reconfiguration of independent travel and sponsored travel opportunities.

The most effective way to avoid having to institute such measures, be it for the greater good or to comply with local health authorities, is to achieve herd immunity on campus through a combination of vaccination, natural immunity or both.

- **Opt-Out and Refund Policy:** Although we are not responsible for the shifting terrain of COVID-19 infections and its consequences for our programs, we do understand that the new perspectives and updated guidance outlined in this letter may be discouraging for some students and their parents. To repeat, we have been really successful in running our renowned Rome Program during this last pandemic year and are proud of our achievement, yet it's also true that many adjustments to previous norms have been and will continue to be made until this emergency is behind us. For students who do not want to run the risks and/or do not feel comfortable with the perspectives and guidance offered in this letter, we invite you to apply for a refund of the tuition and fees you have paid so far and consider attending the Rome Program at another time.

If you have questions about any aspect of this letter or a question more generally about the current state, please contact Rebecca Davies, the Director of the Rome Office in Irving by phone at 972-721-5206 or email us at bdavies@udallas.edu. If you prefer to contact me on the Rome Campus, I will respond promptly to email delivered at phatlie@udallas.edu and will be happy to follow up with a call too.

Sincerely Yours,



Peter Hatlie, Dean, Director, VP, Prof. of Classics