



Study Tour Captures Power of Transformative Learning Experience

When Susan Hanny began her graduate degree at UCO in 2016, the notion of studying abroad did not seem possible. Hanny was a nontraditional, adult student with two children and a full-time job; however, when she heard about a spring break study tour to Italy through the Adult Education and Safety Sciences department in March of 2017, her longtime love of travel and desire to visit Europe led her to accept the opportunity.

The study tour, titled, "An Italian Experience," was led by UCO professor Lori Risley, Ed.D., and centered on the themes of culture, education and leadership. During the tour, each student was required to prepare and plan an itinerary for one day of the trip. This allowed students to take an experimental approach to what they were learning about adult and higher education and leadership and apply it in a real-world setting with fellow travelers.

"Students were responsible for navigating the group through transportation and daily activities," Risley said. "They had to do a lot of pre-planning for this, and most of the transportation signs aren't in English which makes it even more difficult."

The tour included visits to significant sites in both Padua and Venice and gave UCO students a glimpse at the history, architecture and artistic elements of the country. The group even had the opportunity to interact with students and faculty from the University of Padua.

Transformed and encouraged by this ten-day educational and cultural experience, Hanny then requested permission from the university to develop her own independent study course to conduct research on the same tour in 2018, with Risley as her mentor. The goal was to discern the ways in which students experience transformative learning through an international study tour. This time, Hanny traveled to Italy as a research observer.

The results of her research displayed a strong connection between study tours and the transformative learning concept. Each participant found he or she had been transformed in some way by the study tour, and surveys of the students showed the experience proved significant in displaying the concept of transformative learning.

Some students, many who were middle-aged adults, gained a stronger appreciation for art or culture, while others were simply given the opportunity to experience life outside of the United States for the first time. "Study tours can move people from just learning knowledge to actually seeking experiences that mean something and are valuable to them as a person," Hanny said.

Her findings, with assistance from Risley, were recently published in an international journal, and the experience has encouraged her to continue her education by recently applying to the Swansea at UCO Ph.D. program.

Both Hanny and Risley agree that they hope these opportunities continue to remain a possibility for graduate learners in hopes that more will be impacted and transformed. For more information on how to support the UCO College of Education's study tour programs, contact Erin Ta at eta1@uco.edu.