

Ex Libris

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Class of 2021 Takes in the Sites of Venice, Italy



Photo: Jennie Thomas

By Jack McErlean '21

In the first week of March, the Class of 2021, accompanied by Jennie Thomas and Fr. Keenan, S.J., completed their inaugural class trip: a travel seminar to Venice, Italy. The trip, overflowing with Venetian art, history, and culture, exposed the Scholars to a foreign language experience early in their academic careers. This tour of Venice not only strongly positioned

the freshmen for future travel abroad, but also had the side-effect of bringing the youngest GPSP class together as a cohort.

Venice was the perfect stage for a trip like this. In many ways a museum on a lagoon, the city in Northeast Italy is comprised of about a hundred church-studded islands connected by arching footbridges. The city's might as a republic peaked around the time of the Italian Renaissance and resulted in an identity unique in its aesthetic style and mix of cultures. The rich history of the city unfolded for the scholars as they walked from island to island, with the story of Venice well

explained by Fr. Keenan, whose time spent living in Italy resulted in a remarkable command of all knowledge Venetian.

On Monday March 5th, the freshmen settled in for a red-eye flight from Boston to Frankfurt, Germany. Late in the morning on Tuesday, the Scholars arrived in Venice, with their excitement compensating for any effects of jet lag or sleep deprivation. The group arrived at their place of stay for the week, the Centro Spirituale e Case di Riposo in the Cannaregio neighborhood. The building was at one time the palace of a prominent Venetian family, but has since become a convent. The

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nuns warmly greeted the Scholars with a wholesome meal for the weary travelers. That afternoon, Fr. Keenan led the group to the nearby church Madonna Dell'Orto, containing the work of famous Venetian painter Tintoretto. After a stop at the neighborhood Jesuit church, Campo dei Gesuiti, the Scholars combed Cannaregio for nearby dining options, and ended their first day in Venice with a family-style meal at a traditional Trattoria restaurant.

The next day, the group began at St. Mark's Square and entered the famous basilica, a stunning example of Italo-Byzantine architecture. Embodying the past glory of Venice, the church holds a vast trove of treasure, including the majestic gem-embroidered altar piece, the Pala d'Oro. Then, the Scholars toured the neighboring Palazzo Ducale, an art-infused fortress and home of the past leaders of the Venetian Republic. After lunch, they visited the Frari Basilica, a giant Gothic church in the center of Venice, housing works that include Titian's. Afterwards, they were off to the nearby Scuola di San Rocco for a tour of Tintoretto's masterpieces.

The Scholars began Thursday with a trip to the neighborhood of Dorsoduro, which included a stop in the Accademia Gallery, home to a vast collection of works by the city's most important artists. The visit also included a tour of the Basilica of Santa Maria Della Salute, a marvelous church in the baroque style erected for the Virgin Mary by survivors of the plague. Another site was a local high school at the former Ospedale degli



Photo: Sara Samir



Photo courtesy of: Sara Samir

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Photo courtesy of: Sara Samir

Incurabili, a hospital for victims of syphilis in Renaissance times. The tour also visited the Peggy Guggenheim home, an eclectic and personal collection of the eccentric heiress. The Scholars were able to see the church of San Sebastino, which contains works by Paolo Veronese, and the San Nicolo dei Mendicoli, a church in honor of the city's beggars.

On Friday, the class of 2021 visited the Castello neighborhood, beginning at the Zanipolo, a large Dominican Basilica. Next, the Scholars went to San Francesco della Vigna, Venice's other main Franciscan church besides the Frari. Afterwards the tour came to the Scuola Dalmata di San Giorgio, showcasing the history of the city's Croatian immigrant community. Following this, the group reached the church of San Zaccharia, which contains work by the famous Giovanni Bellini. The day ended with a viewing of the memorial commemorating the Jewish Venetians deported by Nazi occupiers during World War II, and a tour of the Venetian Ghetto's Jewish Heritage Museum.

On Saturday, the group left the main islands of Venice to venture by ferry to the lace-making island of Burano, with its pastel-colored houses looming over still canals. After some shopping, the group got back on the ferry to travel to the island of Murano, famous for its hand-blown glass. The Scholars spent the day leisurely exploring the island and shopping for the beautiful glass figurines.

On the final day, the Scholars returned to St. Mark's for a wonderful Mass. Most of the day was free afterwards, so that the Scholars could explore or return to any sites of particular interest. The trip concluded with a ferry ride down the main canal, and like the waters of seasonal acqua alta, the spirits of the class remained high.



Photo: Arturo Balaguer



Photo Courtesy of: Sara Samir

GPSP Selection Process Week

By Jacob Kelleher '21

For some, the first few days of February are a slow-moving time of the semester, but, for the Presidential Scholars, this short period couldn't be more exciting. The first week of February marks the Gabelli Presidential Scholars Program Selection Process, affectionately known as GPSPSP. Every year, the top 55 students from Boston College's early action applicant pool are invited to BC as candidates for the GPSP. Over the course of four days, the prospective Scholars (lovingly dubbed "prospies") partake in a myriad of interviews, lunches, seminars, group conversations, and activities, each of which is designed not only to provide the Program directors with insight on each student, but also to introduce each student to the GPSP, BC, and college life on the Heights in general. This year, we welcomed fifty-three students from twenty-five states and three foreign countries. As usual, they were nothing short of remarkable.

The prospies arrived throughout the day on Wednesday, January 31st, and were enthusiastically welcomed by current Scholars in the admissions office. Scholars led the early arrivals on tours and took students out to lunch at one of the dining halls. Later that night, everyone, current Scholars included, enjoyed a pizza dinner, at which all the prospies met their Scholar hosts for the weekend. After dropping off luggage in their rooms, everyone made their way to Lawrence House for the traditional GPSPSP cupcake social. Cupcakes were



Photo: Shaan Bijwadia

eaten, introductions were made, and everyone partook in a "speed dating" activity organized by some of the current Scholars.

The next day consisted of the official series of interviews and presentations. It began with a presentation from Program co-director Fr. Keenan about the Program and all it has to offer. From there, the prospies began their individualized schedules. Some went off to faculty or admissions interviews, while others attended academic seminars. All the events provide valuable insight into the character, interpersonal skills, personality, and abilities of each prospective student. After a demanding day of evaluation, the prospies and current Scholars were invited to a formal dinner in Gasson Hall. Although the delicious food was a highlight for many, the true high point of the evening was certainly our alumni speaker, Pilar Landon '09. Her speech was relatable, intriguing, and light-

hearted. Many Scholars remarked she was one of the best speakers they'd heard over their time in the Program.

After a packed Thursday, the prospies began an equally busy Friday. Everyone finished up the last of their interviews participated in small group conversations, and attended the student leadership panel, making room for the final activities of the weekend. Around mid-afternoon, all the prospies and several current Scholars met to take a trip into Boston. How could prospective students from around the country journey to BC and not experience a taste of what Boston has to offer? Everyone was taken to dinner at Uno's Chicago Grill, followed by a trip to the SpeakEasy Stage Company where they got to see Shakespeare in Love, a wonderful comedy about Shakespeare's attempts to write Romeo and Juliet all while being wrapped up in his own love triangle. After an amazing evening,

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Alumni Spotlight, GPSP Selection Week Dinner: Pilar Landon '09



Photo: Shaan Bijwadia

By Maddie Bald '21

At the welcome dinner of the Gabelli Presidential Scholars Program Selection Process on Thursday evening, the prospective and current Scholars were given the opportunity to listen to Pilar Landon from the class of 2009. Pilar, who initially discovered Boston College and the GPSP from her mother, said that her decision to leave California for the East Coast stemmed from a desire to see more than “simply what she was used to,” and to get outside of her comfort zone. She spoke about her multiple involvements during her time at Boston College, including serving as the Editor-in Chief of *The Heights*, and completing her marine biology internship in Sydney, Australia.

She continued on to talk about her life after BC-- from Teach for America to her current position as a consultant at the Boston Consulting Group in Chicago. Through it all, she emphasized

the importance of following one’s passions over a career dictated by one’s major. She told us that there was “no such thing as getting it wrong” in college, reminding us that no matter what path a person takes, there will always be new information and lessons that can be useful later in life.

Pilar then spoke about how deeply the Program affected her life. The “key enablers to success” were the friends and fellow Scholars she met while at college. The many different people and ideas she encountered, combined with the new places and opportunities offered by the Program, were able to bring new perspectives to her life. She included in her speech a story of how she and her fellow Scholars serendipitously found the exact number of bikes they needed in France while trying to visit the town of St. Michel. Serendipitously because she had miscalculated the difference between miles and

kilometers thus turning a “short” stroll into one that required wheels, highlighting that just because life does not always go as planned does not mean that it is not any less great.

Perhaps the best piece of advice given to the audience was that “it’s okay to close doors,” as this gives a person the freedom to go in a certain direction and not to worry about what might have been. Rather than focusing on one exact path, one should instead have the “freedom to change [his or her] mind” and not be afraid to choose something different than what had been previously planned.

She emphasized how important social justice is in life, and how lucky it is to be uniquely formed by these ideals at BC. She told us that after she had studied at Stanford Law School and worked in patent law, she realized how much she had missed the impact that she had found through social justice. This realization led to a job in consulting where she could see her work contributing to fulfilling people’s goals.

Pilar’s speech not only encouraged current and prospective Scholars to appreciate all that BC has to offer, but also relayed that it is okay to choose to pursue something different than what one initially had planned. Rather than looking at a career simply for the financial or material well-being it might offer, she encouraged everyone to look further-- to look for something that allows for both personal growth and the ability to make an impact in the world.

A Price on Life: Slavery in the 21st Century

By Leah DaCosta '21

After months of brainstorming and planning, the sophomore class of the Gabelli Presidential Scholars Program hosted an educational and captivating panel to raise awareness on the issue of human trafficking. “A Price on Life: Slavery in the 21st Century” gave Boston College students and professors a glimpse into the discussion on the complex realities of human trafficking in Boston. Held in November, this sobering and illuminating conversation was focused on sex and labor trafficking featuring survivor and advocate Jasmine Marino, from Greater Boston; Medical and Executive Director of

Massachusetts General Hospital’s Freedom Clinic, Wendy Macias-Konstantopoulos; Director of BC’s Immigrant Integration Lab, Westy Egmont; and the Chief of the Massachusetts Attorney General’s Human Trafficking Division, Elizabeth Keeley. Each of these eloquent guests provided the audience with different perspectives and a deeper understanding of trafficking and what they could do to help. Though human trafficking may seem like an issue that only plagues less developed countries, the sophomore class and their guests made sure to expose the ubiquity of a problem that affects men and women of any socioeconomic background or community.

Attendees were particularly moved by the insightful remarks of the Jasmine Marino and her journey to help others facing similar circumstances. The sophomore class partnered with the Center for Human Rights and International Justice, the Women’s Center, the Women’s and Gender Studies Program, the School of Theology and Ministry, the Church in the 21st Century, and the Theology Department to create this event. Students and faculty anticipate an opportunity to deepen their knowledge of this issue at a second installment of this human trafficking awareness campaign in the spring.



Photo: Shaan Bijwadia

Tate Krasner '16, far left, returned to campus to Moderate the event. Tate currently works as an analyst in the Human Trafficking Response Unit of the New York District Attorney’s Office.

Sophomore Class Becomes Men and Women for Others on trip to Nicaragua



Photo: Kathleen Bailey

By Cole Tamburri '20

Reinvigorated by a few relaxing weeks away from campus, on January 7th, the GPSP Class of 2020, along with co-directors Fr. Jim Keenan and Professor Kathy Bailey, spent an informative and reflective week in Managua, Nicaragua-- a trip saturated with the realities of third-world poverty, a frustrating political system, and, above all, inspiring encounters with the hope and dedication emanating from members of groups dealing with significant challenges.

The week began with an engaging lesson in history from Mark Lester of the Center for Global Education, who summarized the recent history of Nicaragua, highlighting U.S. involvement in Nicaraguan politics and the recent changes in political power. The Scholars, who had been familiarized with certain details of the revolution by reading Fr. Fernando Cardenal's Faith and

Joy, came to realize the lasting presence of the issues left behind by the revolution, particularly regarding the current President Daniel Ortega. This meeting set the stage for the remainder of the trip.

Following lunch at CGEE, the sophomores met with María Teresa Blandón and spoke (aided by their translator and guide, the warm and uplifting Elisa Vanegas) about the history and continuing struggles of the feminist movement in Nicaragua. María Teresa's strength, dedication, sense of humor, and experience made for an engaging and enlightening address.

The next day, following a tour of the downtown where the group encountered historic landmarks such as the Plaza de la Revolución, known for its role in the Sandinista Revolution, the sophomores enjoyed mid-morning crepes at Pastelería Margarita. They met with Silvia Nadine,

a member of the Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (MRS), a political party vying for a position in the Nicaraguan government. Despite the setbacks faced in recent years by the MRS and Nicaraguan democracy as a whole, Silvia's unwavering determination was inspiring.

Later, the trip took a different turn, as the group met with Silvia Cisneros, a nurse belonging to the Acahualinca Women's Center. The center, despite the battle for funding and resources, has improved the lives of women in one of the poorest parts of Managua through education, medical care, and counseling.

On Wednesday, the students toured a factory in a free trade zone and observed workers on the production line after meeting with members of the factory's management. This was followed by a trip to the American Chamber of Commerce, where development

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policies and foreign investment in Nicaragua were discussed.

On Thursday, the group attended a meeting of the organization Pro Mujer, an organization helping entrepreneurial women start small businesses in some of the poorest parts of Managua. Soon after, the students met with Carlos Mendez of the Humboldt Center and learned of the struggles faced by Nicaragua concerning climate change and the lack of governmental support for research and mitigation efforts.

The group concluded their day by meeting with Alejandra Rodríguez, a graduate of Boston College, at Mercon Coffee to learn about some of the progressive and educational initiatives supported by the organization. Among the projects is Seeds for Progress, which seeks to address issues of poverty and education in coffee farming communities.

The same night, the group hosted an alumni reunion at the Hotel Casa Real and, following general formal introductions by the Scholars, the alumni, and members of the BC community, the group was able to spend a relaxing night interacting with the Nicaraguan alumni.

The following morning, the Scholars returned to the Pastelería Margarita and spoke with “Pinita” Gurdián Mántica regarding her intimate relationship with the Sandinista Front. Her honesty, self-awareness, and warmth, reflected in the atmosphere of the restaurant (a creation of Pinita herself) was as contagious as it was enlightening. Pinita’s love for family and solidarity with the poor resonated clearly with the core



values of the GPSP.

In the afternoon, the Scholars met with representatives of the organization Nica HOPE, which seeks to provide stability and employment, and develop business skills by training women and teens in jewelry-making. These advances aim to offset the disadvantages faced by children in the area affected by the closing of a dumpster near Lake Managua. Finally, the Scholars met with a series of Nicaraguan artists and learned of the struggles and beauty of artistic success in the country. Scholars were able to speak with the artists and enjoyed a pleasant pizza dinner.

On Saturday, the final day of the trip, the group traveled to nearby Masaya to visit the site of an active volcano and spend some time at the Masaya Craft Market before heading to the Café de las Sonrisas in Granada. The restaurant, headed by the ingenious, inventive, and persistent Tío Antonio, is staffed by individuals with disabilities, particularly deafness, and provides an educational, unifying dining experience for visitors.

Prior to a sunset dinner overlooking Managua, the Scholars enjoyed an impromptu voyage to the island home of Felipe Mántica, a

graduate of BC who had extended an invitation to the group during Thursday night’s alumni gathering. Over the course of a week of conversation, discovery, and reflection, the sophomore class processed the unfamiliar world with which they were presented. However, beyond meeting individuals of tremendous strength, perseverance, and dedication, it was the familiarity of their experiences which was most striking. In Nicaragua’s politics, one could observe shadows of the situation at home; in Nicaragua’s feminist struggles, one might perceive the importance of the issue to the development of world at large; and in Nicaragua’s poverty, one was reminded of social inequality in America. Most importantly, the unwavering trust in the youth and education was ever-present, reminding the Scholars of their own role in global leadership, hospitality, fidelity to our partners, and care for the common good. The Scholars left having realized new aspects of their responsibility as young people and citizens of society.

Alumni Announcements

Isra Hussain '17 received a Fulbright combined research scholarship to Vienna, Austria to study refugee integration policies.

Jesse Mu '17 was awarded the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship

Kyle Marra '12 was successful in applying for an Individual F30 Fellowship from the NIH for full support of his MD/PhD training

at UC San Diego. Also - this year, he will be funded by a travel grant from the Knights Templar Eye Foundation to present his ongoing thesis research at the annual meeting for the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology in Honolulu, HI.

Caitlin Peterson '08 got married on April 7th to Kyle Hawkins, and is now Associate General Counsel at Hennessy Advisors, Inc. in

Austin, TX

Brian Soucek '98 was recently awarded tenure and is now Professor of Law and Martin Luther King, Jr. Hall Research Scholar, at UC Davis School of Law.

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the prospies were welcomed back to Gasson Hall where the current Scholars hosted the annual GPSPSP Trivia & Ice Cream Night. Teams of prospies competed in a light-hearted test of that which all of us Scholars enjoy: random knowledge.

With the main events of the weekend completed, everyone went to bed for the evening. The next morning, everyone was invited to a celebratory brunch where Fr. Keenan, Professor Bailey, and Jennie Thomas thanked everyone

for all they had done to make the weekend a success. From there, the prospies happily began their travels home so as to make it home in time for Super Bowl Sunday.

The weekend was a huge success with prospies and Scholars alike remarking on how much they enjoyed the events. Prospies found the weekend to be informative and far less intimidating than they had imagined, while Scholars enjoyed meeting potential classmates as well as being reminded of the

camaraderie that the Gabelli Presidential Scholars Program has at its very core.



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