

Overcoming Obstacles in Developing an Indiana-Bologna Master's Program Partnership

By Stephanie Leslie and Susan Buck Sutton

The Indiana University Masters of Arts in Philanthropic Studies and the University of Bologna Master's Degree in International Studies in Philanthropy were the first two graduate degrees in any country to focus on the history, culture, and values surrounding philanthropic practice and thought. The Indiana University program was developed first, and as the University of Bologna moved toward its program in the late 1990s, it seemed both logical and worthwhile for the two institutions to work toward a collaborative partnership. Such a partnership would concentrate the resources of these two institutions in defining a new field of study at the same time that it held the potential for making this new field international in its outlook from its very inception.

The Masters programs in philanthropy at both Indiana University and the University of Bologna are now coordinated with each other in ways that enable students at each institution to do a significant portion of their coursework at the other institution. The process by which this came about is also revealing of the structural constraints or obstacles that present themselves in such an undertaking, as well as some of the strategies by which these obstacles may be overcome.

The first such obstacle was finding common ground between two programs that had developed independently of each other. The interdisciplinary Indiana University Center on Philanthropy is based on the urban campus of the Indiana University system (Indiana University – Purdue University at Indianapolis), although its faculty are located both in Indianapolis and Bloomington. Founded in 1987, the Center was one of the first programs in the United States to offer critical insight into the history and practice of philanthropy, as well as the skills needed for effective nonprofit management. By the late 1990s, the University of Bologna was moving toward a similar concentration on philanthropy, non-profit organizations, foundations, and social welfare. When faculty from the two institutions met at a conference, they began exploring what they had in common. Professors Dwight Burlingame and William Schneider at Indiana University and Professor Giuliana Gimeli at the University of Bologna took the lead. A series of reciprocal visits over a two-year period created the dialogue that brought the two programs into curricular articulation with each other.

The initial result was the establishment of the Masters in International Studies in Philanthropy at the University of Bologna, pursuing a curriculum very similar to the already established Masters program in Indiana. This was done with the explicit goal of then moving toward a robust set of student and faculty exchanges – and the creation perhaps not yet of a joint degree, but certainly of two intertwined and coordinated degrees. Had the two curricula been substantially different, this process would have been much more difficult. With roughly parallel curricula already in place, however, the faculty from both Bologna and Indiana were able to craft an articulation agreement that facilitated the exchange of students for entire semesters at the graduate level. This curricular coordination involved the teaching of a set of courses at each institution that were pre-approved for the degree at the other institution, and then scheduling these pre-approved courses in such a manner that students could take a whole semester at the other institution. Thus in one to one-and-one-half years, graduate students at both universities could complete their programs and include one semester at the other institution in the process.

More was needed, however, to make this exchange a meaningful educational and scholarly collaboration. Other constraints required attention in order that these two programs work together for a deeper, international understanding of philanthropy. Merely exchanging students from time to time was not enough.

The next steps therefore involved establishing the mechanism for more intensive faculty and student partnerships between the two universities. The student exchanges were thus developed so that a cohort of Italian and American students would spend a full year studying alongside each other. To facilitate this, the exchanges were designed as sequenced, group exchanges. Beginning in 2002, the pattern has been for four students from Bologna to spend the fall semester in Indianapolis, with four students from Indiana spending their spring semester in Italy.

Collaborative teaching also became an integral part of these coordinated Masters degrees. Several faculty from each institution now regularly spend two-three weeks teaching in the courses of faculty at the other institution. For example, the course in “The History of Foundations and Charity” at the University of Bologna regularly has an Indiana University faculty member teach a unit, in return for Bologna faculty teaching in various courses in Indiana. Such collaborative teaching has strengthened the scholarly bonds between the two programs, but has, of course, been limited by the financial resources required for faculty to travel back and forth – something that may be aided by various forms of interactive distance education in the future.

In addition to the curricular parallels of the two Masters programs, the language of instruction at the University of Bologna has also made this coordination possible, although it has not removed all linguistic obstacles. Many of the courses for the Masters in International Studies in Philanthropy are taught in English, an interesting consequence of the Erasmus program throughout Europe. While there is certainly a downside to American students bypassing linguistic fluency to pursue study abroad, the fact that this is possible has opened up such study for those who might otherwise have avoided it. While the Indiana students are thus not required to have fluency in Italian to participate, the program requires them to complete at least one semester of Italian before they begin their coursework in Bologna, as an essential prerequisite for cultural competence in their host city. Indiana students either take Italian in Indiana or arrive in Italy early so that they can take intensive language classes there before their graduate coursework begins. The Italian students who have engaged in this exchange have all been fluent in English before coming.

The development of this coordinated Masters program is still a work in progress, of course, and its directors see further challenges and opportunities ahead. Both institutions feel that more must be done to integrate the students into their host cities, even beyond language training. In-country orientation programs that assess differences in both urban life and educational culture would be very useful. Expanding this coordination to other institutions in Europe and beyond (several of which have already expressed interest) and exploring the possibility of a fully joint, international Masters program are also on the agenda. Such a move would raise the very thorny issue of

accreditation across nations, so coordinated programs may continue for the time being. Whether coordinated or merged, however, the benefits of such collaborative programming are significant in creating the foundation for the kind of international scholarship and education that is necessary for the twenty-first century.

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