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### Local student takes fast-paced UM art course

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**NEWS RELEASE**

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November 12, 1996

## LOCAL STUDENT TAKES FAST-PACED UM ART COURSE

MISSOULA --

Italian drivers didn't have much on the pace kept for three weeks last June by 16 University of Montana—Missoula students -- including Ralph Wiegmann of Elm Grove, Wis. -- who drove, hiked, read, listened and discussed their way through Italy for a course in Renaissance art history and theory with two UM professors.

"They really deserved P.E. credits, we did so much running around and hiking," art Assistant Professor Rafael Chacon said.

Instead the students earned six credits for the course, called The Renaissance in Context and taught in tandem by Chacon and liberal studies Professor Paul Dietrich, associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

The first of its kind ever offered by the art department, the course revved up with two weeks of logistical discussions, preparatory lectures and reading assignments on campus last spring semester. Then, from June 1 to June 17 the group rolled through Italy in two vans, traveling from Ravenna and Pisa to Florence and Rome, looking at art in its whole context.

"It's possible to get a picture of Renaissance history or politics out of a book," Dietrich said. "But you can't understand Renaissance society or art without being there. It's not transportable."

He and Chacon provided the expertise on Renaissance aesthetics and history, particularly art and church history. The students took notes and photos, kept journals and made sketches. They also were expected to read "primary" texts in translation, Chacon said -- writings by Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, Machiavelli and others.

While the focus was Renaissance art, the students also looked at and learned about medieval, Byzantine and Baroque art. They spent a day in the Roman forum to study culture layering. Several sculpture students arranged an afternoon side trip to a marble quarry town where they talked to artists and toured studios and foundries.

"The energy level of the students was amazing," Chacon said. But, he said, "there never was enough time. It was hard for the students to walk six to eight hours a day, go back to their residence hotel, cook dinner and then gather for an evening seminar."

It was especially hard for the students with intense visual imaginations, Dietrich said. "They would want to take out their sketch pads and not move for a couple of hours, ... slow down the pace and take a more contemplative approach."

Wiegmann described the experience as "sensory overload." Yet he was one of those who made time for sketching, and his 18 sketches have been reproduced as gifts to his fellow travelers. Dietrich said he plans to beautify his office walls with the set Wiegmann gave him.

The students had a month to cool their heels once they were back on home soil. During that time they were to reflect on their tour experience, do additional research and then make a presentation to their classmates. For their presentations, several students went in for projects they could craft -- an authentic mosaic, for example, or an altar. One student researched Renaissance music and dance and talked about their relationship to movement and space in the period's sculpture and painting.

"I was amazed at the quality of the presentations," Chacon said. "A number of the students worked well beyond the expectations of the course."

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