Message from the Director

Greetings Alumni and Friends of the EUPS Program,

At the risk of leading off with news that you already know, I’d like to open this issue of the newsletter with a reminder: within the next few weeks, we will have three exciting EUPS alumni opportunities/events.

Academic Coordinator Caterina Paolucci will be in Washington, DC between April 16, 2013 and April 27, 2013. She will be meeting with organizations in and around the national capital and helping to spread the word about our program and our alums. She’ll also be happy to meet with alums in the area. If you’d like to try to set up a “bilateral” or “multilateral/multi-alum” chat with Caterina, drop her a line at paoluccx@jmu.edu.

In addition, all EUPS alums are cordially invited to a reception hosted by JMU’s political science department, the Washington Semester, and the JMU Politicos alumni group on Friday, April 26, 2013. The event will take place from 5:30 PM – 7:30 PM at the Longworth House Office building on Capitol Hill. The reception will bring together lots of alums, friends of our programs, faculty members, various DC-area policy makers and professionals, and a number of current JMU undergraduates—lots of good networking opportunities. If you plan to attend the reception (recommended attire is business-casual or business), be sure to RSVP to POSC@jmu.edu or 1.540.568.6149.

The second big event will take place one night later, from 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM on Saturday, April 27, 2013. Mary Cate Thalgott (a 2011 program alum) is organizing a casual event for alums that night at the Pines of Florence restaurant in Arlington, VA. The restaurant is a stone’s throw from the Ballston metro stop (Orange Line) – its address is 811 N. Fairfax Drive, Arlington, and its phone number is 1.703.243.7463. If you’re able to attend the Pines of Florence event, please let Mary Cate know ASAP. Her e-mail address: thalgott.mc@gmail.com.

You may remember (without particular fondness!) that I sent multiple exhortations in Fall 2012, encouraging you to participate in the second biennial EUPS alumni survey. I very much appreciate the time and thought that you put into the survey. In the end, you came through—we had a solid response rate of 70%, and we gathered some good information about you, your professional trajectories, and your recollections of the program and its role in your professional formation. I promise: I will never ask you to complete another alumni survey. Until 2014.

A few survey results that may be of interest to you: at present, approximately 90% of EUPS alums are living in the United States, and the rest are based in Europe. Of those who live in the US, almost 2/3 live in the DC metro area (broadly conceived as DC, northern Virginia, and Maryland), and there are smaller pockets of alums in the New York and greater Denver areas.

The number one employer of EUPS alums? Uncle Sam. Florentine Dukes are currently working at the Departments of State, Defense, Commerce, Homeland Security, and the US House of Representatives. Along with the significant corps of alums working for contractors and lobbying firms (approximately one in five EUPS alums), they are helping to increase our visibility in the corridors of public power. A quarter of Florentine Dukes work for private companies whose primary vocation is something other than contracting or lobbying, and small but significant cohorts of alums work for state governments, NGOs, educational organizations, law firms, and arts organizations. Along with alums currently on traineeships at the European Parliament and in
other short-term positions, a handful of alums are pursuing additional post-graduate degrees.

It is wonderful to be able to share these kinds of aggregated statistics with prospective students, who are always, and rightfully, curious to know what our students do once they have finished up their degrees. And it is even more wonderful, as the program matures, to watch the professional network grow. Over the past year, I have heard multiple stories of EUPS alums helping EUPS alums – meeting for informational interviews, helping to open professional doors, etc. Of course, I have nothing to teach any of you about the power and importance of networking – as members of the most networked generation ever, you could teach me plenty. Still, it is terrific to see network power at work among EUPS alums. If you’re looking for new professional opportunities, keep those networks vibrant – go to the upcoming events in Washington, for example, join the EUPS Alumni, INTA Politicos, and JMU Politicos groups on LinkedIn, and make full use of your other, non-JMU-related social and professional networks.

It’s at this point in the newsletter that I traditionally discuss the stories that appear in the issue. Before doing that here, I wanted to mention one piece of the newsletter that appears in this and every other issue – the “European Union Policy Studies Program Gift Card” on page 7. When potential students approach my colleagues and me about the program, they often have two big questions. First: what do alums do after graduating? Thanks to your work on the alumni survey and your efforts to keep in touch over the years, I have good answers to that question. Second: what kind of financial support is available? When alumni and friends give to the program, we can answer that question well, too.

Now, to the summary: in this issue’s “Oggi a Firenze” fea-

ture, current student Rebecca Peterson discusses an important, “hyper-local” civil societal organization in Florence, the Associazione Via Maggio. All alums have walked up and down Via Maggio hundreds of times, and Rebecca tells us more about what local residents and organizations (including JMU-Florence) are doing to promote the vitality and attractiveness of Via Maggio and the Santo Spirito district. Academic Coordinator Caterina Paolucci writes this issue’s profile of contemporary EU politics, providing a synopsis of the 2013 Italian general elections, the stalemate that has ensued, and the ways that the Italian results might influence Italy’s relationships with the US and its EU partners, alike. In this issue’s alumni column, we hear from Lauren Perez, who is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in political science at the University of Pittsburgh. Among other things, Lauren reflects on the ways that the program prepared her for a productive academic career. Finally, program assistant Alicia Miller writes about the current cohort’s recent trip to Strasbourg and the chaotic, invigorating hum that overtook the Louise Weiss building while they were there.

Stay in touch – I look forward to seeing many of you very soon.

Forza JMU!

Dr. John A. Scherpereel
Program Director
Oggi a Firenze

L’Associazione Via Maggio

For the summer semester, students have the option to write either a thesis or complete an internship. I selected the internship track and was chosen to work for L’Associazione Via Maggio. To get a better understanding of what the association does, I interviewed one of its founding members, Olivia Turchi.

Beginning in 2009, the mayor of Florence, Matteo Renzi, decided that each Wednesday would be classified as “Citizens Wednesday.” The mayor would allow citizens from throughout the city to come to Palazzo Vecchio and discuss problems and concerns.

After attending a few of these meetings, a group of residents and merchants founded the Association so they would be able to make more of an impact. They wanted the historical street of Via Maggio and the surrounding neighborhood to receive more attention. As EUPS alumni know, the area is known for its artisans, and Via Maggio is home to many well-known antique shops. The problems this area sees are similar to those throughout Florence—traffic, degradation, graffiti, and structural problems. The economic crisis that hit Europe in 2010 has also affected the area, but the association has made progress in curbing some of these problems. It has obtained new street lighting for Via Maggio, for example. It has pushed forward construction on resurfacing manholes and has been able to reduce the maximum allowable speeds reached by city buses.

Currently, the Association’s members represent a variety of interests in the area; there are residents, institutions like JMU, banks, and shops. Membership is open to all Florentines who would like to better the community. The Associazione is keen to cooperate with other local groups, too. It has worked, for example, with the well-known Angeli di Bello on graffiti removal.

In the next few months, the Associazione will work on a number of planned events. During the first week of May, I’ll be helping the Associazione to prepare for the Festival of Europe. I will be guiding students through different museums and exhibits in the area, teaching them about the immense history of the neighborhood. Another important event is the Biennale International Antiques fair in September. This is an important event to showcase the street’s antique dealers. It is important to the members of the Via Maggio Association to maintain the history and tradition of the area. Many have strong familial ties. For example, Ms. Turchi’s grandmother opened the shop that she currently owns in 1942.

The Associazione is off to a strong start. It will certainly continue its work restoring and protecting Via Maggio and will strive to give current and potential residents more of a reason to stay in the area. The history of JMU’s immediate vicinity is so rich in history and art, and the main goal of the organization is to help preserve the neighborhood’s atmosphere and keep local traditions alive.
Italian Politics: from earthquake to stalemate

The February 2013 general elections caused an earthquake in the Italian political system. An earthquake followed by a troubling stalemate. After the ouster of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in the fall of 2011, Mario Monti served until December 2012 as head of a technocratic government charged with saving the crisis-stricken country from the speculative attacks of the markets and from a possible international bailout. Unpredictably, the February 24th election, which was meant to determine who would serve as the Italian Prime Minister for the next five years, culminated in a stalemate between the political parties that gained parliamentary seats. Italy has a perfectly bicameral system, which means that in order to ensure the initial vote of confidence installing it into power, a government needs to command a clear majority in both the House of Deputies and the Senate. The election results did not produce the formation of such a majority. While there is a clear winner at the House of Deputies, there is no majority at the Senate.

In regards to the vote for the Chamber of Deputies, Pier Luigi Bersani’s center-left coalition won 29.55%, Berlusconi’s centre-right coalition 29.18%, the new Five Stars Movement (led by former comedian, Beppe Grillo) gained 25.5%, and “austerity” prime minister Monti gathered just 10.5%. Although the Chamber is practically split into three almost equally sized groups, thanks to the effect of the national level majority bonus foreseen by the electoral law, the winner here is the center-left. With a mere 0.37% advantage over Berlusconi, Bersani’s coalition got the majority bonus and a huge number of seats, 340 versus 124 of Berlusconi. Notable in this regard is the fact that if Bersani or Berlusconi hadn’t formed coalitions with other small partners, the majority bonus would have gone to Grillo’s movement, which is, technically speaking, the largest party in the house. Grillo ran alone and conquered 25.5% of the vote, while Bersani’s Democrats only got 25.4% and Berlusconi’s PDL 21.5%. In spite of getting the majority bonus, the center-left is pretty much delegitimized by this unexpected humiliation.

In the Senate, the situation looks different, due to the unpredictability of the effect of an electoral law attributing the majority bonus at Italy’s regional (instead of the national) level. As a result of highly differentiated local outcomes, nobody has conquered the 158 seats necessary to command a majority in this house. The center-left coalition won 123 seats, the center-right 117, the Five Stars Movement 54, and EU-favorite Monti only 19. Hence, in order for a new government to be installed through the constitutionally necessary confidence vote in both houses, a coalition must be formed, or, at least, an alliance between two or more parties. This coalition must come to terms, for example, on the choice of the future prime minister and other urgent measures, like the reform of the electoral law and of the so-far insufficient financial, fiscal, and economic policies.

The path toward such a coalition, however, is far from clear. The two most likely coalitions—center-left + Five Stars Movement, or a grand coalition of center-left + center-right—are both unpalatable to one of the two potential partners. The Five Stars Movement, which ran on a radically anti-system platform, refuses alliances “with those (corrupt parties) which have caused the situation we want to change,” while Bersani, after years of opposition to Berlusconi, is highly reluctant to join forces with “Il Cavaliere” to save the country from another election; it is quite clear to Bersani that few policies could be agreed upon with the big enemy of the left. President Giorgio Napolitano, for his part, has appointed two commissions of “wise men” to try to sort out some kind of rapprochement between the various sides. Nobody seems to see a way out. New elections may well be around the corner, but many observers doubt whether they would solve much.

In addition to these problems, which leave Italy without a new prime minister and with Mario Monti still in charge of the ordinary administration, the election of the new head of state is pending over the parliament. In mid-April the two chambers will have to elect a new bipartisan, or rather at this point tri- or quadri-partisan figure. Secret negotiations have been going on behind the stage for weeks, with parties putting both the Prime Minister and Head of State on the negotiating table, thereby complicating the picture immensely.

To European observers, the most troubling aspect of all of this is that a radical, anti-EU political party gained so much support in one of the Union’s founding members. Grillo advocates a referendum on Italy’s membership in the euro area, and Marine Le Pen (the radical French right-winger and anti-Europeanist) has recently endorsed Grillo with great enthusiasm. What American observers might have overseen—but what should worry them quite a bit—are Grillo’s advocacy of an immediate withdrawal of Italian troops from Afghanistan and the downsizing of American bases in Italy. His group has already blocked the completion of an important US military installation in Sicily.

In conclusion, the Italian political system is in the middle of a great earthquake that has produced a risky stalemate. These developments are likely to help to redefine the Italian system’s main actors and dynamics, and to have knock-on effects in other European countries, as many in Germany and France already fear.
I am currently at the University of Pittsburgh, finishing up my second year (and last semester of full-time classes!) in the political science Ph.D. program. Most of my research so far, starting with my EUPS thesis, has been on the European Parliament. I’ve also done some work on the Council and its role in the legislative process, and more recently on the role of the national parliaments and how they have adapted to the increasing role of the EU in European politics.

The EUPS program was an invaluable step toward Ph.D.-level research on the EU. The level of specialization in EUPS is something that you do not get in a Ph.D. program. For example, there has been one class offered on the EU in my program, as well as one that I could have taken in the law school. With only one course, it is impossible to go into the type of detail that we got with eight courses and a thesis or internship. While I’ve done a lot more reading on my areas of specialization since beginning my Ph.D., I would never have been as broadly and deeply read on the EU without the EUPS program. Coming in with my EUPS thesis written also gave me a solid paper to present at our EU Conference in my first year, allowing me to get conference experience early.

Perhaps even more important is the hands-on experience that comes from the trips to Brussels and Strasbourg, including some of the contacts that we made there and through the EUI. This is something that many graduate students would not get until they start their fieldwork, often after they have already started the dissertation. They then have to get the lay of the land while they are already starting interviews or archival work. In contrast, having this experience already, I am much more confident in what types of questions to ask and will hopefully be able to hit the ground running when I head to Brussels this summer.

One of the most valuable parts of studying at Pittsburgh has been the EU Center of Excellence here. So that is something that I would absolutely recommend to anyone considering doing a Ph.D. related to the EU – look for universities with these centers. The center here brings in many speakers related to the EU, allowing me to continue gaining specialized EU knowledge, keeping me up to date, and providing opportunities to meet with people and build connections. While many of the talks are interesting but not directly related to what I do, some are also particularly pertinent. For example, last year they brought in Michael Shackleton, who has worked in the EP and written books about it, and in addition to his lecture, he sat down with a few of us who focus on the EP and answered any questions we had related to our research. The center also runs our annual graduate conference, mentioned earlier, and this year helped bring in our own Alex Stutzmman as the keynote speaker. A further benefit of the centers are that they often have grant money, which can help students who study the EU go to academic conferences or do fieldwork abroad.

Another piece of advice I would give to anyone considering a Ph.D. is to think carefully about the decision between political science programs and more policy-oriented programs, particularly in relation to what sort of career you want to follow. While some of this may be biased by my experience, I think it also applies to similar schools. At least at the upper tiers of political science Ph.D. programs, they tend to be quite quantitative and more focused on institutions and behavior than on policy. The training tends to be for academic careers. Policy-oriented or public affairs programs (generally members of APSIA – the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs) tend to focus more on actual policy decisions, their causes, and their implications. The training in these programs is geared toward both academic careers and toward public or private sector policy jobs. I think that EUPS mixed both of these styles, so I would encourage anyone making this choice to consider carefully which side they are more interested in.
Strasbourg: Seat of the EP

From 4-7 February 2013, EUPS students had the privilege of venturing to the scenic city of Strasbourg. Situated in the Alsace region of France, the city holds a pivotal and historical role in the Franco-German reconciliation that followed World War II—a reconciliation, of course, that helped to lay the foundation for the current European Union.

To provide a brief history of the city, Strasbourg was acquired by Nazi-led Germany in 1940 and subjected to multiple bombing raids until it was liberated in 1944. Since then, it has been restored and become the official seat of the European Parliament.

During the trip, students traversed the beautiful cobblestone roads, bearing witness to the historic buildings of the area. Among these buildings were the Council of Europe, European Court of Human Rights, and the European Parliament. While the aesthetic of the Franco-German town was a breathtaking experience in and of itself, the students were also able to witness firsthand the sometimes chaotic nature of contemporary European and world politics.

During one of their trips to the EP plenary voting sessions, students looked on as French President François Hollande delivered a speech to MEPs and attending commissioners about furthering the EU’s efforts in Mali and asking them to approve the necessary measures to increase the EU budget. Interesting as it was, the Hollande speech was not the highlight of the trip.

On the day following President Hollande’s speech, the Tunisian political opposition leader, Chokri Belaid, was assassinated. As fate would have it, Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki, was scheduled to deliver a speech to the EP. Fate, too, would have it that EUPS students were in the EP building as this occurred. Students looked on as President Marzouki delivered a heartfelt speech to parliamentarians, asking for assistance and support for his politically divided nation.
In addition to this speech, students met with policy advisors, MEPs, and other policy makers. Throughout this day, an unmistakable hum overtook the Louise Weiss building. Politicians and officials hustled from one room to another as news of the assassination broke and President Marzouki delivered his speech. It was a rare, exciting, and frenetic day, which few political science students at any level are able to experience during their academic careers.

In Strasbourg, EUPS students beheld Strasbourg’s beauty and history, and their education was particularly enhanced by the political events that occurred during the memorable EP plenary sessions.