Problems Without Passports
ITALIAN 499
Italian Youth: The Lost Generation?
Young people, without question, are the future of any country. And yet time and time again countries are failing their young people. What are the causes and consequences of this for these countries and what futures lay in store for their young people?

Despite the center stage Italian youth took in the 1960s and 1970s, for the last couple of decades they have been excluded from the majority of society's institutions and especially the protections of the welfare state. With youth unemployment rates in Italy as high as 40.1% in 2013, the social implications are vast and wide ranging. As an initial response, the Italian government went into denial over the impending crisis for young people and only now politicians are beginning to address the magnitude of this issue. The socio-economic situation facing 25 to 34 year olds in Italy parallels those in many countries throughout Western Europe, Asia and more recently the United States and thus has reached global proportions. Some analysts predict that the current state of affairs for young people throughout the world may very well be the calm before the storm of a major uprising not entirely different from the student movements of the late 1960s and the more recent Arab Spring.

This course will engage students in the problem of Italy's lost generation from political, economic, and social dimensions while they study abroad in Rome and learn from some of the young people hit hardest in recent years. Students will hypothesize solutions for what is often considered the gerontocracy that has dominated Italian politics over the last few decades. With recent prime ministers' ages generally in their 70s and presidents being in their mid to late 80s, it is no surprise that the Italian government recently was singled out as having the highest average age in the Western world. Students will strategize alternatives to the precarious futures of young Italians in call centers and other employment with short-term contracts which has convinced much of Italy's brightest and most talented youth to flee the country in what has come to be known as a literal brain drain. Students will take on the role that the media has played in exacerbating this problem by portraying young people as superficial sex objects or projecting a continued sense of hopelessness. Additionally students will attempt to solve the problem of the last decade of zero productivity growth in Italy that has had numerous social costs with university attendance plummeting (and drop out rates increasing), the postponing of families and birth rates at a historic new low. Contrary to the negative outlook of the situation described, students will attempt to map out how Italy can utilize its strengths and resources as one of the most vibrant, socially multi-cultural nations in the world where youth are beginning to find alternative ways to express themselves politically and socially.

This problem-based learning course in English will utilize recent Italian films and documentaries to define the political, economic and social dimensions of the problem of Italy's lost generation. It will feature a number of young adult guest speakers from the Roman community who will discuss with our students their own stories. It will require students to interact with and interview Italians in Rome to enable them to better understand the problem and to pose more viable solutions. It will encourage students to reflect on the vital and significant role that they themselves will play as they emerge in the global economy. As importantly, this course will bring to our students' attention that their own futures may not be all that different from their Italian peers should they fail to demand from our government the continued fostering of opportunities for young people—our greatest asset.

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