

**Rachel Norman '19**

**2019 Corona D'Alloro Prize Essay**

Entering Muhlenberg as a freshman, I had no idea that I'd become so involved in the Italian community on campus. I had studied Italian from sixth to twelfth grade, and thought that I would try something new when I got to college. I took Hebrew for my required language as a first-year, but everything changed when I took the History of Italian Theatre with Dr. Leisawitz in the fall of sophomore year. The course had an additional, optional section that allowed a few students to meet each week and dive deeper into class texts – all in Italian. Dr. Leisawitz invited me to participate, and while I was terrified at first, this additional section reignited my love and passionate interest in Italian studies.

I immediately got involved with the Italian Club and restructured my proposed academic class schedule in order to incorporate the Italian Studies minor into the mix. Dr. Leisawitz and Professor Viale became incredible mentors of mine, and helped fuel my desire to reconnect with the language and culture of Italy. Additionally, I noticed that a significant portion of the Italian Studies students were also theatre majors, which inspired me to co-design a course with Dr. Leisawitz that centered around dramatic Italian translation and performance. We had the exceptional opportunity to partner with the Italian Playwrights Project in NYC, and had a successful final play reading of a text that the class communally devised, translated, and performed.

Italian culture and history have always resonated personally with me, and I dedicate this prized experience at Muhlenberg to my grandma Ida. She was a second-generation American of Sicilian descent, and was mighty proud of it. My love for Italy lies within her, and all of my Italian achievements are in her honor. I'm excited to integrate my knowledge of Italian Studies into the theatre and music that I pursue after college, and couldn't be more thankful to the Italian Studies Program for providing me with the tools to do so. The faculty have served as treasured ears, counselors, and sources of community during my time at Muhlenberg. Thank you to the department, my grandma Ida, and the anonymous donor of this award for instilling me with invaluable support and wisdom towards future endeavors.