I am Luis Santos, a 32-year-old U.S. Coast Guard veteran. After departing service and beginning, an academic year the idea of studying abroad seemed farfetched to me. The unfounded thought that I was too old to study abroad had deterred me from even considering it. Moreover, I envisioned the application process to be extremely difficult and tedious, further deterring me from considering it. However, a casual conversation with a fellow student encouraged me to see past the pre conceived stereotypes and apply. Peter, who is an U.S. Army veteran, had just returned from a semester in London. Likewise, Peter is also in his 30’s. He cheerfully described his experience and debunked my invalid vision of the process. According to Peter, studying abroad was an invaluable experience and I would be doing myself a disservice if I did not do it. His encouraging words led me to apply.

The application process proved to be seamless. The application consisted of a few essay questions and personal information. The VA certifying official arranged all required paper work, requiring minimal effort on my part. The study abroad program coordinator walked me through the process and assisted me in selecting the program that would fit my academic needs best. I selected UCSC in Milan, Italy. UCSC’s wide options of English speaking classes and its geographical location made it my preferred choice.

Once I arrived at the airport in Milan, the cultural immersion began. The romantic sounding language and the aromatic coffee were sensed a few minutes after leaving the airplane. The city was welcoming and its habitants were friendly, making it easy to adapt and forget that I was thousands of miles away from home. Once school started, as expected I was the oldest student in all of my classes, which, proved to be advantageous. Previous life experience allowed me to contribute to my classes in a different way than most of my peers. Yielding straight A’s at the end of the program. Moreover, being older, allowed me to appreciate the overall experience in a deeper level than most of my younger counterparts. As mentioned by my colleague, Peter, months prior, studying abroad was indeed an invaluable experience. Both academically and culturally. I highly recommend it to students that are veterans. Spending a semester abroad undoubtedly enhanced my perspective and gave me broader knowledge of the Italian culture, which will be useful in future endeavors.