News



The dome of St. Peter's Basilica is seen through trees in the Vatican Gardens Oct. 3, 2017. Due to the spread of coronavirus, U.S. Catholic colleges and universities have canceled international programs and trips. (CNS/Paul Haring)



Carol Zimmermann

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Amid concerns over the current outbreak of the coronavirus, several U.S. Catholic colleges and universities have canceled their international programs in Italy this semester or are closely monitoring the situation and prepared to cut programs short if necessary.

Schools ending their Italian international study programs this semester include Villanova University just outside Philadelphia, the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, The Catholic University of America in Washington, Fairfield University in Connecticut, Loyola University Chicago, the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, and Boston College.

Other colleges that are monitoring the situation for their study abroad programs include the University of Dallas and Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas.

Italy's Civil Protection Authority reported March 2 that the country has 1,694 confirmed coronavirus cases and 34 related deaths. It has the highest number of coronavirus cases in Europe. COVID-19 is the name of this most recent coronavirus.

Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey, canceled its spring break study abroad program to Italy and several colleges have posted warnings about individual travel during the break on their websites.

In announcing the cancellation of these programs, many of the Catholic colleges and universities acknowledged students' disappointment. Some, but not all, said they would offer some type of financial reimbursement.

In writing about the semester's discontinuation at the Loyola University Chicago's John Felice Rome Center, the program's director, Michael Andrews, said: "Please remember that it is our civic responsibility to do everything we can to prevent any additional spread of the virus, keeping in mind the most vulnerable among us."

He pointed out this was not "an ideal situation for our students, parents, faculty or staff" and said the university was committed to providing a positive alternative learning experience for its students.

Like other college leaders in this position around the country, he said the main goal at this time is to get students home safely and to be sure they stayed at home for the 14-day period directed by the Centers for Disease Control.

Villanova University announced on its website that "given the rapid increase in the number of confirmed cases in Northern Italy, we have made the decision to bring home our students who are abroad in Italy. The university is in close contact with other study abroad programs in which Villanova students are participating and will determine appropriate responses to additional disruptions caused by the coronavirus."

Gonzaga University announced it has suspended all academic courses in Florence, Italy, effective March 6 and said students should make "immediate plans to travel back to their home residence." Similarly, Fairfield University is closing its Florence University of the Arts study abroad program and requiring the 142 students enrolled in the program to leave Italy and return to the main campus by March 15 where they

will have the option of online and hybrid classes to remain on track to graduate.

Boston College officials said initially they were taking a wait-and-see approach regarding the school's college program in Parma, Italy, but "after much thought and consideration," they decided to close the program for the spring semester.

Notre Dame officials said they, too, had to "make the difficult but necessary decision to end all programming" in Italy for the rest of the semester. The school has 106 students studying in the Italian study program, 27 in the architecture program, one in law and 78 in other disciplines, who will be flown back to the United States as soon as possible.

The university previously announced a ban on school-sponsored travel to China and South Korea and is now extending that prohibition to Italy. It also said on its website that it continues to recommend against personal travel to China, South Korea, Italy, Iran and Japan. Boston College also placed a prohibition on university-sponsored travel to China and South Korea.

Not every college is shutting down its Italian programs just yet. Benedictine College currently has 52 students at its Florence campus and is keeping it open for those who wish to stay.

Daniel Musso, who oversees the school's study abroad programs, told News Press, a Kansas-based newspaper, that 14 students are returning to the Kansas campus.

The Dallas Morning News reported that several University of Dallas students studying in Rome have been placed in a "semi-quarantine" as a precaution against the coronavirus, wearing masks on campus, eating meals outdoors and sleeping away from other students.

"The University of Dallas has been closely monitoring developments," said the university's president, Thomas Hibbs, in a statement.

Students from the University of St. Thomas' Catholic Studies in St. Paul, Minnesota, and its seminary program at St. John Vianney, are also being asked to return home by March 6 with the closing of the school's Bernardi campus in Rome this semester.

Students will be able to complete their classes from St. Paul, the university said.

"We simply cannot predict how COVID-19 will continue to spread throughout Italy, and we believe it is in the best interests of our students to leave Rome before the ability to do so is restricted," university officials said.

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