Italian 203 has been my favorite Italian course thus far at Duke. When learning foreign languages, I place a lot of value on learning about the culture at hand, not just memorizing vocabulary lists. Italian 203 was exactly that. This semester, I have found myself completing projects and dialogues that have furthered not only my ability to read, write, and speak Italian, but also increased my knowledge about Italian culture, cuisine, and values. The most rewarding assignments throughout the semester were the various projects that I completed while working in a group comprised of my classmates. Furthermore, challenging myself to be able to present in Italian about my research-based findings in front of the class was a valuable building block in my Italian education.

The first three items in my portfolio reflect examples of projects that required either high-level verbal or written communication. For example, the assignment in “Communication I” required me to produce a well thought out written composition about our first project of the semester, researching and making comparisons between Italian food in America and authentic Italian cuisine. This assignment challenged me to utilize transition words and different syntactical structures in Italian, which benefited and solidified my ability to write in Italian. Additionally, the next two assignments, “Communication II” and “Communication III” provide examples of speaking Italian. Initially, speaking Italian was the most difficult aspect of the language for me, and was an obstacle from the very beginning. Throughout my three semesters spent studying Italian, I’ve worked diligently on my pronunciation of Italian and made significant progress. “Communication III” is the interview project we did, and I collaborated with Jack McDermott and Lily Coad to formulate interview questions for a peer raised in Italy. Conducting the interview was an incredible experience for me, as I was able to put my speaking skills to the test and have a conversation with a native Italian speaker.

Assignment four allowed me to reflect upon a specific aspect of Italian food culture: the values of the slow food movement. Before reading about the slow food movement, I was unaware of the fact that people in Italy specifically are pushing for locally grown food and organic ingredients. This assignment was a learning experience for me and broadened my horizons regarding Italian cuisine. The “Comparisons” assignment forced me to use my imagination and compare an Italian museum that I researched to a fictional American one. Composing this scrittura challenged my ability to formulate ideas and make connections between aspects of both Italian and American culture.

Moreover, the last two assignments, not counting “Grammar” and “Vocabulary,” were parts of the project about the Nasher museum. The presentation, on which I collaborated with Lily and Jack as well, was a production of our research as a group, as well as my role as the communications expert. As such, I developed questions for Laura and engaged in Italian dialogue about the museum and its artwork. Presenting our findings allowed me to further progress my ability to speak Italian and gain confidence in public speaking settings. The worksheet in the “Cultures” section reflected my ability to listen to and comprehend Laura as she spoke about the museum in Italian. Challenging myself, I listened to what she said and took notes in my own words, which reinforced my understanding of the language and culture. Lastly, the vocabulary and grammar sections were examples of helpful grammar and vocabulary activities that aided with the development of vital technical skills when using the Italian language.

Overall, my experience in Italian 203 has made me a better person and student. Working with classmates and my professor in such a close-knit environment helped me to foster positive relationships in the classroom that further engaged my interest in learning and aided with my
intellectual development. Producing the portfolio at the end of the semester served as an ideal way to combine everything I have learned throughout Italian into one presentation.