

The Future of the Italian Language

Kayla Pantano (November 08, 2016)



Montclair University will host a conversation with the likes of Consul Francesco Genuardi and Lucia Pasqualini on the current state of the Italian language in order to foster interest in a structured and sustainable way. Discover a taste of the upcoming event's discussion through our interview with Associate Professor and Inserra Chair Dr. Teresa Fiore.

With the support of the [Consulate General of Italy in New York](#) [2], Montclair State University will host a round table discussion to address the current situation of the field of Italian studies. Spearheaded and sponsored by the [Inserra Chair in Italian and Italian American Studies](#) [3], a diverse group of experts will identify points of traditional strength to leverage and examine new available directions in order to increase the attractiveness of pursuing Italian as a university degree. The event, "[Come sta l'italiano? The Present and Future of Italian Language and Culture Studies](#) [4]," will



take place on Tuesday, November 15, at 6:30pm.

In an effort to promote this event and subsequently the Italian language, we spoke with Associate Professor and Inserra Chair Dr. [Teresa Fiore](#) [5], who was at the forefront of its planning. She describes one of the presentation's objectives as "to understand how the numbers behind the study of Italian can really translate into a commitment to the study in the long term."

Ranging from professors to representatives of academic organizations and government institutions, the scheduled speakers are all very distinguished and will offer insight stemming from their varied backgrounds.

Consul General Francesco Genuardi, an Italian diplomat with 23 years of experience in the field of International Relations, will provide the opening remarks.

In regards to Genuardi, Fiore notes, "His presence is very important because our diplomatic corps has really embraced this mission to promote the country through language, and culture, of course, but this is the first time that language is a central component."

She adds, "He will represent the government's commitment to this type of approach, which is very significant. Language is a distinctive quality and it cannot disappear. Even though our objects, our food, our clothes will circulate, it's important that they circulate along with the language, that they are presented through our language, that people come to our country to interact with people in our language."

[Lucia Pasqualini](#) [6] will also be a presenter. She currently serves as the head of the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in Rome](#) [7] for the promotion of Italian language abroad, previously working as the Deputy Consul at the Consulate General in New York.

"Of course, Lucia also represents the government, even more so coming from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome. She has been an advocate of promoting the country through the language in very clear and systemic ways. This is a person who was very dedicated to the project when she was here at the Consulate and has continued to do so in even more obvious ways in Rome, especially through the [Stati Generali](#) [8]," Fiore says.

"It was an incredibly powerful, diverse, and beautiful way of saying our language is alive. La Lingua Viva was the slogan and she put together an incredible program with professionals, scholars, politicians, the President of the Republic was there, the Prime Minister was there. This is a very powerful gesture towards the value of language," she continues.

In addition to expressing her excitement about Genuardi and Pasqualini, Fiore stresses the significance of the other two guests.

"We're incredibly honored to have both of them, but in particular to hear from Lucia what is going on in Florence and how we can all benefit from what they discussed there for two days. And the other two guests are equally important. [David Ward](#) [9] teaches at Wellesley, where they had a meeting on the same subject. So he will report on that. Then [Dennis Looney](#) [10] from the most important association [[Association of Departments of Foreign Languages at the Modern Language Association of America](#) [11]] in our field, who happens to be an Italianist as well. So we are very excited."

Fiore believes the future of the Italian language is such an important topic "because Italy is a country that is loved." She continues, "It's sought after for its art, products, history, literature. And the language constitutes a really central component of it, in order to convey the beauty, the elegance, the playfulness of our culture and its depth."

In fact, statistics indicate that Italian is the fourth most studied language in the world. Fiore credits this to Italy's popularity as a vacation spot and study abroad destination.

"Italian is studied because Italy is a country that pretty much everyone wants to visit, whether young people or senior people. It has very strong attractiveness for different reasons. It has a very



magnetic power. Visiting is often related to being able to communicate with people and as a result we're seeing an increased interest."

She goes on to emphasize that people also strive to understand Italy as a modern economic power, also because of the Made in Italy.

"Many people want to get to know the country better for what it is today, not just as the cradle of a rich cultural heritage, but as a contemporary economic power in the world. It's a language of love, it's language of family, but it's also a language of economic exchanges."

However, less people are pursuing Italian as a degree, which Fiore credits to three reasons.

"It's in part to the general reformulation of the meaning of the humanities in our contemporary world. People don't value them the way they used to. In the case of Italian specifically, compared to other countries, we continue to be a fairly small country. Our language is really just for Italy, compared to other languages that open up entire continents. Third, for contemporary students the question is, 'What am I going to do with my degree?'"

Fiore holds that Italian needs to be seen not only as one of culture and of the humanities but also as "necessary in our globalized world."

"Historically it's been *la bella lingua* and it will continue to be. That's something that we still need to leverage in fields such as opera, theater, cinema, literature, and so on and so forth. But at the same time it's important to see its contemporary value. It's part of a circulation of ideas and people and products in our high-tech world, and Italy is part of that high-tech world as well."

She adds, "Italian is a very useful language if you choose food studies, design, fashion, or business and Italy is the place you have in mind on the world map. The same accounts for engineers and for astrophysics, for example. There are many areas in which Italy is excelling."

Unfortunately, students do not view Italy as a place to work because of its high unemployment rates, yet Fiore remains optimistic.

"It's still possible if we work together to make it happen. I say so because the presence of Italy outside of Italy is so big thanks to its diaspora and thanks to the Made in Italy, which is creating entire new markets around the world. Students can find local jobs that are still linked to Italy. This is both with Italian companies that have satellite headquarters here, Ferrero, Colavita, you name it, and also American companies that are in touch with Italy to make their products and to market them."

One of the ways to change the stigma around pursuing a degree is to advertise these opportunities.

"I have thought for a very long time that a marketing campaign coming primarily from our governmental institutions could give us a very powerful tool. But I think we need something that specifically targets high school students and undergraduates in terms of where Italian studies can lead because this is what all disciplines are doing: basically telling their students what they can do in the future," Fiore shares.

This brings to light another issue, which begins at the high school level.

Fiore stresses, "We need to create more synergies between the high school system and the university system, so whatever is done before can be capitalized for a degree."

Fiore offers some final thoughts in closing.

"We need to reform the way in which we teach Italian, and it would be great if we could do it through really large initiatives, such as the creation of a think tank where professors can bring together their ideas, resources, and experience, and then the entire field can use it. And then of course the support of the Italian government is very important to send a strong message to our academic institutions



that Italian is not small. Really for me this has become the slogan. We're not small. I mean we're small on the map, but we are big despite the fact that we're small."

RVSP required [here](#) [12] by Friday, November 11.

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[5] http://www.montclair.edu/profilepages/view_profile.php?username=fiorete

[6] <http://www.marcheisgood.com/testimonials/lucia-pasqualini>

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[9] <http://www.wellesley.edu/italian/faculty/ward>

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