

Retired prof's legacy inspires renaissance lecture series

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Retired Brock Associate Professor Professor Ernesto Virgulti, a champion of experiential education and creator of an interdisciplinary studies abroad program that takes students to Italy, was recognized for his many contributions to the University through a new lecture series named in his honour.

A mere mention of Ernesto Virgulti's name brings an instant smile to those on campus who know him.

The recently retired Associate Professor of Italian Studies is being celebrated for his many contributions to Brock, and particularly the Faculty of Humanities, with the launch of a new lecture series named in his honour.

The inaugural Ernesto Virgulti Lecture took place Nov. 6 at Brock's Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts. The event welcomed guest lecturer Laura Ingallinella, Assistant Professor of Italian Studies at the University of Toronto, to deliver a talk on gender and literary forgery in Renaissance Italy.

Virgulti played a critical role in co-creating and designing the Faculty of Humanities' Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (MARS), including teaching many courses and acting as Chair. He taught a variety of courses in MARS and in the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures (MLLC).

“The faculty in Medieval and Renaissance Studies are so passionate and dedicated to their students. It was an honour to be part of its inception during my time at Brock, and a pleasure to see how the centre continues to flourish,” Virgulti said.

Renée-Claude Breitenstein, Associate Professor of French and MARS Director, said students lined up to take Virgulti's classes, particularly those related to Dante and Boccaccio — major Italian authors who drove much of his interdisciplinary research.

“Ernesto is a natural educator; he is knowledgeable and friendly and has been a mentor for many students who look up to him,” Breitenstein said.

Associate Professor and Chair of MLLC Carmela Colella worked closely with Virgulti in Italian Studies and said he played a pivotal role shaping the Italian studies program while making significant contributions to the program more generally.

“Ernesto was instrumental in shaping our modern languages at Brock as Chair for nine years, but he didn't limit himself to one area; he believed in making connections across the University to the benefit of our students,” Colella said.



Retired Brock University Associate Professor Ernesto Virgulti.

Virgulti is known for championing the value of experiential education. In 1991, he designed a hugely successful interdisciplinary studies abroad program for

Humanities taking students to Italy to immerse themselves in the language, arts and culture.

“It doesn’t matter how many lectures students hear in a classroom; experiencing art or visiting historic sites — being there and seeing it— there isn’t a more immersive way to understand a culture,” he said.

Virgulti, who came to Canada from Italy when he was a child, said his career and life’s work was inspired by time spent in Italy in his formative years learning the language and experiencing arts and culture.

In addition to his contributions to Brock, Virgulti has been actively involved in community work both in Niagara and in Hamilton over the past 40 years. His volunteerism includes organizing Italian classes for children and adults, lectures, art exhibits, concerts and numerous film nights.

“Where would we be without language and the arts? The fulfillment we get from cinema, literature, theatre, visual arts and music is a key part of being human,” Virgulti said

Breitenstein and Colella said the lecture series was created to continue Virgulti’s work of cultivating meaningful educational experiences for all.

“The lecture series will welcome scholars like Ernesto, who love teaching and researching in the areas of medieval and Renaissance Italy and can broaden specialized topics to engage a wide audience,” she said.

Virgulti said he is honoured to be recognized by my colleagues in this way.

“I look forward to future conversations spurred by the lecture series,” he said.