MONTEVERDI, TUSCANY—Sitting on the top of a mountain, staring out as the sun set in a pink-streaked sky over the Val d’Orcia sprawling below in a patchwork of yellow and green, I wondered how in the world I was lucky enough to experience that moment. Tuscany is a land that awakens something deep within the human spirit and connects the mind and soul to artists and thinkers from a time long past, a tradition of creativity and scholarship that has helped form our current understanding of what it means to be human.

The Monteverdi Prize allowed me the experience of a lifetime this summer. Sponsored by the generosity of the Cioffi family, whom I had the honor and joy of meeting and spending time with during my experience, I was able to spend the summer in an academic and creative retreat. Although my specific purpose was to perform research for my senior thesis for the Program of Liberal Studies, the experience provided me with so much more. Attending concerts and lectures, as well as leading presentations and discussions on my research, created an environment that fostered deep contemplation and engagement with truly brilliant individuals and fascinating ideas.

I carried out research on Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and the poem’s relationship with art—particularly art of the Italian Renaissance—and how the poem and the art it inspired relate to the medieval art of memory. For my research I traveled primarily to Florence, Dante’s beloved home, as well as to Rome, Padua, and Ravenna, the location of Dante’s tomb. I explored churches, visited libraries, and roamed the streets of the town that gave rise to the great Italian poet and father of the Italian language. The experience was a continuation of the cultural immersion I experienced during my spring semester study abroad in Rome, and the additional time I spent surrounded by Italian culture served only to increase my appreciation of and love for the people and culture of this beautiful country.

My stay at Monteverdi was both rewarding and humbling, and is one of the crowning experiences of my time at Notre Dame. I have grown exponentially as an individual, and come to a much deeper understanding of my connection with the rest of humanity. I am incredibly grateful to all who made the adventure a possibility, and I cannot give a high enough recommendation to those looking to apply in the future. I learned far more from my two months spent on that mountaintop in Tuscany than I ever dreamed possible, and I will continue to look back on the experience with joy for the rest of my life.