ROCK ISLAND, IL (05/19/2010)(readMedia)-- Thirty-three Augustana students will spend 11 days this summer in Rome, Italy, studying and visiting a variety of sites including St. Peter's Basilica, the Pantheon and Jewish Quarter. The group will also visit The Vatican and attend an audience or formal meeting with Pope Benedict XVI. The trip to Rome is the final requirement for a class called Faiths in Dialogue, which focuses on both historical and ethical issues within Christianity.

The program started in 2006 as an opportunity for students to participate in an international experience outside of their normal coursework schedule and is open to students of all majors. Every two years, students can sign up for the upper-level religion course during the spring term and then culminate their class work with a trip to Rome.

Students participating from your area include:

- Owen Engstrom from Sherrard, IL. Engstrom is a sophomore majoring in political science .
- Edwin Fonseca from Moline, IL. Fonseca is a junior majoring in business administration management and accounting .
- Josephine Swanson from Rock Island, IL. Swanson is a sophomore majoring in biology .

"I hope that as a result of the experience, students will have a deeper understanding of various religious traditions-their own as well as those of others-and will think seriously about a wide variety of issues," said Dr. Lee, professor and chair of the Department of Religion. This will be the third summer that Dr. Lee has taken Augustana students on the Rome program.

Lee enjoys many of the historical and cultural aspects to the trip, but says his favorite part is the students. "I enjoy spending time in conversation with students in the wonderful rooftop garden atop the very traditional family-owned hotel where the group stays," said Lee. "It's an incredible privilege to spend time in Rome with Augustana students."

Melissa Shore, a junior communications studies major, is excited about returning to Rome to study. "This trip offers the opportunity to experience Italian culture, Roman Catholic traditions and get a glimpse into the ancient Roman world," said Shore. "I jumped at the chance to return to Rome because I will have a greater understanding of the sites that we visit because of the readings we have done in class."

Over the past ten weeks, students have been examining the diversity within Christian ethical thought and addressing challenges raised by cultural, philosophical and religious pluralism through writing and discussion. They have also been studying ancient Roman emperors, many of the previous Popes, and reading a variety of documents published by the Roman Catholic Church. The coursework is designed to provide students with a firm foundation of knowledge about Rome before leaving so they will have a richer experience while studying abroad.

The students leave May 25th and return to the United States on June 4.

About Augustana: Founded in 1860 and situated on a 115-acre campus near the Mississippi River, Augustana College is a private, liberal arts institution affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The college enrolls nearly 2,500 students from diverse geographic, social, ethnic and religious backgrounds and offers more than 70 majors and related areas of study. Augustana employs 287 faculty and has a student-faculty ratio of 11:1. Augustana continues to do what it has always done: challenge and prepare students for lives of leadership and service in our complex, ever-changing world.