Confronting new challenges is par for the course for plucky Liberal Studies instructor and PM editor John Black.

As he grabbed a brief moment’s respite from a week so incredibly busy that it saw a three-day delay in the publication of the polite yet satirical magazine, Black was sanguine about what the immediate future has in store for him.

“It’s one hell of a tough assignment,” he mused. “Let there be absolutely no doubt about that. Yet in these times of unbridled change we must always be on guard against complacency, and never is this more true than at the present moment.”

At the end of the day, the bottom line is that the Liberal Studies Abroad program places huge demands upon both students and faculty (oh - not forgetting CUPE staff, of course). The unusual diet of pasta, gelati, espresso and red wine has seen the end of many would-be imitators. Both parties to the educational transaction have to confront so-called great works of art in situ, rather than in books, and therefore without aid of marginal notes or helpful synopses.

“The weather can also be a problem,” said Black. “Students are not used to paying attention when it is 27° outside, and so some classes have to be shortened.

Black and colleague Lisa MacLean conduct an urgent faculty meeting amid the urban nightmare that is contemporary Florence.

“Perhaps the worst aspect,” he continued philosophically, “is the fact, so damaging to the self-respect of faculty (and, where applicable, CUPE staff) that we are not allowed to pay for our own travel expenses. I have learned to live with this, but I don’t mind saying it has been a struggle of gargantuan proportions.”

Such a spirit serves as an example to us all. With so devoted a servant, Malaspina will soon achieve its highest aspirations.