



1561  PAVIA  
ALMO COLLEGIO  
BORROMEO



QUICK GUIDE 

ALMO COLLEGIO BORROMEO

PAVIA - ITALY





## CHRONOLOGY OF THE COLLEGE

- 1561** Foundation of the College  
Bolla by Pope Pius IV
- 1564** Laying of the first stone
- 1581** The first students enrol,  
including Federico Borromeo
- 1584** Federico Borromeo  
first Patron of the College
- 1587** Constitution of the College
- 1818** Completion of the southern  
side of the Palace and  
nineteenth-century garden
- 1915** World War I,  
the College becomes
- 1919** a military hospital
- 1977** The Graduates Section opens
- 2009** The Women's Section opens



## THE RECTOR'S WELCOME

*Dear Guests,*

Welcome to this "Palace of knowledge" steeped in ancient tradition. Today you can experience its majestic beauty, created by the commitment of those who imagined, constructed and cared for it.

In times of hunger and pestilence, our founder felt it necessary to realise this palace with startling attention to detail! Unperturbed by the difficult social situation, unaccepting of other more modest styles of architecture, he did not sacrifice astonishing detail nor allow details to be omitted by tolerating half-measures; he detested the egotism of a self-centred life, and was certain that the sight of so much stunning beauty could inspire a more authentic existence: the more beautiful the Palace, the more beautiful the hearts and minds of those who dwelt within!

Welcome to the Almo Collegio Borromeo, where beauty is the norm, wishing that you too are enriched by that same beauty!

*Alberto Lolli*

## PROTAGONISTS OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE PALACE

**Carlo Borromeo** (1538-1584) cardinal, archbishop of Milan, canonized in 1610, is the founder of the College.

**Federico Borromeo** (1564-1631), cousin of Carlo, cardinal and archbishop of Milan, founder of the Ambrosian library and gallery, was one of the first students hosted in the palace while still under construction in 1581. He was the first Patron of the College from 1584 to 1631, and was responsible for the definitive drafting of the College constitution, as well as commissioning the frescoes of the Representation Hall.

**Pellegrino Pellegrini** (1527-1596), **Francesco Maria Ricchino** (1584-1658), **Giuseppe Pollack** (1779-1857): they are the architects responsible for, respectively, the construction of the Palace (1564-1586), the construction of the seventeenth-century garden (1620-1629) and the completion of the southern façade after the demolition of the church of San Giovanni in Borgo (1818-1820).

**Cesare Nebbia** and **Federico Zuccari**, **Giovanni Battista Muttoni**, **Manlio Oppio** and **Osvaldo Bignami**: they are the painters, who in various periods, realized the frescoes of the Representation Hall (1603-1604), those of the vault of the Chapel (1579) and of its walls (1909).

Cardinal Federigo "... soon after entered the College founded by this (the cousin Carlo Borromeo) in Pavia and still bears the family name..."  
(Alessandro Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, chapter XXII)



The motto "*Humilitas*" appears in the coat of arms of the Borromeo family in 1444 and is chosen by San Carlo Borromeo as the cardinal's coat of arms to indicate the humility with which we must approach God. Engraved in "Gallic letters", palm and olive branches are added to accentuate its value. The motto is traditionally accompanied by the Latin phrase "*victrix invicta*" (literally "victorious and invincible") to indicate the success of those actions undertaken with humility.

**Unicorn**: mythological sea horse that indicates valour and devotion; it raises its head towards the Visconti serpent as a sign of gratitude. This symbol was introduced into the coat of arms in 1445.

**Lemon or Cedar**: represents the climate of the islands.

**Camel**: the patience and fidelity of Vitaliano I towards his uncle Giovanni.

**Wavy lines**: the waves upon which Antenore sailed back from Troy to Padua.

**Three Rings**: these friendship rings were introduced into the coat of arms shortly after 1445 by Francesco Sforza to testify to the alliance between the Visconti, Sforza and Borromeo families.

**Horse's bridle**: allegorises strength and commemorates the military events of 1487 when Helvetian and Vallesan hordes of invaders descended from the Sempione pass but were defeated by Giovanni Borromeo, who pushed them back beyond the Alps.

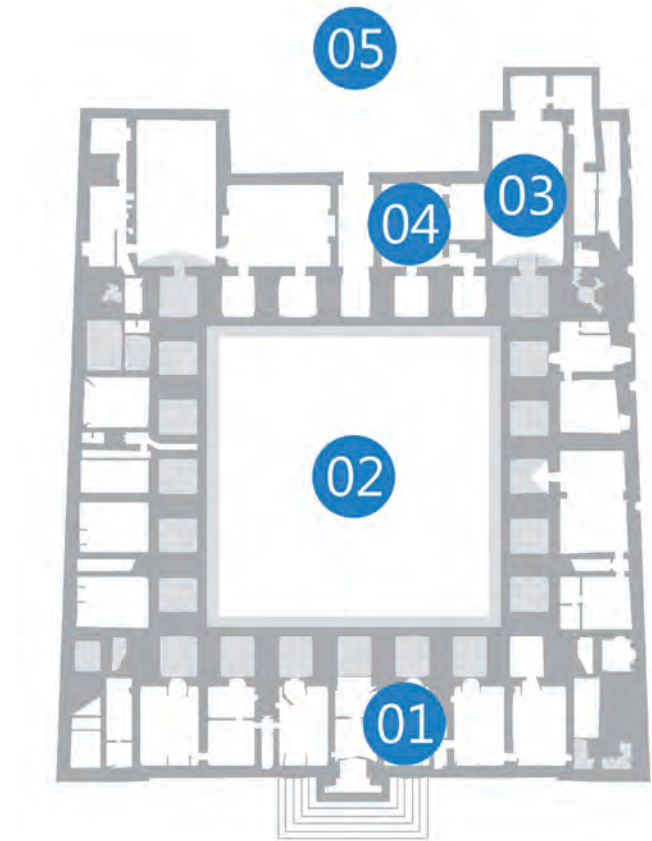
**The braid**: the lock of braids represents the sacrifice of Saint Giustina.

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Borromeo College was founded to host deserving students of the University of Pavia, albeit without economic resources. Here, students sleep, eat, study, complete their university education and spend much of their free time together.

The building is on six levels: on the **ground floor** there are the offices, the rectory, the chapel, the refectory, the historical archive, classrooms and common rooms; on the **four upper floors** there are the students' rooms; the entire **eastern side of the main floor** is occupied by the representative rooms; in the **basement** there are the library, the classrooms for the lessons, the study and reading rooms, the recreational areas and the gym.

- *The visit to the College is free.*
- *All those who enter the building must register at the porter's lodge, and wear the visitor's card they will be given for the duration of the visit.*
- *The visitors' route is limited to the numbered places indicated on the map.*
- *You can take pictures (without a tripod) exclusively for personal use or study, not for commercial use or publication.*
- *It is possible to smoke only in the vicinity of ashtrays.*
- *All personal items must be kept with you.*
- *It is not possible to consume food or drink.*
- *If the fire alarm sounds, go directly towards the emergency exit without running and then towards the porter's lodge.*
- *Promptly contact the concierge for any need or emergency.*



## VISITORS' ROUTE

1. Entrance and Porter's Lodge
2. Inner courtyard
3. Chapel
4. Fireplace room
5. Seventeenth-century garden

Visitors are asked to respect College life and the campus, and the students who live here, keeping silent and following the directions of the visit.



**Accessibility:** the route of the visit is all on the ground floor and accessible to visitors with disabilities.

01

ENTRANCE AND  
PORTER'S LODGE

The **main facade** of Borromeo College overlooks the square of the same name: the warm colour of the masonry, enhanced by openings, niches and reliefs, interplays with the natural light of different hours of the day and different seasons.

At the centre of the last row of windows, above the inscription in capital letters referring to **Cardinal Carlo Borromeo**, the large **multicoloured oval emblem of the Borromeo family** stands out.

You enter the palace up a stone staircase that leads to the **large portal**, dominated by a sculpted grotesque mask, reproduced in the wrought iron knockers of the wooden doors. The entrance hall is enclosed by a carved wooden wall, which bears the motto of the College "**Humilitas**" and two of the Borromeo heraldic emblems: the horse's bridle and, at the top of the structure, the camel crouched in the flowered basket.

Other elements that introduce the history of the College are visible in the **Porter's Lodge**: two portraits of the founder San Carlo Borromeo and the first Patron Federico Borromeo, both cardinals and archbishops of Milan, the Borromeo symbols in the inlaid marble floor, the numbered panel that the students have used for many decades to report their presence in the College.







02

## THE INNER COURTYARD

Overlooking the **courtyard of honour**, we can see the grandeur of the Palace's architecture: the compact rectangular cube delineated by the facades opens up into a luminous space, lightened by **double porticos** formed by slender **twin columns** connected by large, very high arches. Light plays with shade, the airiness of the structure with the grace of the chromatic harmony between the white of the plaster, the red of the terracotta tiles and the gray and cream of the stone parts.

The building has been conceived as a large, unified, rational entity: it is a place which inspires amazement and admiration, and where beauty seems to speak, but it is also a space shaped specifically for the **life of the students** who, after long hours of study in their rooms, can relax by walking under the porticos and in the garden.

The dominant qualities of this architecture are **symmetry**, **harmonious proportions**, the **regularity of openings** along the four sides and the regular intervals of bays. The various floors are connected by a functional **system of staircases**: two main stairs in the corners of the western side, two spiral stairs in opposite corners of the quadrilateral, several narrower ramps to connect the levels of the two porticos with the mezzanines; finally the ancient staircase for horses leading to the library in the basement.

On the roof of the eastern side, opposite the entrance, sits the **bell**: in this elegant wrought iron structure, all the Borromean heraldic emblems are intertwined under the flaps of the cardinal's hat, a reference to the founder. Even today its bell rings the hours in the College.



## 03

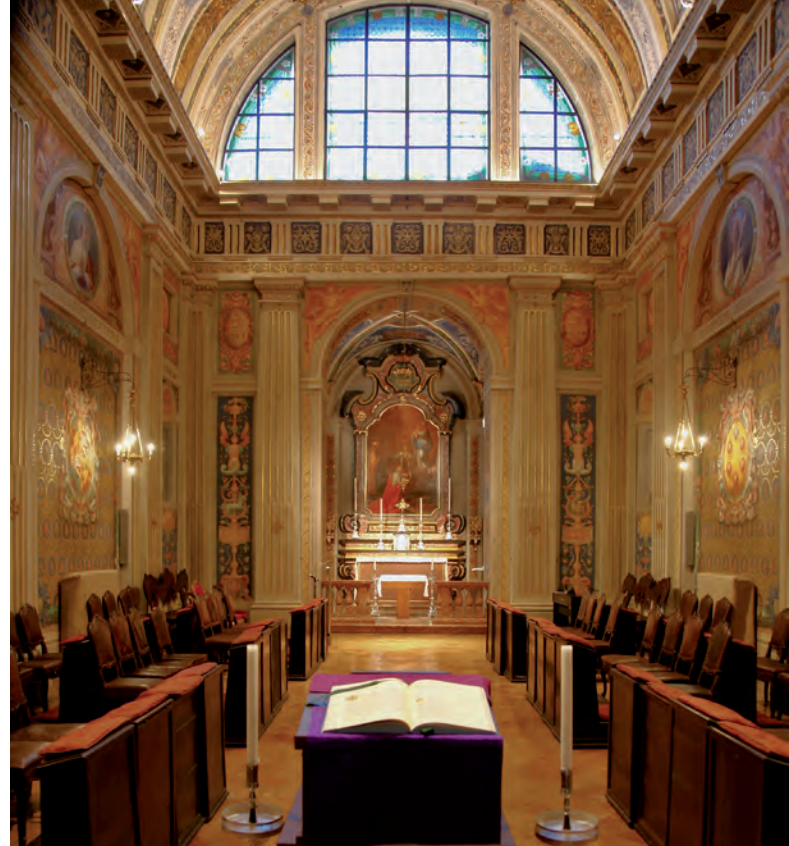
## THE CHAPEL

The **Chapel** is situated in the southern corner opposite the main entrance. Its entrance is defined by its rich seventeenth century marble gate, crowned by the bust of Saint Carlo. The church provides regular liturgical services and is dedicated to the martyr **Saint Justine** (Borromeo's family Patron Saint) and **Saint Carlo Borromeo** (since his canonization in 1610).

The interior is composed of a unique nave; the **barrel vault** is decorated with the most ancient **frescoes** of the Palace. These were realized by the local painter, **Giovanni Battista Muttoni**, in 1579, before the completion of the building. The style is typical of Mannerist decoration: four scenes from the Old Testament are surrounded by geometrical and "grotesque" decorations, fruit and flower borders and monochrome symbols of Christ's Passion.

The walls are entirely covered with frescoes made in 1909 by **Manlio Oppio**, **Oswaldo Bignami** and other local painters: the Patron Saints of the College and of university students (Carlo Borromeo, Justine, Caterina of Alessandria, Thomas Equinas) appear in the four tondoes. Large coats of arms of the Borromeo and Medici families (in memory of Pope Pius Medici IV, the founder's uncle) stand out on sumptuous backdrops that curiously simulate tapestries.

The **twentieth century stained-glass window** facing east and the **wooden choir** above the entrance are remarkable, where even today in the most solemn celebrations, the students' choir sings. The original 16th century **floor** made using the "**cotto Lombardo**" technique, has the characteristic, woodlike two-tone veins. The **altarpiece**, surrounded by a sumptuous cornice in multi-coloured marble, is an eighteenth-



century work by the Roman painter **Nicola La Piccola** and depicts the adoration of the Madonna and Child by the Saints Charles, Ambrose and Justine.

In the Chapel we can find seats in embossed leather and nineteenth-century kneeling-stools, and antique furnishings and vestments; thus in many parts of the College, original furniture, finishes and fixtures are still preserved in the styles of the various eras, from the end of the sixteenth century to the following centuries.

*By statute, since its origins, the College is directed by a **Rector priest**. All activity is under his jurisdiction: from the logistical, cultural and educational to the spiritual. The Rector celebrates the weekly Mass in the **Chapel of the College**.*



04

## THE FIREPLACE ROOM

Before the nineteenth century this was the Rector's room. Instead today it welcomes students and guests who can enjoy a coffee break while reading newspapers and magazines. For centuries it has been one of the very few heated rooms in the palace: **the large fireplace in coloured marble** is richly decorated with painted stucco reliefs, with cherubs bearing the coat of arms of the Borromeo family, complete with all their heraldic emblems.

This room houses several ancient paintings: **two full-length seventeenth-century portraits of Carlo and Federico Borromeo**; a canvas with the **biblical figure of Job**, dating from the 1600s; a small copy of one of the frescoes painted by Cesare Nebbia featured in the Representation Hall: the scene with **Saint Carlo during the plague of Milan in 1576**.



### Borromeo and literature

*The College is mentioned in the 1568 edition of Giorgio Vasari's "Lives", which defines it as "The Palace of Knowledge". It has been visited by many illustrious travellers, such as Montaigne and Stendhal, who mention it in their own travel memoirs. It is mentioned in "The Betrothed" by Alessandro Manzoni: in the illustrated edition of 1840 a splendid engraving shows the façade of the College and a glimpse of the square: nothing seems to have changed!*



## 05

THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY  
GARDEN

The Palace was designed to have an open-air area facing east, suitable for students to relax. From the entrance hall you can see how this is situated in line with the similar entrance hall on the opposite side. Past the courtyard the eye is naturally drawn to the light beyond the walls of the building (with a fine perspective telescope).

A spectacular **seventeenth-century gate** in wrought iron, decorated with some of the heraldic elements of the House of Borromeo (humility, the camel, the bridle and the unicorn) opens onto the **terrace overlooking the garden below**, connected by two symmetrical flights of stairs.

The **large Italian style garden** - a style characterized by geometric mown lawns, bordered by low hedges of box and tunnels of hornbean under which you can walk - was built by architect **Francesco Maria Ricchino** by **1629**. The wall that surrounds the garden is closed at the bottom by a large **recess with fountain**, which was once connected to the moat of the Visconti Castle. From the fountain you can admire the eastern façade of the College, which from this viewpoint looks like a Renaissance "villa of delight": the structure containing various-sized windows is characterised by two projecting main buildings; the **chapel** and the **refectory**, to which two lower wings are connected at the level of the garden.

In the **elegant open portico**, which connects to the nineteenth-century garden, there are **plaques** commemorating various names: one that lists the names of the various **Rectors** from over the centuries; Borromeo students who fell in the two world wars and two plaques dedicated to **Cesare Angelini**, an important

scholar and Rector from 1939 to 1961, and the Russian poet **Wenceslas Ivanov**, a guest in Borromeo in the nineteen-twenties and thirties.



Next to the Chapel, on the opening leading to one of the two spiral staircases, an inscription recalls the visit to the College in 1984 by his Holiness **Pope John Paul II**. His successor **Benedict XVI** celebrated Mass in the Borromeo Gardens in April 2007. In the entrance hall overlooking the seventeenth-century garden other plaques celebrate memorable figures in the history of the College, students distinguished for professional, cultural and ethical merit: the jurist and patriot of the Risorgimento **Agostino Bertani**, the doctor and scientist **Carlo Forlanini**, the blessed **Contardo Ferrini** and the antifascist lawyer **Galileo Vercesi**, one of the "martyrs of Fossoli".





## THE REFECTORY

NOT INCLUDED  
IN THE VISIT

Proceeding along the eastern side of the portico we meet the doors of two large communicating rooms: the ancient **Fireplace Room** where, in the coldest season, students could study or relax while warming themselves by one of the two large fireplaces, and where today breakfast is served and occasionally dinners in the presence of university professors; the **Refectory**, whose entrance is embellished by the Medici family's coat of arms and the inscription dedicated to Pope Pius IV (Giovanni Angelo Medici), maternal uncle of San Carlo. Inside, the wooden benches and tables along the walls are the original sixteenth-century ones and have hosted students and guests of the College at lunch and dinner for more than four centuries. A small pulpit reminds us that students took turns to read texts during meal times. On the walls a series of eight eighteenth-century paintings by the landscape artist Alessandro Antoniani portrays some properties of the Borromeo family.

In the **gallery**, on the northern side, above the access to the spiral staircase, a fresco of the early seventeenth century depicts **Christ carrying the cross**, a common icon placed near monastery refectories to remember and remind students today, the commitment to study and to community life.

The ancient **seventeenth-eighteenth century wooden doors** that we meet while walking in the open galleries, though straight when closed, are askew when open: this is the effect of the **asymmetric hinges**, specially designed to allow fast, automatic closing of the doors.





## REPRESENTATIVE ROOMS

The main floor, on the eastern side, is entirely occupied by the **two representative rooms** of the College.

The **White Hall (Sala Bianca)** takes its name from the light colour of the plaster, on which the Borromean emblem of the three intertwined rings is reproduced. The window and doors are eighteenth-century; once used as a hall for instrumental music and then as a library, this room connects on the left to the Prince's apartment - now a room for prestigious guests - and on the right, to the Hall of Frescoes. On the walls there are the nineteenth-century portraits of the last religious patron and lay patrons. The two larger paintings, by the neo-classical painter **Protasio Girolamo Stambucchi**, depict the full-length figure of Renato II (first lay patron in the seventeenth century, on a landscape that recalls the Borromean Islands of Lake Maggiore), and **Giberto V Borromeo** (who is responsible for the completion of the south side of the Palace, as shown by the drawings on the desk).

The **Hall of Frescoes (Salone degli Affreschi)** has been, from its foundation, the most prestigious part of the College: constructed according to the **golden proportions** found also in the Sistine Chapel, it is 10 metres wide and 30 metres high, with a **barrel vault**. The floor is the original late-sixteenth century. The Hall has various entrances from the portico, and a **double row of windows**. From the largest eastern-facing windows one can enjoy the view of the seventeenth-century garden and appreciate the expanse of the campus of the College. This room is used for the important events of collegial life, such as the **traditional graduation ceremonies** of the students, dissertations and visits of distinguished

*The Halls of representation are **accessible during events** such as: lessons, seminars, conferences, conventions and concerts open to the public.*

personalities. It was designated by Federico Borromeo to celebrate the Founder of the College. He entrusted painters of great experience in the **Mannerist fresco** style to adorn the Hall with **scenes from the life of San Carlo**: **Cesare Nebbia** decorated the entire vault and the northern wall (the one communicating with the White Hall), **Federico Zuccari** the southern wall (leaving his signature). This pictorial cycle was executed in less than two years between **1603** and **1604**. It is sumptuously framed by illusionistic architecture, emblems and coats of arms of the Borromeo and Medici families, magnificent still lifes in festoons of fruit and garlands of flowers, fake monochrome reliefs and niches with allegorical figures of men and women personifying virtue. The whole frame contains **seven scenes from the life of Carlo**: (reading from the southern fresco) being made Cardinal by Pope Pius IV; pilgrimage to Turin to venerate the Shroud and meeting with the dukes of Savoia; foundation of colleges, seminaries, diocesan members and other religious orders; grandiose procession to display relics; blessing of the bread and a pilgrimage to the sacred mount of Varallo; Carlo's funeral; Carlo during the plague of Milan of 1576-1577. This is **the first monumental pictorial cycle dedicated to Carlo Borromeo which anticipates his canonization in 1610**. The freshness and vivacity of the colours is still intact after many centuries; the last restoration (consisting of cleaning the surfaces) dates back to 1985.

The eight large canvas paintings on the longer walls of the room depict the full-length figure of **Pope Pius IV**, the founder **Saint Carlo**, **Federico Borromeo** and the other cardinals of the Patron family of the College.







## LIBRARY AND HISTORICAL ARCHIVE

The **library** is located in the **basement** of the building on the western side and houses the texts useful to the students for the preparation of university exams and for the preparation of their degree theses. The library heritage of the College is fully archived in the online catalogue of the University of Pavia and consists of approximately **60,000 volumes**, continuously increasing thanks to bequests and donations.

On the western side of the portico, on the ground floor, there is the **historical archive**, where the centuries-old memory of the College is conserved, contained within the thousands of documents, drawings and manuscripts, concerning the construction and decoration phases of the Palace, the internal management and administration of the various property, the reports between Rectors and Patrons, the texts of the entrance exams to the College and the university careers of the students.

The archive also contains about **400 parchments** dated between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries from the **Cluniac monastery of San Maiolo**, and the oldest and most precious part of the College's book heritage: *incunabula*, *cinquecentine* and *seicentine*; early printed books from the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and rare printed editions of the following centuries.





## THE CAMPUS OF THE COLLEGE

The College is surrounded by a **large green area**, where there are **sports facilities** (tennis / volleyball / basketball courts and a soccer field), and on whose northern side lie the other buildings that make up the Borromeo campus, in addition to the historic building.

1. The **nineteenth-century garden** extends over the area once occupied by the Romanesque church of San Giovanni in Borgo, demolished in 1811: some of the medieval architectural structures remain including part of the church walls and the parsonage surrounded by green. The romantic, picturesque English-style garden contains a green lawn and small pond, relics and fountains, rosebushes and tall trees, all overlooking the avenue that runs along the river Ticino. From here, looking through the wide gates, you can enjoy the view of the College.
2. Steps lead up to the lawn area which runs along the wall of the **seventeenth-century Garden**. From here the gardens spread out: land once cultivated for vegetables and orchards, and then unified and transformed into a park. Here there is a 17th-century **farmhouse** facing the river.
3. On the northern border of the gardens is the **eighteenth-century building**, established as a hospice for the poor and acquired by the College at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Nowadays



- this building, dedicated to **Contardo Ferrini**, hosts undergraduates, Master's and PhD students, researchers and university professors and, in the ancient adjoining church, cultural activities take place. The entrance to the building is on Via Vercesi.
4. In 2009 the **female section** was inaugurated inside an ancient wall enclosure. It houses some rooms for female students in addition to those reserved for them in the historic Palace.

## THE COLLEGE YEAR

*Since its foundation, the College follows the [calendar of the academic year](#) of the University of Pavia.*

The College opens in **September** for those students who must take exams or finish their degree in the autumn session. In the same month the **entrance test** for new students is also held.

The official opening of the collegiate year is the **feast of St. Carlo**, on 4 November, solemnly welcoming the newcomers and greeting the new graduates. In December, the **Christmas Dinner** is traditionally dedicated to celebrating the year's graduates.

On the first Sunday of May there is the **reunion** of the Alumni: a great convivial meeting of the Borromaici of all ages who return to the College to greet each other and meet the new faces of this close-knit community. To maintain their place in the College, students must have an annual average academic score of at least 27/30 and have completed all the exams included in their study plan. They also have the obligation to participate in supplementary academic activities for a total of 70 hours per year for the three-year period and 25 hours per year for the following years, after which they are awarded the **College diploma**. The College offers students the opportunity to participate in cultural events, concerts, conferences and to attend courses supplementary to their university studies, and foreign language courses.

In addition, by passing the entrance test, students can attend courses of the **IUSS (University Institute of Advanced Studies of Pavia)**. The IUSS, of which Borromeo is among the founding bodies, is the Specialized Superior School in association with the Scuola Normale and the Scuola S. Anna di Pisa.





# THE COLLEGE IN NUMBERS

8,419

Campus  
Area (m<sup>2</sup>)

60.000

Books in the  
Library

193

Beds

130

Places at a  
reduced cost

153

Months spent abroad  
by students

1/4

New students /  
student applications

140,671

Meals provided

2,121

University credits  
awarded

1,347

Students attending courses  
recognised by University of Pavia

Data updated in the academic year 2021/22

Source: Statistical Office of MIUR (Ministry of University Instruction and Research)











## LIBRARY AND ARCHIVE

The **Library** is open only for consultation of the preserved works. Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday: 11 - 13 / 17 - 19, Tuesday: 9 - 11 / 17 - 19, Friday: 9 - 12 All volumes are registered on Opac, the University's online catalogue: [opac.unipv.it](http://opac.unipv.it)

Info: +39 0382 3951 - [biblioteca@collegioborromeo.it](mailto:biblioteca@collegioborromeo.it)  
**Archive** documents are accessible for consultation only with the authorization of the Rector and for scientific purposes only. Requests can be sent to: [biblioteca@collegioborromeo.it](mailto:biblioteca@collegioborromeo.it)

## GUIDED TOURS

College visits are permitted from Monday to Sunday, from 9 am to 7 pm. Guided tours are free and by appointment: [visite@collegioborromeo.it](mailto:visite@collegioborromeo.it); they are reserved for individuals or groups (schools, associations, etc.), in Italian or English, and may include places accessible only with a guide, (such as the gardens and meeting rooms).

## CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Cultural events are available on the website of the College: [www.collegioborromeo.it](http://www.collegioborromeo.it) To find out about the activities you can subscribe to the weekly **newsletter** directly on the site, or by writing to: [newsletter@collegioborromeo.it](mailto:newsletter@collegioborromeo.it).  
Info: [didattica@collegioborromeo.it](mailto:didattica@collegioborromeo.it).

## RELIGIOUS FUNCTIONS

Holy Mass is celebrated in the College chapel **every Sunday** at 12 and on **holidays** related to College life.



## CONTACTS

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