FIU Prague Summer Program, LIT 4364

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Course Description:
This study abroad course will cover the development of Czech and Central European literature in the modern era and in the context of world and American literature. As a central issue, it will focus on the notion of identity and its transformations through the 20th century historical lens—when ‘the World’ became ‘the Modern World.’

By reading the literature created in the Czech Lands, students will understand that there are ‘other voices’ expressing their view of their constructed reality during the same time periods as literary voices they are familiar with. As they walk around Prague, students should gain an understanding of the forces that created this ‘new world’ they see around them and the ways in which it is similar to or different from the worlds they are familiar with.

Themes To Be Analyzed:
1) The notion of the collective national identity in the 19th century and its shifts into the modern world (National Revival writings, Jirasek, Neruda, Meyrink);
2) After the turn of the century as a specific (Kafka, Hasek);
3) Post WWI: The era of the state and identification with a state-based society construct (Capek);
4) Loss of identity in an enforced totalitarian world: Holocaust writings as well as texts responding to the first phase of building up Communism (Klima, Pavel, Margolius-Kovaly);
5) Artificial identity as a social/cultural product (Havel, Hrabal, Kundera);
6) Rejoining the World Stage: Postmodern identity in a new world order (Hodrova, Topol, Ajvaz).

This course is co-taught by Petr A. Bilek (born 1962) is the chair of the Department of Czech and Comparative Literature, Charles University, Prague. He has published extensively on contemporary Czech literature in the 1990s, including two books on modern Czech poetry („Generace“ osamělých běžců and Stavitelé křídel, both in 1991). In recent years, he has focused more on literary theory. As a result, his new book on interpretation theories of modern narratives (Hledání jazyka interpretace: k modernímu prozaickému textu) appeared in 2003 (re-printed in 2007). His recent publications also include essays on Milan Kundera in the context of contemporary Czech literature and in the context of Central European modernism (Brown Slavic Contributions, Vol. XI. and XIII., Kosmas 17, 2003, No. 1), on the image of the City of Prague in literature (Style 40, 2006, No. 3) and on contemporary Czech poetry (New Orleans Revue 26, 2000,(No. 1-2).

- Walking tours to the places connected with the literature and cultural issues in Prague will be an integral part of the course.
- All readings and discussion will be conducted in English.
- Reading: approximately 200 pages per week

Global Learning Course Outcomes:
Global Awareness: Students will be able to analyze the interrelated dynamics—culture, politics, language, history, etc.—that have shaped the evolution of Czech identity in the modern era.
Global Perspective: Students will be able to discuss and analyze texts via diverse viewpoints from different cultural contexts.

Global Engagement – Students will be able to demonstrate a strong motivation for and willingness to move across boundaries and unfamiliar territory in order to engage with others and develop intercultural competencies in viewing the world from multiple perspectives.

**Grading:**
- Attendance – 25%
- Discussion Participation – 7%
- Written Discussion Responses – 18%
- Global News Assignment – 25%
- Final Project – 25%

**Required Readings**

I. Collective pattern of the National identity as the 19th century standard:
- **Reading:**
  - Extracts from the Czech revival ideological writings (in *The Course Pack*)
  - Ján Kollár: The Prelude to *The Daughter of Slavs* (in *The Course Pack*)
  - Alois Jirásek: (from) *Old Czech Legends* (in *The Course Pack*)

II. Shift of the collective national paradigm to the notions of an individual as part of a nation in the 2nd half of the 19th century:
- **Reading:**
  - Bozena Nemcova: Four Seasons (in *The Course Pack*)
  - Jan Neruda: At the Three Lillies, How Mr. Vorel Broke in His Meerschaum (in *The Course Pack*)

*Walking Tour: I. Vysehrad National Cemetery and Spatial Re-construction of the Time of the Origin*

III. Arrival of the modern era and its consequences: The crisis of collective belonging and world Modernism
- **Reading:**
  - Gustav Meyrink: *The Golem*

*Walking Tour: II. The Old Town Square area as a place for Modernistic symbolism*

IV. The 1920s and 1930s: The tension between individuality and temptation to build up artificial collective social constructs:
- **Reading:**
  - Karel Capek: The Footprint, Footprints, Elegy (in *The Course Pack*)
  - Jaroslav Hasek: (from) *The Good Soldier Svejk* (in *The Course Pack*)
V. The Holocaust and the Communist takeover as new enforcements of collective identity in the 1940s and 1950s:

Reading:
Ivan Klíma: Miriam (in The Course Pack)
Ota Pavel: A Race through Prague (in The Course Pack)
Heda Margolius-Kovaly: (from) Under a Cruel Star (in The Course Pack)

Walking Tour: III. Prague monuments as ideological re-interpretations of history:
St. Wenceslas, Zizka’s Monument and the site of former Stalin’s Monument

VI. Deconstructing Communism from the Inside and from the Outside (the 1970s and 1980s):
Reading: Vaclav Havel: Audience (in The Course Pack)
Bohumil Hrabal: Too Loud a Solitude
Milan Kundera: The Unbearable Lightness of Being

VII. Excitement and confusion of living in a post-totalitarian society: The last challenge of the notion of identity:
Reading: Bohumil Hrabal: The Magic Flute (in The Course Pack)
Daniela Hodrova: I See a Great City (in The Course Pack)
Jachym Topol: A Trip to the Train Station (in The Course Pack)
Michal Ajvaz: The Beetle (in The Course Pack)

Walking Tour IV: Olsanske Municipal Cemeteries and the New Jewish Cemetery:
Traces of individuality within the collective eternal space

The following books should be obtained by students and, if possible, read in advance.
Any edition is O.K.:
Gustav Meyrink: The Golem
Franz Kafka: Collected Short Stories
Bohumil Hrabal: Too Loud a Solitude
Milan Kundera: The Unbearable Lightness of Being

Required Assignment

Global News
Before studying abroad, it is important to take time to learn a little about the history, culture, politics, society and economy of the host country. Consuming news from local news sources is an effective way to do this, but can also be helpful in seeing how course content is manifested in the local society and how global processes are impacting local events. This assignment has been designed to help you familiarize yourself with current events in the Czech Republic and to better understand these events in relation to the broad themes covered in the course.

Assignment:
To understand more about the Czech Republic and its current events before departure, you are expected to read at least one article from the following news sources each week:

- Prague Post [http://www.praguepost.com/]
- Prague Daily Monitor [http://praguedmonitor.com/]
- The Prague Tribune [http://www.prague-tribune.cz/]
- The Daily [http://www.thedaily.cz/]
1. For each week prior to departure (or as directed), select a recent news article, write a brief summary (2-3 paragraphs), and provide an analysis of the article that extends a concept or theme relevant to the focus of the course (less than one page). Post a reference to your article and your summary/analysis to the online Facebook page for others to read and offer comments.

2. Upon returning from abroad, select a salient topic that has emerged from the course content, the weekly assignments and your time abroad. Write a 2-3 page reflection paper on what you’ve learned and how this learning has helped to shape your understanding of the Czech Republic. Post it to the Facebook page.

**Evaluation:**
This assignment is worth 25% of your overall grade. Your weekly responses will be assessed on your ability to critically analyze the article in relation to course content. The reflection paper will be assessed on your description of how the weekly assignment informed your understanding of the local culture and how well you demonstrate connections with the broad themes covered in the course.

**Final Project (choose one of the following):**

1. **Journaling Across Cultures**

   **Introduction:**
   One of the most valuable and relatively painless activities you can do to enhance your international and intercultural experience is to keep a journal. No matter how amazing and unforgettable your experience may seem, it doesn’t take long before your memories begin to fade. Keeping a journal gives you a record of events, activities, and thoughts. More importantly, it actively engages you in your personal overseas journey through thinking, interpreting and analyzing intercultural experiences. It may also help you remember the academic content of the classes and will help you articulate how the Program is transforming you into a global citizen. Your journal will be read and graded after the time abroad.

   **Goals:**
   The broad goal of this course is to support you in developing academically and as a global citizen. As you begin writing in your journal, keep in mind that writing of this nature is not just for displaying knowledge but can also be useful in acquiring knowledge, support, and expanding your initial perceptions of a new culture. Journaling encourages new ways of conceptualizing your international experiences.

   Consider the following focus areas when making your journal entries:

   **Social Responsibility.** What experiences have you had that have influenced your perceptions of global interdependence and social concern for others, to society and to the environment?

   **Global Competence.** In intercultural encounters, it is important to have an open mind while actively seeking to understand the cultural norms and expectations of others and leveraging this gained knowledge to interact, communicate and work effectively outside your comfort zone. What experiences have you had that have forced you to recognize your limitations to engage successfully in these intercultural encounters?

   **Academic Self-Concept.** International education opportunities can bring about a newfound awareness of one’s academic abilities, for the better in most cases. How has this international experience influenced your academic abilities and confidence?
Journal Structure:
Please structure your journal as three distinct sections:
1. Expressives—In this section, reflect on the focus areas listed above. While you may have described an event in one of the other sections of the journal, you may then make an entry in this section to record what you thought and felt about that event. Consider how this is influencing your academic learning and your development as a global citizen.
2. Impressions—This is the section of your journal where entries will be made chronologically. This section is for jotting down the places, people, events, concepts, ideas, smells, signs and other things you remember. Be detailed in this section with dates and the names of people, places, events, cities, etc. This is also a good place to attach brochures, maps, postcards and other meaningful materials.
3. Narratives—This section awakens/satisfies the storyteller in you. You will undoubtedly have many stories—good, bad, funny, and otherwise. Write about them in this section before you forget them. Tap into your descriptive abilities to create a vivid picture of what you experienced.

Evaluation:
The journal will be reviewed periodically during your trip, and then one other time at the end of the course. Specific submission dates will be announced. This assignment is worth 25% of your overall grade and will be assessed on your success with the organization, presentation and depth of your ideas. Keep in mind that your goal is to communicate a rich description. You will find that the process of writing the assignment is a major part of the cultural learning experience.

Top Ten Tips for Keeping a Journal:
1. Number your pages and divide your sections early on. Decide which section you probably will be writing in more than others. Then, divide the rest of the journal somewhat equally among the other two sections.
3. Try to write at least one entry every day. Date each entry.
4. Carry around a little notebook to write things down that you want to remember—names, places, quotes, descriptive words as they come to mind—and transfer them later into your Impressions section.
5. Include impressions from classroom lectures, discussions and assignments. By recording your impressions of your academic environment, you are actively using classroom material to enhance your cultural experience. You can compare and contrast what you learn in class with what you learn outside of the classroom.
6. Experiment! Assign yourself different personal research exercises such as: Interview a local person, and/or take time to sit and observe how people interact in coffee shops, theatres, or public places.
7. Ethnocentric moments are reactions based on your own cultural assumptions, to local situations and events. Recording an experience at the post office or a restaurant will help you to analyze your own cultural values. Re-reading them later on can be a source of a good laugh.
8. Record how people respond to you. You may feel misunderstood, uncertain how to respond or relate, or lost because people do things differently. By imagining how your actions might be interpreted differently by others, you can begin to understand different points of view.
9. Make it your own. Include photos, sketches, song lyrics, whatever inspires you. Tape memorabilia to the cover or inside, attach articles, photographs, or other special mementos. Keep a vocabulary section of new terms and expressions you have learned.
10. Critique your notebook. How do your perspectives change? What do you choose to write about, and how does this change? How do you see yourself growing academically and as a global citizen?
2. Collecting Life Histories
Learning from local residents allows you to understand the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand. Rather than manipulate variables or proceed from a research hypothesis, both questions and answers must be discovered in the social setting being studied. This will involve conducting observation, interviewing informants, note-taking, collection of relevant materials and documents, keeping a field journal, and taking photographs.

Selecting an Informant:
Your goal in this assignment is to interview at least 3 local people, informants, to produce a written ethnographic analysis. This is more than a retelling of the interviews, for it also aims to cite and sort the values, attitudes and assumptions of the informants. Your role is to learn from these people, to be taught by them. Remember that informants are human beings with problems, concerns, and interests. Also keep in mind that your values may not coincide with the informants’. Be careful to choose people with whom you can follow-up, if necessary.

Preparing for the Interview:
Successfully interviewing informants depends on a cluster of skills. These include: asking questions, listening instead of talking, taking a passive rather than an assertive role, expressing verbal interest in the other person, and showing interest by appropriate eye contact and other nonverbal means. When preparing your interview, think about the kinds of ethnographic questions you will use. There should be a mix of descriptive and structural questions. Descriptive questions are broad and general, allowing people to describe their experiences, their daily activities, and objects and people in their lives. Structural questions are more specific and explore responses offered to descriptive questions. They allow you to find out how informants have organized their knowledge.

Conducting the Interview:
It is best to think of the interview as friendly conversation. A few minutes of easygoing talk interspersed here and there throughout the interview will help with developing and maintaining rapport. Here are a few other tips:
- Expressing Interest. Use both verbal cues and nonverbal cues to let the informant know that you are interested in what he or she is saying, and want him/her to continue.
- Expressing Ignorance. Even if you have already heard what the informant is telling you, try to make sure that you show interest and that you would like to know more.
- Avoid repetition. Make sure that the questions you are asking are not redundant. Taking turns. Even though you really want to know more about the person you are interviewing, try to make sure that you engage your informant in a two-way conversation. Turn taking helps keep the encounter balanced.
- Repeat the informant’s answer to make sure that you understood well; do not try to make your own interpretation or paraphrase what has been said.

Ethical Principles:
When conducting research, there are ethical principles that will you should keep in mind. For example, be sure to safeguard your informant’s rights, interests and sensitivities. Communicate the aims of the interview as well as possible to the informant. Your informant should have the right to remain anonymous and speak “off record.” There should be no exploitation of informants for personal gain.

Life histories are a kind of description that offers an understanding of foreign cultures. They reveal the details of a single person’s life and in the process show important parts of the culture.
Conduct a life history interview of 3 informants. These are to be nondirective interviews, so that they are, as much as possible, the informant’s own stories in every way, emphasizing what they think is important to tell rather that what you think is important to ask about. Thus, as soon as you are sure the informant understands what is wanted in the interview, you can begin with such nondirective questions as, “Please tell me about your life as a child,” or “What was it like to grow up here?” It may be rewarding to ask informants who they consider to be the most important people and most important events in their lives. If the life history is collected in more than one session, it is a good idea to think out questions raised by the first session and to ask them of the informant in the next session, or in a brief visit for final questions. With informants who can manage to think through a chronology, it is wise to work out a year-by-year list of events as a check for the ordering of the items in the history. When you write up the life histories, please remember ethical safeguards for your informants, including the possible necessity of giving the person a fictitious name, unless you have the full permission to use the real name and all of the details in the story.

Evaluation:
This assignment is worth 25% of your overall grade and will be assessed on your success with conducting the interviews and on the organization, presentation and depth of your data. Keep in mind that your goal is to communicate a rich description of the interviews. You may find that the process of writing the assignment is a major part of the cultural learning experience.

3. Assignment:
Buildings, nature and cultural practices have no intrinsic meaning. People give them meaning. The meaning of this heritage is not objective but rather groups come to a negotiated agreement as to what it symbolizes for them. Attempting to understand a culture through its heritage is the focus of this assignment. This assignment has been designed to expand your understanding of the host country by compelling you to move beyond consuming simple touristic interpretations of the local heritage to learning the more nuanced and disputed meanings heritage has to local groups.

Defining Heritage:
Built, natural, and intangible heritage provide the symbolic capital that build cultural identities.

- **Built Heritage** refers to historical and contemporary structures and objects that hold social significance to local communities (e.g., a stadium, a cathedral).
- **Natural Heritage** refers to natural places, objects and attributes preserved in their natural state (e.g., rivers, mountain ranges, caves).
- **Intangible Heritage** refers to the customs, traditions and practices of a culture (e.g., festivals, performances, sports).

This assignment will engage you in identifying examples of built, natural and intangible heritage that are meaningful to the Czech Republic. You may work individually or in pairs to complete this assignment, keeping in mind that one grade per pair will be awarded.

1. **Identifying and Deconstructing Heritage.** While abroad, identify and photograph examples of built (e.g., temples, buildings, towers), natural (e.g., forests, rivers, reefs), and intangible heritage (e.g., festivals, food dishes, pottery, sports). Your goal in this assignment is to apprehend the meanings these sites have for those in the Czech culture.
To do this, you may need to speak with local people, consult historical references, read travel guides and brochures, etc.

2. **Global Panoramio.** Register for a free Panoramio account and upload photos of 2-3 sites from each of the three types of heritage (one photo per site). Add a detailed caption to each photo in which you carefully explain its meaning and importance to the host culture. When meanings are disputed or the
site holds different meanings for other groups, explain it. Also, follow Panoramio’s prompts to register your photos in Google Maps and Google Earth.

**Panoramio:**
[ www.panoramio.com/]
Panoramio is a geolocation-oriented photo sharing website designed to allow Google Earth users to learn more about a given area by viewing the photos that other users have taken at that place. Photos uploaded to the site can also be accessed through Google Earth [http://earth.google.com/] and Google Maps [http://maps.google.com/].

**Photography Etiquette:**
Most examples of heritage (built, natural or intangible) are heavily visited, photographed and studied by tourists. However, there are instances when you may want to seek access to more private heritage sites. In those situations, you should be respectful by asking permission before taking photos and being respectful when asking questions about the meanings of that heritage. Also, remember that your photos will be accessible worldwide, so avoid including identifiable people in your photo frame, so as to protect their right to privacy.

**Evaluation:**
The assignment is worth 25% of your overall course grade. You will not be graded on your photography skills. Rather, your grade will be based on your ability to represent and discuss the local meaning of selected cultural heritage sites. It is important that you accurately map your photos onto Google Maps or Google Earth.