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## **LIT 4950 FIU Study Abroad Program**

COURSE NAME: Czech Study Abroad

INSTRUCTORS: Richard Drtina, PhD Charles University, Barbara Weitz, FIU

**Prerequisites: None**

**Credits: 3**

**COURSE SYLLABUS: Czech History and Politics from a Global Perspective**

### **Course Description:**

This course is intended as an introduction to Czech history and politics as a global crossroads. This course will examine the political situation within the East - Central European Region, covering the history of the Czech Lands as well as contemporary events. The learning objectives for the students will be to have an understanding of the basic ideas, concepts and politics of the region's political and social development and its historical context. In addition the role of Czech lands within a Pan European context will be examined. The influence and impact that Imperial/Global politics states have had with regards to the development and growth of the Czech Republic will also be studied. Students will also learn about of the impact of regional politics, the reasons for alignment and focus on the Geo-political specifics of the region. The course will finally address issues such as the collapse of communism, the emergence of nationalism, the breakup of old alliances and the birth of new ones. It will also look at how the Czech Republic is addressing current political and economic challenges.

### **Course Materials:**

Bazant, Jan. *The Czech Reader: History, Culture, Politics*

### **Supporting Materials:**

Case studies, articles and other handouts will be provided by Professor Drtina. Power-point slides will be used during lectures. Liberal uses of maps.

### **Learning Objectives:**

To reach an understanding of the current political situation in East-Central European history and politics and have an appreciation of the historical context of Global History as it unfolded for the past one thousand years.

Students will be expected to have knowledge of the weekly subject. This means reading assignments in advance.

## **Global Learning Course Outcomes**

**Global Awareness:** Students will be able to analyze interrelated political, historical, cultural, economic, and other dynamics that have influenced the development of Prague and the Czech region as a global crossroads over time.

**Global Perspective:** Students will be able to discuss and analyze global historical and political issues via diverse viewpoints from different cultural contexts.

**Global Engagement:** Students will be able to articulate the meaning of global interconnectedness and its impact on their motivation to become civically engaged.

- Class 1: Introduction to the History of Bohemia—Chapter 1, 2, 3  
From Celtic tribe settlements to the leader of the Holy Roman Empire in Europe
- Class 2: Caught between Empires – Chapters 5  
Its role in the Hapsburg Empire, between the British Empire, the Prussian Empire and the Russian Empire
- Class 3: Enlightenment, Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism—Chapters 6,7,8  
Identity as a modern nation among nations. Prague becomes a modern city
- Class 4: The 1<sup>st</sup> Republic – Inter war years - Chapter 9  
President Masaryk as a feminist who marries an American while teaching at Princeton and as a good friend of Woodrow Wilson. Main boulevard in Prague is named Woodrow Wilson Blvd.
- Class 5: The Rise of Totalitarianism and WW2 - Chapter 10  
Living through WWII as first nation occupied by Hitler, losing 92% of its sizable Jewish community. Partly liberated by Gen. Patton but Prague liberated by Russian forces. The city of Plzen still celebrates the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in honor of American forces that liberated them
- Class 6: Stalinism and Socialism - - Chapter 11, 12  
Woodrow Wilson Blvd. renamed and turned into a highway (after Prague Spring 1968)
- Class 7: Rumblings of freedom/Collapse of Communism - Chapter 13  
Moving from Empire to State-- Quest for freedom begun on Nov. 17, 1989 by students in Prague. By Nov. 29, 1989, communism as the ruling force was gone.
- Class 8: Transitions to Democracy  
from Communism to the EU-- The Burden of History and the Surface of Democracy-- Vaclav Havel named President. He was first newly-elected president from a post-totalitarian country behind the 'Iron Curtain' to address both houses of the U.S. Congress in January 1990

## **Grading:**

Attendance – 25%

Discussion Participation – 7%

Written Discussion Responses – 18%

Global News Assignment – 25%

Final Project – 25%

## **PROJECTS:**

### **Required: 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/>
- *Radio Prague* <http://www.radio.cz/en/>
- *Ceske Noviny* <http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/news/>
- *Prague Daily Monitor* <http://praguemonitor.com/>
- *Actualne.cz* <http://aktualne.centrum.cz/czechnews/>
- *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 – 15% for the weekly assignments and 10% for the reflection paper. 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.
2. A hardcover book is the best.
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 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 than 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. Heritage:**

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/](http://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.

**4. Blog Abroad**

Not all journals are private and not all are kept in paper and pencil. The Internet has revolutionized journaling and created the blog, short for "web log". Blogs are easily updatable web pages where you can keep a running journal. Usually a blog will have some personal information as well as a description of the themes the person will be most likely writing about. Most blogs are free and you can update them from anywhere. In this course, you'll be writing your own blog, so tell your family and friends about it!

**Assignment:**

1. *Global Issues*. Being prepared for your study abroad experience requires having a global outlook. Begin reading and thinking about the role of the U.S. in the world and impressions of the U.S. held in other countries. Think about the effect globalization has had on different countries or regions of the world. Prior to departure, upload 3-5 carefully written posts to your blog on the theme of "global issues." Consider the following topics:

- Common stereotypes of U.S. Americans
- Positive and negative viewpoints of globalization
- Global issues and events
- Global warming

2. *Expanding Worldview*. We each have different cultural perspectives that shape our worldview but as we encounter other cultures, our worldviews change and expand.

What are the limitations of your worldview? While in the Czech Republic, upload 2-3 carefully written posts to your blog on the general theme of “expanding my worldview.”

Consider the following topics:

- Multiple interpretations of global issues and events
- Global consequences of local behaviors
- Anti-American sentiment
- Differing ways of living and being in the world (lifestyle, consumption, etc.)

3. *Global Citizenship*. Are you a global citizen? What does being a global citizen really mean? Reflecting on your experiences abroad, think about what it means to be a global citizen. After returning home, upload 2-3 carefully written posts to your blog on the general theme of “what it means to be a global citizen.” Consider the following topics:

- Social responsibility
- Global interconnectedness and personal responsibility
- Advancement of global awareness and civic engagement
- Global competence

**Additional Requirement:**

Throughout the Program, you are encouraged not only to share your blog with others, but to also read the blogs of other students in the class. This is your final project and will be worth 50% of your grade. As you read the reflections that others have gathered, post your responses or commentary. Do so respectfully and in the spirit of open and constructive dialogue. You are required to upload at least three responses on each of the three broad themes. Attendance and participation in all activities and field trips will be worth 25%