

**Annual Study Center Review
CIEE Study Center, Charles University
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2007**

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Each summer, program directors write a Study Center Review for each CIEE Study Center program commenting on the previous academic year. The program director writes the review based on input from the CIEE Academic Consortium Board members, resident directors, sending institutions, and student evaluations. Each report is made public on the CIEE website at www.ciecee.org.

Program Goals

Established in 1991, the CIEE Study Center in Prague has two main goals: to provide a broad and challenging academic program which gives students the opportunity to learn about subjects related to the region, and to provide the experience of living in the setting on which their studies are focused.

Based on resident staff and student feedback, the program met its goals during the 2006-07 academic year. The CIEE program offers a broad range of academic courses and provides students with a significant amount of co-curricular and housing opportunities designed to integrate students into the local community.

New & Noteworthy Features

Academic

Czech Language

Although most CIEE students do not list Czech Language as a major motivation for choosing the program, many of the 2006-07 students rated their language professors very highly. Several of the language faculty participated in the two-part Teacher Training Workshop conducted by CIEE in 2006. As a result, there was a noticeable shift to a more student-centered learning approach in the language classes.

In spring 2007, CIEE Prague staff introduced the Community Language Commitment with the hope that more students would challenge themselves to use basic Czech on a more regular basis. The staff noted mixed results and are hoping to increase the use of Czech amongst students in fall 2007.

Many CIEE language and area studies courses involve excursions in and around Prague. Through these excursions and the numerous volunteer activities coordinated by CIEE staff, students have many opportunities to use their Czech skills regularly. CIEE homestays and apartments with local Czech roommates offered integrated housing options that provided students with additional language practice.

Area Studies Courses

CIEE continued to offer a diverse range of academic elective courses in 2006-07. The following courses were added during the past year:

PSYC 3003 PRAG Psychoanalysis of Czech and Central European Society and Culture

CINE 3009 PRAG Eastern European Cinema

CEAS 3003 PRAG Collective Identity in a Totalitarian Regime

Most students enrolled in a combination of courses taught by both Charles University and FAMU (Prague Film and Television School of the Academy of the Performing Arts). Charles University and FAMU professors participated in a CIEE Teacher Training Workshop in 2006. Many faculty reported that the workshop had given them new tools for teaching American students effectively. CIEE Prague staff noted a sharp increase in the overall classroom interaction between students and faculty, and many students commented that they enjoyed the interactive teaching methods used by CIEE faculty. As part of this student-centered learning strategy, at least 12 of the professors led or co- led academic excursions for their classes each term over the last year.

A large number of CIEE students took one or more courses at FAMU. These innovative Cinema and Performing Arts courses give students the opportunity to study at one of Europe's most prestigious film schools .

The CIEE Prague staff use an elaborate on-site evaluation system each semester to obtain student feedback on each of the courses. Over the past few years, this system has allowed CIEE to provide specific faculty members with timely feedback and has enabled CIEE to hire a better overall group of faculty to teach courses. Overall student feedback on professors remained quite positive in 2006-07.

Non-Academic

Orientation

CIEE Prague staff introduced a "Focus Series" during the fall 2006 and spring 2007 orientations. The first Focus activity helped students to gain a better understanding of the history of Prague and the Czech Republic, while the second and third parts of the series included activities such as a goal-setting workshop and discussions pertaining to "best practices" and "maximizing the CIEE Prague experience." Many spring 2007 students participated in an on-line Pre-Departure Orientation. The goals discussed during this innovative pre-departure exercise were used to set the tone for the on-site orientation goals discussion.

In response to feedback from students and the recent ACB monitoring report, CIEE attempted to improve the quality of the Czech Buddy program. Extra training helped to ensure a better overall effort from the local Czech students who assist with the program orientation. Czech Buddies continued to lead practical orientation walks, but scavenger hunt and activity-based activities were added to make the interaction between the local Czech student assistants and CIEE students. Czech buddies were given a list of discussion topics and questions to use with CIEE students during these activities to help reinforce the staff-led orientation sessions.

Cultural Activities/Field Trips

CIEE Prague staff and local Czech students (Czech Buddies, Czech Flat Mates) organized approximately 36 cultural activities and field trips each term in 2006-07. Here is a sample of the activities and local excursions in which 2006-07 CIEE Prague students participated:

- Visit to National Museum
- Bowling and Pool Night
- European Film Festival
- Rudolfinum Concert
- Czech Ice Hockey game
- Tajemství Opera in National Theatre
- Mid-Semester BBQ and Trivia Game
- Czech Cooking Lesson
- Soccer, Basketball, and Tennis tournaments
- Czech film nights
- Mushroom-Picking Trip with Czech Flat Buddies
- Forum 2000 Conference
- Strahov Open Air Festival
- Czech Philharmonic Orchestra

In addition, CIEE staff started a new International Student Club in fall 2006. This club is designed to bring local Czech (Charles University) students together with CIEE students for various activities, sporting events, and cultural exchange.

Many CIEE academic courses include excursions and overnight field trips. Students participate in a minimum of two field trips each semester. Here is a sample of the field trips offered during 2006-07:

- Terezin & Lidice (Focus on Czech History and Jewish History)
- Overnight trip to Moravia (Focus on Psychology, Art, and Architecture)
- Overnight trip to Bohemia (Focus on Cultural Studies, Architecture, and History)
- Northern Bohemia trip (Focus on Art and Architecture)
- Jachymov (Focus on National Identity, Political Science, Psychology, and Cultural Studies)
- Plzen (Focus on Political Science, Economics, Judaism)
- Optional multi-day excursions to Vienna and Berlin

Overall, students seemed to enjoy these group excursions. By connecting these excursions with the academic program, the CIEE Prague program helps students gain a greater understanding of Czech culture and history while providing them with multiple travel opportunities.

Housing

CIEE Prague continues to offer students three different housing options: Czech dormitory, apartments with local Czech students, and Czech homestays. During the 2006-7 academic year, approximately 53% of the students choose to live in apartments, 34% in the dormitory, and 13% in homestays.

The small percentage of students living with homestay families had very positive things to say about their experiences, and staff reported that many of the students in homestays demonstrated stronger language skills and cultural knowledge than those in other housing options. Student feedback on the apartments was mixed, though many clearly felt that apartments provided the independence that they desired and a chance to live in nice neighborhoods in and around central Prague. The dormitory is located close to the CIEE Study Center; so many students enjoyed the short commute and opportunity to live in a building with many other students.

Housing is one of the most challenging components of the program, and the CIEE Prague program has made various improvements over the past year. These included enhanced training and revised selection criteria for Czech Flat Mates (living in CIEE apartments). Czech Flat Mates were responsible for organizing a myriad of cultural activities throughout each semester. CIEE will add local students to the dormitory in fall 2007 to help with local cultural integration.

Community Engagement and Integration

CIEE Prague offers one of the largest ranges of volunteer and not-for-credit internship projects available at any CIEE Study Center. Each semester, staff organize a volunteer/internship fair to introduce students to local opportunities. While volunteer projects are typically limited to 1-2 sessions, internship projects can last throughout the entire semester. The Resident Director noted that while many students express interest in doing a local volunteer project, the percentage that follow-through with the projects is much lower. She and her team will address this problem more carefully in fall 2007.

Students participated in the following volunteer or not-for-credit internship opportunities in fall 2006 and spring 2007:

Volunteer Projects:

- Jedličkův Foundation
- Elementary School projects
- Radio Akropolis
- PPEF Charity Softball Tournament
- English tutoring (local children)
- PPER, Stone Circle (Writing)
- Graphic Design Studio
- Local Preschool
- Charles University (UJOP)
- People in Need (Roma issues)
- Teaching English at local hospital
- Teaching English to local Roma children
- OPU-Organization for Refugees
- Non-Profit Fundraiser for School in India (Surya)

Internship Projects:

- Prague Society for International Cooperation
- People in Need

- Forum 2000
- CERGE-EI
- One World Film Festival

The Forum 2000 Conference continued to be one of the highlights for students in fall 2006. This event allows students to attend presentations and meet various world leaders and prominent figures in business, politics, and NGO work.

In addition to the above projects, CIEE students had the opportunity to participate in the “Meet the Czech Family or Friend” program. This allowed students in the apartments and dormitory to be matched with a local family or individual for cultural exchange. Approximately half of the students each semester took part in volunteering, an internship or in the “Meet the Czech Family or Friend” program.

CIEE staff and faculty organized additional cultural activities designed to increase students’ awareness of various Czech cultural and societal issues. These included participation in numerous local festivals, an art therapy session, a discussion with a local town mayor, a drama and writing contest, and FAMU film projects.

Challenges & Future Directions

Academic Challenges

Several years ago, CIEE made a formal commitment to improving the academic quality and rigor of the program. Overall, the results have been extremely positive. The CIEE faculty have clearly benefited from the Teacher Training Workshop conducted in 2006, and student satisfaction with classes has increased over the past year. The primary academic challenge for this program relates to the strong desire of students to travel independently around Europe. CIEE has required classes on Fridays, and some students (particularly in spring 2007) found that these classes prevented them from taking longer trips outside of the Czech Republic. CIEE will continue to monitor this situation over the coming year.

Many students commented on the fact that CIEE courses are not integrated into the Charles University campus. Students who take FAMU courses do have the opportunity to study alongside local Czech and international students. Although CIEE courses are open to Charles University students, Czech student enrollment is very low due to the distance between the central university facilities and the CIEE Study Center. In fall 2007, CIEE students will be able to take one course offered in English by Charles University for international students in central Prague. CIEE staff have carefully selected a list of courses that will expand the overall CIEE academic offerings while allowing program participants to study alongside other international students. This should help address the lack of academic integration that has existed in previous years. Finally, CIEE staff and faculty are planning to increase their use of Czech Language with students in fall 2007 in order to help challenge students to use their local language skills on a more regular basis

Non-Academic Challenges

The CIEE Prague program grew significantly in 2006-07. As a result, the CIEE resident staff have had to make various adjustments to the orientation and other large group

activities. Small group activities organized by staff and local Czech students helped to address the challenges associated with a “large program,” and feedback from the spring 2007 students will be used in creating more small group activities during the fall 2007 orientation and throughout the semester.

Some students complained about the lack of internet access in the CIEE apartments. CIEE will explore the possibility of adding internet to apartments in the future. However, it should be noted that students have free access to wi-fi internet in the CIEE Study Center.

CIEE Prague staff remain committed to providing students with a smorgasbord of opportunities for volunteering with local organizations and meeting various members of the Prague community. During a staff retreat held in summer 2007, staff discussed strategies for getting more students involved with volunteer projects and improving student participation in evening and weekend activities organized by staff and Czech students.

Future Directions

As mentioned above, CIEE is making various changes and additions to the Prague program in order to improve the academic and non-academic components of this popular CIEE study center in 2007-08. Beginning with fall 2007, students will have limited access to a select group of Charles University courses taught in English for international students. This should help increase the level of academic integration and will also help reduce the average size of classes held at the CIEE Prague Study Center.

CIEE staff will continue to revise the training of local Czech students for the Czech Buddy and Czech Flat Mate groups. Orientation walks will be restructured to provide for more interaction between Czech student guides and CIEE students, and more attention will be given to program learning goals and outcomes.

Although the challenge of coordinating CIEE courses, Charles University courses, and FAMU courses remains, CIEE will examine ways to improve the on-site course registration and add/drop systems.

The CIEE Prague program continues to offer students one of the most exciting academic and co-curricular study abroad options in Central Europe. With increased academic integration and enhanced opportunities for interaction with local Czech students, the 2007-08 academic year promises to be a very good year for CIEE students in Prague.