

Learning from a Czech Perspective

As a CET student in Prague, you will have the opportunity to attend Jewish or Czech studies course taught in English by a Czech scholar. In our experience, students gain much from such courses and often unexpectedly take away from the experience new understandings, not only about the course topic, but also Central Europe in general and the culture of a Czech classroom.

Because taking a class by a Czech scholar may be a new experience for you, we have compiled a list of *Frequently Asked Questions* about learning from a Czech perspective. We encourage you to read this document and hope that you find it helpful. As always, you are welcome to contact CET at any time with other questions or concerns.

Who teaches area studies courses at the Jewish Studies in Prague Program?

Most courses are taught by local professors from Charles University and other prestigious research institutions, such as the Institute for Contemporary History and the Jewish Museum. All faculty recruited by CET speak English and have had experience teaching western students, at either a US or Czech university.

How might a course taught by a Czech scholar be different from what I'm used to?

While your Czech professors will have had experience teaching western students, they will most likely conduct their class in a way most comfortable to them, namely, a Czech style. In a Czech-style classroom, the teacher, as the authority on the topic, is the focus, not the student. Given this dynamic, many classes will involve a high degree of lecturing and opportunities for discussion may be limited. Please note however, that CET works closely with the faculty to develop a learning environment which is comfortable for both professors and students.

In addition, it is important to remember that your instructor will be teaching in a non-native language. (Imagine you teaching a similar course in your second language!) While CET ensures that all Czech faculty have excellent English skills, your instructor's English may be accented. In addition, it may be necessary for you to slow down your own speech and refrain from using colloquialisms when speaking to your instructor.

Does CET guide Czech scholars on the expectations of US students?

Yes. CET does advise Czech faculty of student expectations and requires all courses, regardless of instructor, to adhere to program standards. For example, CET staff may suggest that a professor include types of assignments--such as analytical essays or daily journals--with which US students are familiar and which, we believe, exercise critical thinking skills. We may also advise Czech faculty of US students' proclivity for classroom discussion.

It is important to understand, however, that while most Czech faculty take CET's guidance to heart, it is not possible (nor desirable!) for CET to mold faculty to fit one ideal. Just as students have different learning styles that may be culturally based, so do faculty have different teaching styles. We welcome

the diversity of pedagogy that Czech faculty bring to the program and limit our intervention to ensuring that basic class requirements and standards have been met.

How can I get the most out of a class taught by a Czech scholar?

- *Prepare to learn from a Czech perspective.* Your Czech professor is not only an expert on the topic, but a specialist with a distinctly Czech perspective. This can be challenging at times, especially if the professor presents a historical figure or event in a starkly different light than you are used to. Perhaps the professor will draw alternative conclusions from history than are common in the United States. Please try to use this as an opportunity to broaden your perspective and test your own systems of beliefs. Doing so will make it a much more rewarding semester.
- *Get to know your teacher.* Czech faculty choose to teach in CET's program because they are interested in teaching foreign students. While your relationship with your Czech professor may be more formal than that to which you are accustomed, it is still possible to seek out your professor for more information. Try talking to him or her after class. Or, invite him or her out to lunch!
- *Talk to the Resident Director.* While program staff may be limited in how much they can ask a Czech professor to adjust his or her class, we encourage you to see the RD as a resource. All of CET's RD's understand the frustrations that US students sometimes encounter. Your RD can provide you guidance about how to approach your class, how to better understand your professor's cultural background, and how to get as much out of the program as possible.
- *Go with an open mind.* Try to remain open to anything. The ultimate goal of study abroad is not merely increased familiarity with one course topic, but rather a broader understanding of culture in general--how it informs relationships, knowledge and daily life in a foreign environment.