UIUC Faculty Led Programs
Summer 2016 in Prague and Krakow
POL 446 [Problems in Polish Literature]
HIS 467 [Eastern Europe]

Prague and Krakow: The City as Open Text, the City as Cultural Palimpsest
Lead Instructor: Professor George Z. Gasyna (Slavic and Comparative Literature)
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Program Departure Date from U.S.: June 15, 2016
Program Start Date: June 16, 2016
Program End Date: July 19, 2016

Course and Program Objectives

This five-week, two-city, 6 credit hour Faculty-led summer Study Abroad program, offered in collaboration with the Jagiellonian University in Krakow and Dartmore Institute in Prague, will familiarize undergraduate students with the history, politics, literature, visual arts and other forms of cultural production originating in, or thematically concerning, the cultural capitals of the Czech Republic and Poland.

The courses – POL 446 and HIS 467 – will focus centrally on the cultures and what could be called the “textures” of the two cities. They will address the two cities’ architecture, prominent monuments, geographic situation and historical developments, notable neighborhoods, social events calendar, and even sports as a kind of living text that can be penetrated through immersion into the daily life of the cities and their inhabitants. These two Central European capitals have
been chosen for tandem study for several reasons. Prague and Krakow represent the cultural epicenters of their respective nations (though in Poland’s case, Warsaw has for the last 300 years been the political center); both are home to venerable and culturally significant seats of learning; the history of each – ancient and modern – has been marked in similar though not identical ways by analogous world-historical phenomena, from religious conflict to wars of succession, and from plagues to general strikes (students will investigate and try to account for some of the differences in outcome). Prague and Krakow, similarly, are both “student” and archbishopric towns, as well as constituting astonishingly prolific artistic and publishing centers of their respective nations. In other words they are sites of practice and memory where radically different worldviews and “versions” of modernity intersected and interrogated one another, sometimes with startling consequences. Throughout their histories, both Krakow and Prague were relatively open cities, traditionally multilingual and multi-confessional; both were home to significant populations of Jews and other communities (Germans, in particular), making them an attractive destination for the study of Jewish diaspora and patterns of European migration. Further, perhaps due to this heterogeneity, both became centers for the production of national identity and the normalization of official national culture, though the influence of their thinkers on discourses and ideas of nation and culture would exceed the national borders. Another contribution of these two cities is that they produced a number of individuals of global impact in similar “spheres” of activity (Kafka and Hus; Conrad and Wojtyla). Finally, both cities were profoundly marked and transformed by the most recent World War (though ironically – but thankfully – were spared significant physical damage, and both feature intact historical cores which are today UNESCO World Heritage Sites) and, in the post-WWII era, by the Soviet-communist takeover. Indeed both cities emerged major sites of anti-communist resistance which saw the rise of a dissident class that then emerged as a central element of the new post-communist elite. The political processes, especially of the last decades, are almost literally “inscribed” on the walls of the buildings, palpable to those who immerse themselves in the urban fabric. Thus the cities themselves will be our primary texts.

POL 446, in particular, will investigate this palimpsest and rhizome of experience and artifact, treating the cities as an index and archive of the respective national cultures. To attain a sense of the depth and richness of these cities as sites, students will supplement theoretical and historical readings with frequent excursions to key urban locations, ranging from museums and archives to cafés and squares. Students will participate in at least two formal class excursions per week, sometimes more, in addition to travel to other significant locations beyond the city limits (see the preliminary schedule, below). In addition, students will view films and documentaries, meet with local literary and cultural scholars, curators, and historians, chaperoned by the instructor(s), and otherwise participate in appropriate cultural events on offer during their stay. The last element of the course will be to determine the ways and extent to which these ancient Slavic cities, bastions and producers of “national” values, have “communicated” to one another over the course of their long and turbulent histories.
POL 446: PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE of READINGS and ACTIVITIES

June 16 Arrive Prague; Orientation and Introduction to the program
June 17 The Coasts of Bohemia: Prague in the European context
June 18/19: Tour of Prague Castle & Hradcany district
June 20 Kafka’s stories
June 21 Kafka’s sites
June 22 Jewish Prague; the Golem
June 23 Kafka as a modern spirit
June 24 United Islands of Prague Festival (held around this time in 2015)
June 25 Excursion to Český Krumlov
June 26 Prague: Evening concert or similar performance, tbd

June 27 Communists and Dissidents
June 28 The other Prague: Cubism, Constructivism, Surrealism
June 29 German Prague; the Hapsburgs and Nationalism
June 30 The writers: Hasek, Havel, Skvorecky
July 1 The University as a generator of cultural meaning
July 2 Wrap up Prague
July 3 Travel Day to Krakow; Orientation and evening dinner in the Old City

July 4 Poland’s most important city: 1100 Years of Polish History; free evening of exploring
July 5 Krakow Jewish Festival (in 2015, this ran until July 6)
July 6 Wawel Hill and the Old City; legends
July 7 Kazimierz; Old and Tempel [Moorish] Synagogues
July 8 Ewa Hoffman, Lost in Translation (selections)
July 9 visit to Auschwitz Nazi Death Camp
July 10 visit to Wieliczka salt mine/concert hall

July 11 Krzysztof Kieslowski’s Krakow: La Double Vie de Veronique; Preisner’s symphony
July 12 The Galician Museum – read Joseph Conrad on Krakow (Poland Revisited)
July 13 1100 Years of Polish History: “Colonial” Hapsburg-occupied Krakow; The Romantics; Krakow’s theaters and opera
July 14 The Krakow Avant-Garde; Witkiewicz Father and Son (plays and manifestos)
July 15 1100 Years of Polish History: The “Four Mounds”
July 16 Trip to Zakopane; Witkacy Museum; theater performance or gallery visit
July 17 Zakopane, guided tour up Kasprowy Wierch (a prime symbol of the Romantic imaginary) and walk down the mountain along the Valley of the Five Lakes (a treasured symbol of Polishness)

July 18 1100 Years of Polish History: The Dissidents; triumphs and vicissitudes of the Jagiellonian University; Krakow as Polish cultural center in 2016

July 19 Travel to Prague

**Required readings**


A Course Packet of readings and other materials prepared by the instructor.

Screenings of representative Polish and Czech and Slovak films.

**Course Requirements**

Four response papers, ca. 1000 words each: 40%

Final collaborative project: 40%

Active participation in excursions and cultural events: 20%

**Grading**

Grades are calculated using a modified UIUC percentage system, as outlined below:

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