

Creativity in the Czech Context

EURO-ARTS-3005 (3 credits)

Czech Republic: Studio Arts - Creative Writing, Contemporary Dance, and Photography

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

The Creativity in the Czech Context seminar explores the intersection of the arts and society through theoretical debates and personal discussions with Czech artists and activists whose work mirrors, provokes, or raises awareness of current debates in the Czech lands around such topics as human rights, the environment and public space, gender equality and social marginalization. They consider how the roles of Czech artists and civic leaders have transformed in recent years to respond and engage public discourse and analyze individual and community approaches to social change. The Artist & Community, the Artist & Public Space, the Personal is Political are a few of the umbrella themes that inform the students' investigation of the role of the artist today.

Creativity in the Czech Context is structured around field visits to artists' studios and arts associations to learn first-hand how they utilize creative strategies to impel social and political change in the Czech Republic today. Students participate in exhibitions and annual community events and local arts performances and festivals. Students keep a field journal and prepare a capstone presentation on a topic of their own selection based upon the site visits.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the ways in which Czech artists, NGOs and activists utilize the arts to engage human and civil rights;
- Explain the tools and mechanisms employed by Czech artists and activists to impact social change through the arts;
- Analyze and appraise the contemporary Czech social and political landscape based on concrete examples of artists' engagement with current social issues;
- Apply knowledge about current debates and developments in the Czech society in a field journal, discussions with artists and specialists in the field and a final oral presentation.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English, but during orientation students will learn about the structure and essentials of the Czech language as well as its important place of the language in Czech culture.

Instructional Methods

This is a field-based course drawing upon experiential methods and includes assigned readings, round-table discussions and site visits to artists' studios and arts community associations devoted to community and social change. The site visits and thematic discussions are often connected to current events such as art exhibitions, public debates, festivals, and other activities to facilitate a deeper understanding of course themes and a level of immersion in the cultural milieu of Prague.

Assessment: The final grades are based upon a fieldwork journal documenting daily notes from readings, theoretical debates and site visits, a capstone presentation on one topic drawn from the course, as well as timeliness and active participation.

Course Schedule

**Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs*

Module 1: The Arts & Human Rights activism in historical and contemporary context (4 days) The introductory module is devoted to a review of historical precedents for Czech artists' engagement in social and political debate, of civic action and as a driving force in Czech social movements, and the role of artists and underground culture in a totalitarian state. We summarize the current debates in the public discourse and their historical roots around such areas as human and civil rights, gender equality, climate change and the environment. We discuss course framing and approaches including a consideration of the value of intercultural dialogue and arts-informed inquiry of contemporary society. We also debate questions around notions of power and autonomy of artists and artists' communities, the impact of culture on social debates and politics today, of the arts in relation to democratic and anti-democratic impulses in politics and society. Round-table discussion topics include *Czech Civil Society and the Arts in Historical Perspective*, and *Mechanisms for Change through the Arts: An Intercultural Debate*.

Module 2: Arts, Artists & Contemporary Society (16 days)

This module comprises an intensive series of round table discussions and site visits to artists' studios, NGOs, independent cultural and community spaces. Theoretical discussions interrogating the various roles of artists in relation to the community, to public space, to politics and to the artist's self are paired with relevant visits to artists' studios and NGOs to speak directly with the artists, scholars, activists, and other specialists and to see models for engaged art and civic action firsthand. We consider how current topics such as climate change and the

environment, human and civil rights and social marginalization are revealed in the arts, and the ways in which artists across a spectrum of creative media employ creative mechanisms for public debate, social and political engagement. For example, we look at ways in which artists and activists reach out to connect with the community or create their own communities engaging topics of equality, interspecies coexistence, and common local interests. We will see examples of art as research and the way it may be coupled with science to produce knowledge or raise awareness for social change. Lecture and discussion topics for the module include *Creative Interventions and the Czech Environmental Movement, Arts, Gender, and Society, The Arts & Social Marginalization, Arts Interventions in Contemporary Politics*.

Module 3: (4 days)

The final module begins with a summary and discussion about our intensive field-experience. We return to our journals to reflect upon themes that emerged during site visits and how our assumptions about the various role of artists have been challenged or changed. Students select one theme to present in more detail in the final oral presentation and roundtable debate.

Readings:

Boyer, Dominic and Alewei Yurchak (2010) American Stio: Or, What Late-Socialist Aesthetics of Parody Reveal about Contemporary Political Culture in The West, in *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 25. No. 2, pp. 179-221.

Ferber, M. A., & Raabe, P. H. (2003). Women in the Czech Republic: Feminism, Czech Style. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 16(3), 407-430.

Hájek, J. (1985). The Human Rights Movement and Social Progress (A.G. Brain, trans.) in Vaclav Havel et. al. *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central- Eastern Europe*. Translator A.G. Brain. New York. M.E. Sharpe Inc., 134-140.

Havel, V. (1992). Six Asides about Culture in *Open Letters, Selected Writings 1965-1990*. (Paul Wilson, ed.) New York: Vintage Books, 272-284.

Hetmánková, R. (2013). Back from the Bottom: Focused on Women. A Research Report of Jako Doma, o.s.

Holland, D. (2014). Social entrepreneurs and NGOs for people with mental disabilities in post-communist Europe: implications for international policy. *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, 6(4), 7-24.

Shriver, T. E., & Messer, C. (2009). Ideological cleavages and schism in the Czech environmental movement. *Human Ecology Review*, 161-171.

Stern, M. J., & Seifert, S. C. (2009). Civic engagement and the arts: Issues of conceptualization and measurement, 5 – 23.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Description of Assignments:

Field Journal (60%):

Students are required to keep a field journal that includes notes and questions on readings, videos, or other resource requested in preparation for the roundtable discussions. It should also include follow up reflections after visits with artists and activists. The field journal may also include notes on relevant public events, exhibitions, performances, and other recommended events that deepen students' understanding and connection to the cultural and activist communities.

Capstone Arts & Society Presentation (30%):

Students select one of the primary themes of the semester and prepare an oral presentation of 15 minutes utilizing examples from field visits, quotations from artists and activists and other data from the journal. Students are encouraged to apply their own academic disciplinary lens to provide a new perspective on our themes and encourage a diversity of perspectives for the concluding group debate. Students may should draw upon relevant field experiences from the course or on other relevant site visits, discussions or lectures occurring on excursion or elsewhere.

Participation (10%):

Attendance, timeliness and active participation in roundtables and field visits.

Assessment:

Field Journal	60%
Capstone Presentation	30%
Participation	10%

Grading Scale

94-100%	A	Excellent
90-93%	A-	
87-89%	B+	
84-86%	B	Above Average
80-83%	B-	
77-79%	C+	
74-76%	C	Average
70-73%	C-	
67-69%	D+	
64-66%	D	Below Average
below 64	F	Fail

Program Expectations

- Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.

- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- Respect differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.
- Storing Your Work: Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will always be available to despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.
- Personal Technology Use: Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- Course Communication: Course documents and assignments will be posted on the learning management system, Canvas. Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.
- Content Considerations: Some texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counseling services.
- Classroom recording policy: To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

