

## **ACB Evaluation Executive Summary**

**Central European Studies Program, CIEE Study Center at Charles University and the Prague Film and Television School of the Academy of the Performing Arts (FAMU), Prague, Czech Republic**

**Spring 2011**

The CIEE Study Center in Prague has identified its mission as follows: “to provide a broad and challenging academic program which gives students the opportunity to learn about subjects related to the region, to engage participants in immersion activities exploring Czech culture, and to provide the experience of living in the setting on which their studies are focused.”

The team has found this popular program to be extremely well run. Under the leadership of Lucie Zacharová, who has served as director for 10 years, the program delivers student services that are first-rate. Students receive very useful and timely information prior to and during their time abroad, have three excellent options for housing, and are offered multiple ways outside the academic curriculum to acquaint themselves with the local culture. The program makes excellent use of its location to enrich both the academic and non-academic programming. The staff is responsive and knowledgeable and highly regarded by the students whom we met.

All students take Czech language, although some approach the course more seriously than others. The program has responded by dividing students up into different groups so that the more ambitious students can move as quickly as possible. In this and other ways, the Resident Director has worked tirelessly to offer an academic program that responds to the needs of the students, who, for the most part, have little background in Central European Studies. The opportunity to take courses at Charles University, FAMU, and at the CIEE Center is an attractive feature of the program, although not as many students take advantage of the full range of possibilities as one would hope. In past evaluations, students generally rated the courses in the Czech institutions more positively than the CIEE courses. We think there are a number of reasons for this, one of which might simply be that the students who reach beyond the CIEE Center may be more interested in stretching themselves academically and culturally.

The Resident Director has responded to students’ concerns about CIEE courses by working with faculty on ways to deliver their course material in a more engaging way. This has helped, and it is impressive to see how aware some of the faculty are of certain pedagogical techniques. Nonetheless, we think that the main issue is really the substance of the courses themselves, not necessarily the delivery. In the report that follows, we encourage the CIEE Prague program to review the substance and shape of the curriculum and explore ways to move beyond broad survey courses. It might be a good idea to offer courses that draw on students’ disciplinary training to explore topics in Central Europe that require a thoughtful engagement with scholarly material and their local environment. Too many students see the CIEE courses as the simple transfer of information that needs to be memorized and then presented back to the instructor on a test. The class presentations that we saw, where a student had an opportunity to introduce his or her own research to the class and promote discussion, were not of very high quality, despite the fact that the students admitted to the program have survived a competitive admission process and have an average GPA of 3.4.

In short, the program has many strengths. It is clear that the Resident Director has high expectations, which are largely achieved. With some adjustments in the curriculum and by

encouraging faculty to insist on higher standards in the work produced by students, the program can reach new heights.

## **CIEE Action Plan**

### **Central European Studies Program**

### **CIEE Study Center at Charles University and the Prague Film and Television School of the Academy of the Performing Arts (FAMU), Prague, Czech Republic**

**December 2011**

#### **Overview**

CIEE staff are pleased to provide this Action Plan in response to the Academic Consortium Board (ACB) report on the Central European Studies Program at the CIEE Prague Study Center at Charles University and the Prague Film and Television School of the Academy of the Performing Arts (FAMU). The report of the site visit was received by members of the ACB at the Spring 2011 meeting. After review, the ACB accepted the report, and presented it to the Academic Consortium.

The Action Plan outlines the key recommendations from the Evaluation and the specific steps CIEE plans to follow to address the recommendation. While the Action Plan is authored by CIEE, staff solicited input from the ACB team leader from the evaluation (Dr. Nancy Kanach, Princeton University) and, where appropriate, from other members of the evaluation team, Dr. Kelley Conway, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Dr. Lisa Fetheringill Zwicker, Indiana University). The Action Plan should be read in light of the ACB Evaluation and with reference to the detailed description of the program available from CIEE.

The “ACB Plan for Program Evaluation”, the Evaluation report, the Action Plan, and program details are available at [www.ciee.org](http://www.ciee.org).

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#### ***ACB Recommendation***

Encourage or require students to take at least one course at either Charles University or FAMU and make a more concentrated effort to include more Erasmus and Charles University students in CIEE courses.

#### ***Action***

The CIEE Prague Central European Studies (CES) Program offers students the opportunity to choose from a series of courses at the CIEE Study Center, Charles University, and the Prague Film and Television School of the Academy of the Performing Arts (FAMU). Most CIEE Study Center courses are taught by faculty from Charles University and are open to local Charles University students. Several CIEE Study Center courses are taught by FAMU faculty. The program allows CIEE students to take up to six semester credits from among a special selection of Charles University courses for foreign students or film courses taught in English through FAMU (FAMU International). Each semester, a large percentage of the CIEE students do in fact take at least one course from either Charles University (ECES courses) or FAMU, but CIEE agrees that it is important to promote these options to students more effectively. Beginning with the fall 2011 semester, CIEE resident staff were more proactive about obtaining Charles University and FAMU course syllabi in advance, as previous students had claimed that they received the information too late in the course selection and registration process. The staff also spent more time discussing these course options with students during the On-Line Pre-

Departure Orientation (OPDO) and the on-site orientation. Overall, enrollment in FAMU courses has increased in recent semesters. Enrollment in Charles University (ECES) courses has increased slightly in the past year, but student feedback has been quite mixed. The CIEE Resident Director plans to work more closely with the ECES coordinator at Charles University to address concerns about the ECES course offerings, registration process, and course quality issues. CIEE is also hoping to be able to offer new Charles University course options in future semesters. CIEE also would like to increase the number of local Charles University and Erasmus students participating in CIEE Study Center courses. In addition, CIEE is in the process of adding several new courses to its Study Center offerings for 2012 and beyond.

Despite the fact that the CIEE courses are officially listed as Charles University courses, the difference in the academic calendars and challenges with the Charles University course registration process continue to make it difficult for local students to join CIEE courses. The CIEE Resident Director addressed these issues with Charles University officials in September 2011 with the hopes of improving this situation in future semesters.

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### ***ACB Recommendation***

Create better information about the credit-bearing CIEE Internship in the CIEE Prague program materials and increase the number of students doing for-credit CIEE Internships

### ***Action***

The CIEE Prague Central European Studies program offers students a variety of non-credit volunteer project and for-credit CIEE Internship options. Information on these options is available on the CIEE website and in program catalogs. The new CIEE Internship protocol requires students to apply for a credit-bearing internship before they leave the U.S. and start their semester in Prague. Students submit an Internship application and provide CIEE with a short proposal and recent C.V. Students must receive written approval from their home institution and CIEE prior to the start of the semester in order to do an Internship for credit. Despite this protocol, many students express interest in doing an internship after they arrive on site in Prague. Information and approval prior to the start of the semester is extremely important, as it gives CIEE Prague staff the time and information that they need to arrange suitable Internship projects and give local internship host organizations a sense of the student interests. Students who are studying on the program for a full academic year may apply for a second-semester Internship on-site during the first semester.

CIEE staff understand that many students are not clear on the details of the CIEE Internship protocols and have made various changes in order to help provide students with the necessary information as far in advance as possible. Changes were made to the pre-departure materials, and staff devoted more time to discussion of the internship and volunteer options during the On-Line Pre-Departure Orientation for fall 2011 students. According to the CIEE Resident Director, a record number of students are engaged in a for-credit CIEE Internship this semester (fall 2011).

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### ***ACB Recommendation***

Faculty should consider offering more focused courses that go beyond a survey level and allow students to practice high level cognitive skills of analysis and synthesis as well as craft more focused and innovative research papers. CIEE should consider moving away from program goals that focus on broadly based knowledge (acquired through survey courses) and towards

helping students increase their understanding of Czech culture as mediated through their own discipline.

**Action**

CIEE staff are in full agreement with these recommendations, and the Resident Director has already started to talk with local faculty about the need to make their courses more focused. One of the challenges for many faculty is that most U.S. students arrive in Prague without a basic understanding of Central European history and politics. The CIEE Resident Director has encouraged professors to avoid spending too much time on general, background information, and there have already been some noticeable improvements in some courses in fall 2011. As new courses are added to the program in subsequent semesters, CIEE will attempt to make sure that these courses go beyond the survey level and provide students with greater focus on a specific topic. While students have generally been satisfied with the level of rigor in most courses, CIEE believes that it's important for students to have increased opportunities for critical thought and reflection on the materials covered in their courses. According to the Resident Director, CIEE faculty have already started to implement changes to their courses in fall 2011 and have made a noticeable effort to offer students more primary sources in their course materials. Faculty have the ability to order new materials through CIEE, and any new books, journals, or articles are then integrated into the CIEE program library. CIEE Prague also provides students and faculty with free access to various on-line library resources.

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**ACB Recommendation**

Continue the outstanding work that the CIEE staff has already completed in providing opportunities for intercultural learning and monitor the appropriate balance between student independence and programmed enrichment activities. Continue to focus students' evaluations of program activities around intellectual and personal growth rather than student satisfaction.

**Action**

The CIEE Prague staff is committed to increasing opportunities for intercultural learning. The CIEE Seminar on Living and Learning continues to be a popular elective course for students, and the Resident Director recently participated in a training workshop at the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication to help her make the course even more rewarding in 2011-12. One of the staff goals is to make intercultural learning a more specific goal in all of the program's activities. Other than the for-credit Seminar on Living and Learning course, the program offers cultural workshops, volunteer projects, and informal discussions throughout the semester. The resident staff revised the training workshops for the local paraprofessional (student) staff to include cultural workshops and more intercultural training activities to help enhance the intercultural learning that can occur within the integrated program housing and during Czech student-led program activities.

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**ACB Recommendation**

Consider instituting a core course to cover material that would serve as background for more focused topic courses.

**Action**

CIEE staff discussed this recommendation in summer 2011 but has decided that it would not be feasible to offer a core course due to the program enrollment (approximately 100 students per semester) and the fact that many students like the current program due to the fact that it gives them the opportunity to have flexibility in their course selection. However, CIEE Prague staff

have also started working with the program professors to discuss ways that they can avoid overlap on basic concepts/topics in Czech history and politics and focus more on the specific topics being taught in their courses.