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How would you evaluate the three weeks in Olomouc at Palacky University?

My international student experience at Palacky University was outstanding. The international exchange program offered by Palacky University and the U.S. Law school partners marked my first opportunity to study abroad in both my undergraduate and law school degrees. From the moment we arrived, our assigned mentors greeted us with open arms and a remarkable depth of knowledge of the Czech Republic. Our journey began with several days of touring Olomouc, allowing us to grasp its historical relevance and central European importance. Our mentors were incredibly helpful, expertly navigating and familiarizing us with Olomouc's most recommended and memorable locations for study, dining, and experiencing local life, such as the vibrant Lower and Upper Square's (Horní náměstí) and the tranquil Smetana Park. This immersion not only helped me adapt but also challenged my perspectives, fostering a greater appreciation for global cultures.

The level of personal interaction with our assigned professors from Palacky University, Nebraska, and UIC was a great experience to both learn and obtain insights not normally obtained in a typical classroom environment.

Excursion and Cultural Experiences...

In addition to the formal classroom instruction, our experience was enriched by a broad array of cultural and institutional engagements that deepened our understanding of Czech society, history, and governance. We had the opportunity to visit multiple UNESCO World Heritage Sites, sample traditional Czech cuisine at locally renowned restaurants, and participate in student-led cultural events—including a vibrant, multi-day end-of-semester festival featuring live musical performances, art installations, and community activities. These experiences helped foster a shared sense of community among international and Czech students alike.

Our group excursions spanned several cities and towns throughout the Czech Republic. A highlight was our visit to Kroměříž, where we explored the beautifully preserved gardens and the Archbishop's Summer Palace—a site rich in baroque architectural heritage and ecclesiastical significance. In Brno, we toured the Czech Constitutional Court and engaged in dialogue with legal professionals from the local prosecutor's office and the ombudsman's office. These visits provided invaluable insight into the inner workings of Czech public institutions and their approaches to constitutional oversight and public accountability.

In Prague, our itinerary included a guided tour of the historic city center, multiple landmark sites such as Prague Castle and the Charles Bridge, and a visit to the Czech Parliament, where we met with legal professionals to better understand legislative procedures. We also attended a football match (SK Slavia Prague), which offered an authentic experience of local sports culture, and concluded the trip with an elegant evening at the Czech State Opera.

These excursions were not merely recreational—they were intellectually and culturally immersive. At each site, I gained a deeper appreciation for how the Czech Republic's historical narratives inform its contemporary legal system, political culture, and societal norms. The

architecture, public spaces, and civic institutions together illustrated the continuity between past and present.

The visual impact of the locations we visited was profound. The baroque design of the Archbishop's Palace in Kroměříž, the stately grandeur of the Constitutional Court in Brno, and the richly historic buildings of Palacký University in Olomouc were awe-inspiring. Likewise, the dramatic skyline and gothic architecture of Prague—including its Parliament building and medieval streets—left a lasting impression. These structures reflect centuries of legal, religious, and academic development and presented visual narratives unlike any I have encountered elsewhere in the world.

What made this experience especially unique was the direct interaction with Czech legal professionals, governmental bodies, and institutions. These conversations revealed both the strengths and challenges of the Czech legal system and prompted reflection on how certain practices—such as the structure and independence of the Constitutional Court or the proactive role of ombudsmen—might inspire reforms or comparative dialogue within the U.S. legal framework.

Was it your first time in Europe/Czech Republic? What was your impression?

The international exchange program in Olomouc was indeed my first opportunity to visit the continent of Europe. The depth of history that I was able to experience in Olomouc and the surrounding Czech communities was both enlightening and humbling—unlike anything I had encountered elsewhere in the world. The architecture, from the baroque elegance of the Archbishop's Palace in Kroměříž to the Gothic spires of Prague, conveyed centuries of political, legal, and religious transformation in a way that no textbook ever could. Each city and site we visited reflected the resilience and layered identity of Czech society, shaped by imperial, religious, and democratic transitions.

Immersing myself in Czech culture helped me not only observe these historical legacies but also understand how they continue to influence contemporary legal institutions and public life. Whether touring the Czech Constitutional Court in Brno, the Parliament in Prague, or the historic campuses of Palacký University in Olomouc, I gained a new level of appreciation for how deeply embedded law and governance are within the fabric of European society.

From a language and communication standpoint, I made a sincere effort to learn basic Czech greetings and social customs. Simple expressions like *Dobrý den* (good day) and *Děkuji* (thank you) went a long way in facilitating positive and respectful interactions with locals. Learning how to navigate formal and informal greetings also helped me better understand Czech social norms, particularly in professional and hospitality settings.

While most academic and professional interactions were conducted in English, the language barrier in informal settings occasionally presented challenges. That experience gave me a much deeper appreciation for the struggles faced by non-native English speakers in the United States. Being in a position where I had to rely on gestures, context, or translation apps reinforced just how significant and often invisible that burden can be for others. It was one of the most

enlightening aspects of the trip, and it has reshaped my own perspectives on patience, inclusion, and the importance of linguistic accessibility in legal and everyday contexts.

Looking back, I truly believe that visiting the Czech Republic as my first experience in Europe provided a uniquely authentic and non-tourist entry point into European life. Unlike more commercialized destinations often shaped by tourism, my time in Olomouc and other Czech cities offered a more grounded, immersive view into the customs, values, and daily rhythms of Central Europeans. I was able to observe how history, language, governance, and culture intersect in meaningful ways that aren't always visible in more globalized capitals. It was an experience rooted in community, learning, and cultural exchange—not just sightseeing. For that reason, I am incredibly grateful that the Czech Republic was the first country I visited in Europe. It offered depth, sincerity, and substance that will continue to shape how I approach future international experiences, both personally and professionally.

What was your biggest experience from summer school?

The overall best experience I had from this summer school experience was gaining a deeper understanding of Czech culture and forging lasting connections with my fellow classmates, international students, and local Czech students and residents. The program created an atmosphere where genuine friendships could flourish, rooted in shared exploration, academic collaboration, and cultural exchange.

A key part of this immersion was the strong support and camaraderie we developed with our local mentors—Martin, Tommy, Daniel, Martina, and Quinn. They were instrumental in helping us navigate not only the physical layout of Olomouc and surrounding cities but also the unspoken nuances of Czech customs and social etiquette. Their generosity, humor, and local insight added immense depth to our time abroad. They didn't just guide us—they welcomed us into their world, making our experience feel less like a temporary study tour and more like a community-based exchange.

Language also played a major role in shaping my appreciation for Czech life. Learning and using simple Czech phrases like “dobrý den” (good day), “prosím” (please), and “děkuji” (thank you) helped bridge gaps and show respect, especially in everyday settings. These efforts were always met with appreciation, and they reminded me of how meaningful small gestures can be across cultures. My experience struggling at times to communicate also gave me a deeper understanding of what non-native English speakers face daily in the United States, broadening my empathy for others navigating language barriers in unfamiliar environments.

Additionally, Czech cuisine became an unexpected highlight of my immersion. From traditional dishes like *svíčková* (marinated beef with creamy sauce), *goulash*, and *knedlíky* (dumplings), to sweet treats like *trdelník*, food served as a powerful cultural connector. Shared meals at local restaurants turned into opportunities for informal learning and bonding, often led by our mentors who explained the regional origins and traditions behind the meals.

Altogether, this experience taught me that cultural exchange isn't just about attending lectures or visiting historical sites, building human connections, gaining new perspectives, and allowing

yourself to be shaped by a world outside your own.