

Probably the first time I visited Czechoslovakia would have been somewhere around 1976 and it was just a vacation trip. We made a loop through Europe and one of the places we went through was Prague and a bit of the then Czechoslovakia. It was later, though, that I got involved with the Bradley European program which was initiated by and managed by professor Roach who was a history professor.

He started that probably before I went to Bradley and his program was at least initially a handful of students would backpack through Europe with him and they would make some grand circle through. Then I got to know him – we used to have a lunchroom in the student center where many faculty met so I got to know him just over lunch frequently, otherwise I would never encounter somebody from the history area. At some point our former dean, Tom Bouch?, who was an exceptionally interesting dean and was very involved - he asked me if I would be interested in doing some work to internationalize our material – the content for students – and the accrediting agency AACSB had a special program for faculty to acquaint them with international concepts and each colleague that was a member participating in that consent one or two faculty to this program, internationalizing the business curriculum.

And so I was happy to go along with them. It was couple of trips – St. Louis and maybe Atlanta and it was young people who were teaching at the time and it was an attempt to just internationalize the curriculum. To get people teaching things that were about international activities. And a fellow that I've met from University of Michigan – over couple of years we sat down and came up with this idea of taking students to London or to Europe, someplace international and giving them the experience of working in a different currency, different environment and maybe visit some financial institutions along the way. So we sketched this whole idea of taking students to Europe and I went home and he went home after these meetings and nothing really materialized from this. I talked to the department chair we had at the time and he said that it was an interesting idea and wished us good luck. So there was no support for this notion whatsoever from the normal administration but Joe Roach, who was doing the history group with his students was more receptive and I mentioned to him, talked to him about the idea so he suggested at the time why don't I go along with them on one of the trips and just observe what they do, what it's like and then I can subsequently plan to take some students myself.

*So this is still pre nineties?*

Oh yea, this was in the early eighties, probably about 83 or 84. He said you know: „just come along. We'll buy you a ticket and you can explore this and then maybe in a year or so take a class.“ So I said: „well, I'd prefer if I can take some students with me whenever I go rather than going myself.“ You know, take some students and maybe visit a place or two. So he agreed and so he prepared a little brochure that we distributed in business classes and basically it was to take an international finance class which had never been offered before and doing it as part of this trip to Europe. And six or eight students signed for this so it was a small group. And I spent some time in London before so I decided it would be nice to go all over but London is really the international finance center so I decided that would be the target for the group to go and so indeed that was what we did. I created - sketched out an international finance management class and students signed up and we joined this history program that was going on. The history program was six weeks long and it was divided in three segments. First segment was two weeks and it was a concentration on one class in London and what they did in London largely was art appreciation. Go to the British museums and places like that and through some of the art exhibits. So I said rather than doing art exhibits and the like – we go visit some banks and some of the exchanges in London so indeed that's what we did. The students had a great time and they continued on into the history class and that took place in Belgium. They went to Bruges and places like that and then they finally ended up with the class in ??? in Austria. In a little ski village just about Innsbruck. Anyway, that was my first experience with European activity and we did that several times over and it became more popular after two-three offerings and sort of became a standard thing in the summer. And then after doing that couple times i decided to visit Czechoslovakia and I think it was probably right after the split or right around the time of the split. So I was planning after the class that I taught in London sometime to do a loop around Europe myself with my family and so we all went along and we were sitting in a hotel in Bruges and Dr. Roach says to me: „I have met a woman from Prague who is really interesting person to know. You know she's just very outgoing...“, and he got to know her through some international program meeting. So he says: „I think you'd enjoy meeting her“. So we're in Belgium with the phone systems of the 80's so he came up with the idea to call her. So we called her and came up with this idea of meeting her and seeing about the prospect of taking some Bradley students to the Czech republic. And so I went to Prague then, afterwards we

arranged this meeting and met with her and she was very accommodating and outgoing and I'd encourage you to meet her if you haven't...

*So who is this charming lady?*

Jaroslava Durčáková. And I think she was an ordinary faculty member, she subsequently became the director of their international programs and subsequently she became the provost of VŠE. I think she is retired now but she's an exceptionally nice person so we met and talked about this idea of taking some Bradley students to Prague and so the following year we signed this up, to have a class that would be offered in Prague. In this three-segment program, where the kids went to Europe and two weeks in London, two weeks in Bruges and a couple places on the continent and the last couple of weeks in Austria typically. So during that last weeks we sketched out a class to go to Prague. Jaroslava arranged for variety of meetings. She would as I recall find students who volunteered to serve as guides to help us find a way around town and so she really arranged a bunch of visits to financial institutions of all sorts and I can't even remember all the things we did but it was a busy time and a lot of fun. So we did that successfully and decided to do it again – successfully – and after we've done that a couple times. – Oh, I guess I am getting ahead of myself at one point.

Before we took students to Prague for the first time, after I met with Jaroslava Durčáková, Joe Roach asked me to invite her to come to Bradley so we had her come to Bradley just for a visit and we scheduled a meeting time for students who might be interested in the study abroad and bunch of students signed up for that – after fifteen or so students signed up to go to Prague the following year so that was sort of the genesis of us going there so we got to spend a little bit of time visiting different financial institutions and organizations and somewhere after we've done that a couple times – I don't recall how I got the information – Dr. Roach might have pointed that to me or I might have found it somewhere else but there was a federal grant. It was in response to whenever all the Eastern Bloc countries were opening up – the federal government came up with grant to pay for students from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and maybe Poland or another country or two to come to the US to study. So we applied for this grant and we turned out to be successful to get the grant for just a handful of students and what it initially was for them to come to study for a semester. Maybe it was a year and indeed several students took the opportunity to come and enjoyed the experience. The idea was to come to America to take the class. So you're in a master's

program in Prague, you come here for a semester. After some students did this, some of them decided to stay on and continue in the MBA program. It turned out they were in general very good students so as a result the then director of the MBA program was excited to add them in as graduate assistants. So they had this initial funding to come which did not last permanently but it sort of went with their appetite and indeed as a result for several years, then – I can't tell you how many came with that program, but it lasted for several, two-three years. During this time there was this infusion of students. As I recall only one decided to not stay on to finish an MBA. One of the students came, stayed one semester and went home. And I've lost track of what his interest was but everybody else got the idea to hang around, finish the degree, rather than just take a class. The government program to pay for students to come went away but at the time as more students became interested in it and the folks at VŠE were encouraging students to apply it got to a point when the assistantship was enough to cover the expenses for most people. So maybe they had to pay travel or something but the assistantship was reasonable amount and so over the years...this was the genesis of the program.

*So these were the initial alumni.*

Yea and everybody and all of the people who participated are in that list that we have on the web.

*But at the same time you were going to Prague to give lectures and...*

Oh that's true, there were also a couple, year or two when I did do a class for VŠE. It was maybe just once that we actually did that class but the thing we did that was most involved was taking Bradley students and mixing them up with VŠE students and doing things together. So Bradley students got to hang out with them and they got to hang out with the Bradley students. Some of the VŠE students who worked with the class were some of the first students who came here to do the program that was funded. We knew them, they knew us and they were interested in the opportunity so we were able to get the funding. That would have been the very first students – Roman Zedník, Petr Jirásek. And I guess one other confounding issue that happened: when we were having the joint meetings with Czech and American students, my son had just finished high school. Probably the summer he started as a freshman at Bradley – he was going along with the trip. So he wanted to participate in the class and so

he got signed up. The class met in Prague and the class involved Czech students, American students, Czech professors and American professors. At the end of the class, Jaroslava Durčáková said to me – and my son's name is Kevin – you know, she says: „put yourself in Kevin's shoes for a minute. He's doing a presentation, his audience includes his father, his father's colleagues and it includes his colleagues, students he knows from the States as well as these other colleagues he just met from Czech. And he was able to really do an exceptional job at presenting to an audience like that. That is a unique capability.“ She says: „you know, when he graduates from Bradley, I'd love it if he'd come and teach for us.“ At that time they had an American student who had been teaching there, a recent graduate. So he became interested in that and intrigued by that idea and when he finished his program at Bradley, his first job then was to go to VŠE to teach for a year. And he had a great time and he was preceded, there were several others – Jason Lauren and couple others who had come from Bradley to teach.

VŠE had a young fellow teaching who was a recent graduate from some American school. I've never met him but he was there for a year or two and then he left so they were interested in having somebody from out of the country, teaching rather than just having one of their old professors teaching something so they were getting sort of an American experience from whoever this person was. So over several years, probably half dozen different Bradley graduates in addition to my son went and taught there for a while. In fact, one of the other students is now my son in law. He was dating my daughter and he was very interested. He spent lot of time in Europe, he traveled around earlier when he was in high school. So he was very interested when he found out about this opportunity and it was just coincidental that he was also dating my daughter. So when he came back to the States couple years later and proposed to my daughter, he had written out this explanation how her father had banished him to this far-off land so that he can never see her. It was really cute, this story. He's a very colorful son in law, he writes a lot and that was one of his little stories.

*Interesting. So they were never there together in Europe...*

No, actually I think that's actually when they did meet. He went on a program to Europe. He was a student on the program that went to Europe and I think when he went on that program – it was before he went to Prague – so he and my daughter knew each other from having met on that earlier occasion.

So there's all kinds of confounding issues to say the least. You know, the connections and that sort of thing.

*Well and what was kind of the atmosphere at the University of Economics in transition? Because obviously horrible things were taught before – it was kind of dark ages for the spread of knowledge. But then was it a really smooth and fast transition in a sense of economic thought?*

I think a lot of it was a function of who the people were. Some people probably were dragged along kicking and screaming and I think others really led the way and professor Durčáková in particular was one of them. She was very open-thinking and she was not dogmatic and she was also somebody who was pragmatic so she could get along in any environment. She was very flexible, bright person and very interested. She had travelled quite a bit. She loved to travel so she'd been out of the country number of times in the era when it was very difficult for people to get out of the country. Pre-89 was just unimaginable for somebody to get out of the country. But she managed to do that. She had gone to the Middle East a couple of times so she was a great person to connect with. She was the central person, there were several others. Jaroslava Holečková – I think she's been retired for a while but she was very involved with the international programs and the like.

So that's pretty much the genesis, where the program came from. And then from about that point on we got to the point where Bradley was very enthusiastic about the students who came from VŠE because overwhelmingly the students then, and now, are excellent students so you know it adds to the character of the institution. The fact that students come here from very different background. The Midwest is not a multinational structure but I think having students who come from different culture, background, language and experience enriches the MBA program here immensely and as a result the folks here are very willing to – whenever the government funding dried up – they were willing to say: „well, maybe we can find some assistantship money to support that kind of thing.“ And so this had endured and in part the students who had come had been an excellent cadre of students. So you know, how can the administrators say no whenever you have the opportunity to attract some really good quality students?

*Would you point out some students that were really exceptional?*

Just about all of them. Well some of the early ones were really interesting. Petr Jirásek, one of the first students to come – and I got to know him well and I visited the family in Prague and his family is really fun folks. When socialism collapsed, Peter came up with the idea that now the socialism is gone he wanted to be an entrepreneur. He was going to be a businessman himself. He decided he was going to sell something, promote something. He came up with the idea he was going to be the first entrepreneur now that Czechoslovakia is going to have a free economy and so somehow he established a deal where he was – someplace in downtown Prague – he was going to be a shoeshine boy. So he was going to make money shining people's shoes. So he made a sign: „This is one of Czechoslovakia's first entrepreneurs.“ So he puts his sign up and he shines people's shoes for money and along comes some guy from Time magazine – a photographer – sees this kid shining shoes and his sign says „First capitalist in Czechoslovakia“ or whatever so as a result they had a big write-up about him – I think it was Time magazine. And it was all about what happens with this person who was going to be the capitalist entrepreneur. And then after he's here at Bradley - towards the end of the year he's here - the folks from Time do another story on what has happened to this guy who was going to become an entrepreneur. So they came here, sent a team – it would be interesting to dig out the old article. So now Peter is – I have not had any contact with him for a long time – but he and my son had become good friends. They met when my son went there to teach and in fact that's how, now that I remember, when we were trying to identify students to come here for the MBA program, Peter was a student in my son's class and so he was the one who was one of the several students who were selected to come in the initial group.

So there's a lot of interconnections that I am forgetting to say the least. But it goes on and on and there's lots of people involved and a lot of involvement – a huge variety of people.

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