
To Write or not to Write. Erasmus students as Journalists.

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There are Erasmus students and Erasmus students. One group takes Erasmus solely as a prolonged vacation in the country and city of their choice and as a great opportunity to meet and befriend people from across Europe. The studying itself is just the “necessary evil” to make this all possible. And then there are the other Erasmus students, the ones who choose their host university because of the offer of subjects (in English or other foreign languages) or professors who can help them with their research and writing their thesis or other papers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this second group of Erasmus students are usually well motivated to try something else on top of their university requirements and Erasmus recreational activities: often they apply for a job or internship during their study abroad.

One of the most popular internships for Charles University Erasmus students who speak German is a journalism placement with Tschechien Online; an online news portal reporting Czech current affairs in the German language. German speaking Erasmus students from Charles University have been contributing to this website for 4 years now, mostly as bloggers or reporters of cultural events in Prague. So far, the portal has had almost 30 Erasmus students as interns.



The topics of the students' articles vary between: tourist attractions in Prague, the culture and music scene, football or ice-hockey matches visited, unfortunate circumstances the students' experienced (such as robbery or ticket fining), reports about their extracurricular activities (trips, Erasmus Theatre Club or Europe Meets School) and also the social life in the halls of residence. All in all, by reading these different articles the reader gets a good insight into the Erasmus experience in Prague and particularly at Charles University.

Georg Pacurar from Tschechien Online says, "When we first offered virtual internships in journalism in Summer 2008, none of us really knew, what to expect. We questioned whether there would be enough students from German speaking countries willing and competent enough to write for an online magazine alongside their regular classes. Soon after, the first applications arrived. Since then, not a single semester has passed without us employing and training two or more Erasmus students. Working with them has generally been a positive, fun and inspiring experience.

What is important to us is that our interns bring a fresh outlook, with their different academic backgrounds, personal interests and experiences in Prague. Most of our staff are long term expats living in the Czech Republic for fifteen years plus. Both aspects: the "off the boat" impression and the insider's view – are equally important for our readers.

We don't expect applicants to be Pulitzer prize winners, however we do expect them to be curious, open-minded and to enjoy writing. In return, we are happy to show them some tricks of the writers' trade and to offer an insight into the sometimes mysterious microcosms of Czech politics. So far, three of our former interns have pursued media careers after returning to their home countries."

It's nice to have such positive feedback about our past students. While reading their blog entries one can see that some of them are writing really well. Let us quote a few of them here (the quotes were selected based on their relevance to the Erasmus programme at Charles University).

Sebastian Miksch, a History student from Universität Leipzig, spent one academic year at Faculty of Arts, Charles University in 2009/10. He referred to the difference of two Erasmus seasons in the following way: "It has been two weeks now since the long awaited approval of the prolongation of my Erasmus stay arrived in fax to my coordinator. After the long wait, I could breathe a sigh of relief and start thinking how I would spend this nice time of year in Prague.

Yet, from my short walk through the corridors of our hall of residence, taking in the sour faces, I could tell that the Erasmus adventure for many is over too soon and that some of my closest friends would leave for home before long. I found the first invitations to several farewell parties in my mail box; everyone who was to leave soon invited me to a last beer or last meal.

And that's how I found myself wandering from corridor to corridor each evening of the week, to toast with a beer or wine especially saved for this occasion; talking about everything that had happened over the past half a year. We exchanged anecdotes and laughed about the shared experience. Certainly, we made each other promise to keep in touch and keep the newly created friendship alive, although we knew it was going to be really difficult.

At the end of the week, we started to say goodbye and accompanied those leaving to the bus or train station where we parted with lots of hugs. It was a little bit difficult, but we had all known from the beginning that this moment would come one day. There was a small consolation, some friends, like me were staying for the second semester and new ones would undoubtedly join us. There were also, already, the first invitations to welcome parties in my mail box. The Erasmus adventure round two..."

Melanie Köhler, student of Humanities from the European University Viadrina, current Erasmus student (winter semester 2012/13) at Faculty of Arts wrote "An Ode on the 2nd Gallery and the Student Discounts of the Czech National Theatre" after joining the Erasmus Theatre Club, Faculty of Arts. She wrote: "Once, the best view in the theatre was reserved for the King, who could follow the play from his royal box and could be seen by everybody.

Today, the National Theatre in Prague has the parquet reserved for the best and the balconies are for the rest of the audience with the exception of the students, who are cast out to the 2nd gallery. One would assume that the seats with the worst view would be left for those with less money; yet, I could not imagine any better.

Sure, one must first climb several (thousand) steps up to the 2nd gallery, but once you have done so, you can see the space as a whole, with its full depth, width and "goldenness" in front of you. The view from here is something the people in the parquet cannot even envisage: the view from the top..."

Julia Formanek, a student of Medicine from Charité in Berlin joined the 3rd Faculty of Medicine in summer semester 2011/12. Being half-Czech, she decided to live with Czech rather than Erasmus students and participated in activities offered primarily for Czech students, such as the annual ball of 3rd Faculty of Medicine.

She wrote: "A quarter of an hour later, my hair freshly styled from the wind in the subway, I am standing in front of the National House in Vinohrady. It's an extraordinary beautiful building from 1894, where concerts, balls and even congresses take place. As I mount the main staircase, past the men wearing tuxedos and the girls in ball gowns, up to the main hall I ask myself, as I do daily in Prague, how it is possible that I am the first Erasmus student from Charité to Prague in 12 years. The hall is illuminated by large chandeliers and the gold-yellow walls are decorated with paint and ornaments. There is a large dancing area in the middle of the hall with chairs at the sides and at the back, red velvet curtains and pretty lights everywhere I would recommend a Prague ball hosted by the medical faculty to everyone, in particular any romantic girl.

A bit later, a young man asked if he could dance with me. The Czech men appear very courteous at such occasions and I was overwhelmed by similar approaches several more times during the evening..."

It's a pleasure for us to hear about such nice experiences from our Erasmus students as well as their troubles, so that we can attempt to help them. We hope that these positive experiences shall continue to be written about in the years to come.

[Tschechien Online](#)