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What makes studying at CU exceptional are the opportunities that students are given at the university. One of these is the opportunity to attend courses run by not only Czech scientists and specialists, but also by top lecturers from abroad. Thanks to the support of [the Fulbright Commission](#), students have had the chance to learn about how to run non-profit organisations at seminars run by American specialist and Harvard graduate Edward Shippen Bright, MBA, MPA. During the summer semester, Shippen Bright taught at the Department of Civic Society Studies at the CU Faculty of Humanities.



What brought you to Charles University and the Czech Republic from the United States?

Around six years ago I came to Prague as a tourist. Back then, I really liked the people here and their attitude to life. I fell in love with the Czech Republic and since then I'd been thinking about how to get back. I spoke to a few people here who were interested in the workings of non-profit organisations and were looking for advice on how to start that kind of project. I saw how the Czech Republic had been changing and developing since the Velvet Revolution. I wanted to be part of that, so I filled out the Fulbright Commission form, even though I didn't really believe I'd be successful. And in the end it worked out (*smiles*).

Charles University is one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in Europe. Right from the start I knew that I wanted to teach at this exceptional institution, so I contacted my colleagues from the Department of Civic Society Studies at the CU Faculty of Humanities, who then sent me a letter of invitation.

We usually discuss how to get a Fulbright grant with students. How difficult is it to get a grant as a lecturer?

It's a long, drawn-out process. It takes a year before they tell you whether you've been successful or not. You have to fill out lots of forms, go for a personal interview in the US, and if you pass this part, you have to go to another interview with the Czech Fulbright Commission. Only then do they decide whether to give you a grant.

How did your seminars at Charles University turn out?

I created a course for students, intended to teach them how to manage a non-profit organisation. I helped them to see life differently, find something that really interests them and which they can, in some way, develop. Say by starting up their own non-profit organisation. I simply wanted to show them that it is possible to change bad things in society for the better. People really can achieve this if they want. I told the students how to go about it and taught them to think about what they're doing.

During my seminars I tried to use real-life examples. I and the students then together sought solutions for the given situations. One of these examples was the story of a woman who wanted to set up an organisation to help and advise new mothers on how to care for their children, while helping women to develop options for finding employment.

I didn't run classic lectures, where I'd stand up in front of students and talk for an hour and a half. On the contrary, we all sat together at a table and debated about how to set up an organisation, how to cope with financing, management, and setting the organisation's goals. We basically discussed everything you have to take into account if you want to give society a high-quality service.

Are Czech students different to American ones?

Here I had a very international group of students, including Spaniards, Russians and Germans, as well as Czechs and Slovaks.

Are the Czechs different? I wouldn't say so. I think they're very well educated. First of all they're very quiet, while I'm the exact opposite. From the start I made jokes. I said to everyone that if anyone's quiet during my lessons, I'll just ask them more questions. I joked that the only way to protect themselves from my nosey questions will be to say something themselves. In the end they overcame it, got used to my teaching style and started to speak openly about what they thought. And I must say that they came up with some excellent observations and ideas.

I'm sure that the Czechs are fed up of constantly hearing, particularly from Americans, that they should believe in themselves more. But I can't help it; it has to be said again. That fact that the Czechs were able to overcome a totalitarian regime, virtually without bloodletting, and that the entire revolution was led by an artists and playwright, says a lot about the Czechs. Who else has achieved that? No-one; the Czechs achieved that, and no-one else. I think that's one of the most amazing things in the world. That's why I constantly repeated to my Czech students that they should be proud of who they are and where they're from. What happened here was truly amazing. The Czechs really should believe in themselves more. And the same thing applies to building non-profit organisations. If you really want to change things, you'll manage it.

Is it possible to compare life at Czech and American universities, or are they worlds apart?

I am not an academic, so maybe I have a slightly different point of view than a professor who's been teaching at an American university for ten years. But I did study and work at Harvard, so maybe I can compare a bit. I think the biggest difference is that American universities have large campuses, where students from different faculties can meet each other, and there's more space for a variety of shared activities. I'd also say that, compared to our universities, there isn't a lot of communication and cooperation between the individual faculties at Charles University. I really miss that here.

You came to the university not as an academic, but as a person who can convey his rich practical experience to students. Could you describe the projects you've so far been involved in?

I run my own real-estate company, so I have experience in the private sector. I've also worked in the public sector, though, when I worked for the Maine Department of Conservation in the American state of Maine. I also set up my own non-profit organisation. I have therefore worked in all three basic sectors of a democratic society, which is highly unusual. Few people have experience from all three sectors, and most people spend their career in only one, and at most two.

When I was working in the public sector and running my own real-estate company, I always had the feeling that I was missing something and that I wasn't content. That's why I set up my non-profit organisation. I wanted to do something for society. Maybe I got it from my parents, who were also very active and had been working on various organisations benefiting society for as long as I could remember.

At the same time you're also the development director for Audubon Alaska, which works to conserve the natural environment in Alaska. Could you describe the work of this organisation?

I'm in charge of marketing and fundraising and it's a job I really enjoy. We work on some great projects. The conservation of the environment in Alaska affects the whole planet. Thousands of birds fly to Alaska from all continents every year to bring up their young. It's an amazing place and I am delighted to be part of a team helping to conserve it.

My children used to always ask me what I'm trying to do. And I said to them: "It's simple; I'm just trying to change the world. And that's it..."