**Cultures and Context: Prague - In the Heart of Central Europe**

**Syllabus Spring 2012**

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Office hours: Wednesday, 4:30-5:00 pm, Professors' office at Malé nám. 2

**Course description:**

Prague is certainly one of the most important historical, geopolitical and cultural capitals of Central Europe. The concept of Central Europe is somewhat elusive and it is difficult to define it by geographical or political categories. Often, it is characterized simply as a space on the edge between the West and East. However, most scholars agree that there is a distinct Central European culture. Identified as having been one of the world’s richest sources of creative talent and thought between the 17th and 20th centuries, Central Europe was represented by many distinguished figures such as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Kant, Goethe and Hegel; later followed by Kafka, Rilke, Freud, Mendel and Dvorak, to mention only a few. Central European culture is based on historical, social and cultural characteristics shared by the countries of this geopolitical entity. It is a result of complicated historical, political, ethnic, cultural, artistic and religious interactions throughout more than a thousand years of history. We explore the characteristics of Central Europe primarily from the perspective of Prague and its cultural history, which is so typical and almost archetypical for this region. Students study geopolitical characteristics and various phenomena that co-create the idea of Central Europe. Taking advantage of the course’s location in Prague, students have the opportunity to examine the primary sources and artifacts (art, literature, music, architecture, film) in their contexts and environment.

As a typical MAP course it is based on a cross-disciplinary approach to the regional study, concentrating on main ideas and their contextual analysis. Presentations, discussions and writing assignments are a key part of the course. Active participation in class discussions is expected and students are required to write a short (one-page) response paper every two or three weeks. Their focus is on topics discussed in the class with the stress on ideas and context rather than on specific data. Class discussions and assignments include also critical consideration of general phenomena and notions such as culture, nation, nationalism, etc.

Other requirements include a mid-term exam (4-page take-home essay) and a final paper. The final paper is an in-depth exploration of a theme discussed in one or more response papers and is both more detailed and aimed at a slightly higher level of abstraction than any of the response papers. The instructor will assist you in refining your approach to this final course project.

Class sessions will be composed of lectures, guided visits and excursions to sights related to the course (e.g. historical sights, galleries and museums) and discussions on weekly readings as well as on other sources such as music, films etc.

**Grading policy:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation/attendance:</td>
<td>20 %</td>
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<td>Response papers (altogether):</td>
<td>20 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>15 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-term exam/paper:</td>
<td>15 %</td>
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<td>Final paper:</td>
<td>30 %</td>
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**Recommended readings:**

Required texts for weekly readings will be available on the internet or distributed in class.

**Schedule of classes:**

*Week 1*
16 February
Course overview and introduction.

*Week 2*
23 February
Geographical concepts of Central Europe, geopolitical dynamics.

*Week 3*
1 March
Historical foundations and regionalization of Central Europe. - “A space between powers.”

*Week 4*
8 March
“In the heart of the European heart.” - Religion and the medieval idea of the Central European society.

*Week 5*
15 March
Religious emancipation and Reformation., cultural and political consequences - “Region on the boundary.”

*Week 6*
22 March
“Golden time of thoughts” - Central European culture from 17th to early 20th centuries.

*Week 7*
29 March
“Rise of a nation” - Nationalism and its context; concepts of Mitteleuropa and Pan-Slavism, cultural and political consequences.

*Week 8*
5 April
Central European Jewry in historical and cultural context, tragedy of Holocaust and “The lost culture.”

**Midterm Paper Due**
Week 9
Spring Break – no classes.

Week 10
19 April
German and Russian hegemonies in Central Europe - “Among the giants.”

Week 11
26 April
The principles and consequences of totalitarianism in Central European Soviet satellites.

Week 12
3 May
“Velvet Revolution and its legacy” - Struggle for democracy in communist countries.

Week 13
10 May
Post-communism in Central Europe, characteristics and context - “Challenges in building democracy.”

Week 14
17 May
“Seeking the lost European identity” - Central Europe in today’s broader political and cultural context (European Union, globalization etc.).

Week 15
**Final Paper Due**