

USF Bids Farewell to Frischmann

By Debbie Rosenthal
Law Student

I caught Professor Petr Frischmann (yes, that is how you spell it) in his office the day before he left for his week-long vacation to Kauai, Hawaii. If I were headed for the tropics, school would be the last thing on my mind, but he was more than happy to talk with me.

Professor Frischmann's seven-week course on Dispute Resolution in Central Europe ended last Tuesday and concluded his first visiting professorship in the United States (he previously worked at Oxford at the Center for Socio-Legal studies and as a research fellow at Liverpool University).

Professor Frischmann was invited to teach here as part of an ongoing program that USF has with Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic. Frischmann teaches USF students in the summer program in Prague as well, although he says it is dramatically different.

"I appreciate my class here very much," said Frischmann. Comparing the two, he found that the longer course here allowed him to cover a broader and more detailed range of material and allowed the students more time to prepare. On the other hand, "the summer classes (in Prague) have a different spirit. It's a better way to teach comparative law because they are in it, experiencing it and they can compare their individual experience with theory."

Professor Frischmann described the warm reception he received here from students and faculty alike as "really excellent." According to Professor Frischmann, the USF summer program in Prague made the transition to teaching at USF smooth for him because "it wasn't

an unknown place for me."

Nor was he a stranger to the United States. He made his first trip in 1990, when he bummed around the country via Amtrak in true bohemian (no pun intended) style.

"That was my discovering of America," he said. It was then that he first developed his appreciation of what he considers the finest attribute of our country: "diversity. That's what the United States is to me."

His made his second trip to America in 1993, vacationing for a month in New York and Florida.

Professor Frischmann has taught at Charles University since 1986. There he

teaches Civil Law, Civil Procedure, Comparative Law, Legal Professions and a host of other legal classes to the 3000+ student body of the law school. When he began, the country was under Communist rule, and the effects of Communism on the school were marked. At that time, "they trained Communist lawyers" and Frischmann was "one of the few" faculty members that was not aligned with the Communist party.

Since the fall of Communism in late 1989, law professors in the Czech Republic have struggled to keep up with the rapidly changing legislation there. Textbooks are an impossibility, "because while you write it, it changes," so the law courses are almost entirely dependent upon oral lessons.

Be assured that in the Czech Republic's newfound growth, Professor Frischmann has played an active part. Last year he helped a new law school get off the ground in Olomoc, a town in Moravia in the Czech Republic. This will be the fourth law school in the country. In addition, Charles University's law faculty is influential in actually forming the new legislation. Members of the faculty are on Legislative Committees, and the present Constitutional Court Justice Vojtech Cepl is a former member of the Charles University faculty. In fact he, along with Frischmann, taught USF students who visited Prague this past summer.

When he wasn't teaching this summer, Professor Frischmann was busy with wedding festivities. In July, he married a woman whom he met in 1990 while acting as ski instructor to a group of philosophy students and faculty on a trip to the

Czech mountains.

"It was good, because there wasn't much snow that year, so there was a lot of time for socializing," he said, grinning.

Although he has his ski instructor's license and is "a big admirer" of Koret ("my friends in the Department of Physical Training would be jealous of your Koret,") Professor Frischmann describes himself as "part lazy, part active." Two years ago he founded a horseback riding club at Charles University, but this was more out of a love for students than for horses.

Apparently Czech students have a hard time socializing, and to Frischmann, this is a matter of serious concern. During the Communist years, youth groups were "much discredited," and the persisting effect of this exploitation is that the students continue to have no unified voice.

"Everyone there feels fear from any kind of organization. Students are atomized. Their only opportunity for socializing is in the Department of Physical Training (the Czech equivalent to P.E.) They complain: 'we don't know each other. There is nothing left but education in this school.'" As a result, Frischmann has a message to American students who travel to Prague or otherwise come into contact with Czech youth: "Please show them how to organize themselves. Explain to them how to build their own representation."

And what of USF? We will lose Professor Frischmann on November 27th, when he returns to Prague in time for the national holiday on the 28th, commemorating the founding of the country of Czechoslovakia. Frischmann hopes to return to the States in the future and will remember his visit to USF fondly (aided by the hours of footage he took on his Camcorder). In fact, he says, he has only one complaint: the piano in the lounge is badly out of tune.



Czech Professor Petr Frischmann

Photo By Gabrielle Holley