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Spring 2016, Hungarian Students Return to UNH to Pursue PhDs

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UNH Global

Hungarian Students Return to UNH to Pursue PhDs

Tuesday, March 1, 2016

Study abroad and international exchange programs are a vital part of college life. They have the potential to function as a symbiotic relationship that is mutually beneficial for both the student and the university. The student experiences another culture in depth, hones their language skills, and immerses fully in academics and student life at another institution. For most, this is a profoundly enriching experience. With the enrollment of a significant number of international students, the host university becomes more diverse, and expands the knowledge and horizons of its community. This is the win-win of international education.

Students from abroad can attend UNH in a variety of ways. One of the easiest is to come here on exchange. Currently, there are 50 international exchange students studying at UNH - largely from Brazil, followed by the U.K, Netherlands, Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, Uzbekistan, China, and Bahrain. Some of these students are sponsored through the Institute of International Education (IIE), such as the Brazilian Science Mobility Program. Others are here through reciprocal exchange agreements UNH has with overseas universities, such as Lancaster University, University College Utrecht, Utrecht University, Heriot-Watt University, Saitama University, and Chengdu University. Recently, UNH has initiated new programs in China, Japan and Korea. For the full list of exchange programs, visit <https://www.unh.edu/global/outgoing-international-exchange-students> (<https://www.unh.edu/global/outgoing-international-exchange-students>).

UNH is fortunate to have had many engaging students over its 20 plus years of being an exchange destination. Bence Cserna and Laszlo Kindrat, both from Hungary, stand out as students whose experience at UNH had a profound impact on their lives and career direction. Bence and Laszlo came for one semester, in 2012 and 2013 respectively, to study in the College of Engineering and Physical

Sciences. Through a very selective process at their home institution, Bence and Laszlo were awarded the opportunity to come to UNH and experience a semester on the campus of a quintessentially American institution.

Based on these great one-semester experiences, both students decided to apply and were accepted into PhD programs at UNH. They have been making the best use of their time here by becoming involved in campus life and contributing their areas of expertise to their research--and UNH is enriched by their being here. Here's why they wanted to return:

UNH International Educator: What was your experience like as an exchange student?

Bence: My friends always told me that a semester as an exchange student is one of the best things to have happened to them. It is something that everybody should experience at least once. I was really excited to come to UNH and I was ready to have that special semester that everybody was talking about. I came with high expectations but the reality was better than I ever imagined.



Bence Cserna

My experience at UNH started out with the International Student Orientation. The orientation is a collection of programs where the incoming international students meet each other and get introduced to the local culture and UNH in general. By the end of the orientation week I found myself surrounded with a group of new friends who were ready to spend a mind blowing semester together. It was a forever accelerating journey that had new surprises for us every week up until the end of the program. Near the end of the semester I had the opportunity to compete in the finals of the nationwide cyber security challenge as the 4th member of the UNH Cyber Security Team. The academic experience itself made it worthwhile, not to mention we had the chance to travel around New England and visit places from Canada to Florida.

Laszlo: I've always wanted to go to America. The exchange program here is excellent. There's so much stuff here, the meal plan, housing. It's financially very important to me to be covered; otherwise, I wouldn't be able to afford it. That's how I chose UNH, or maybe UNH chose me. I was

really interested in math – though my program back home was engineering. I signed up for two math classes, and both were taught by the same professor, Marianna Shubov. I've always liked mathematics. I never knew that you can teach it in such an interesting way. This person was awesome and her research is something I have been interested in.

UNH IE: Were there things about American culture that met your expectations or things that surprised you?

Bence: I lived in the United States before a few times, thus I knew what to expect on the cultural side. However this was the first time when I came here as a student.

The structure of the classes are different to that of those in Hungary. At my home university the focus was on the in depth theoretical knowledge while at UNH most of my classes were practice oriented.

I noticed a big difference in the mentality of the students and faculty. Unlike in the States, education is free in Hungary. Students are not as motivated to go to classes since they are not paying significant amount of money for their education. At the same time there is a smaller incentive for the universities to keep their students. It is easy to fail exams, courses, and even to get kicked out if you are not performing well.

Laszlo: It was a really interesting experience (being on exchange). I like the classes here; students actually go to class. The classes are small, so professors know their students' names. Students take fewer classes, but each is much more intensive. What I found, too, was professors made sure what they cover, the students really learn it. Students have every resource to learn it. I think that's really awesome and it's contrary to what I experienced back home.



Laszlo Kindrat

UNH IE: Why did you decide to come back to UNH?

Bence: I graduated with my Master's degree (in Hungary) and had a full time job waiting for me at a major international company. I was always interested in doing a PhD, but at that point I almost gave up on the idea. I had everything planned in my life that would provide me a comfortable future.

Then I was offered an assistantship at UNH. First, I was sure that I wasn't going to take it; but then I started considering it more seriously. I knew it is a big decision that will affect everything in my life, including my family and friends.

Would it be better to have a full-time job and start my ordinary adult life? I will have many years to work, but this is a unique opportunity. The final and biggest reason was that I have this opportunity now. I know the place (UNH) is amazing and if I would say "no", then I would think about what could have been.

Laszlo: I really like it here. I like the four seasons. In November (of my exchange year), I talked with my professor about opportunities for graduate school and recommendations. I only applied to UNH; I was not really interested in going somewhere else because I really wanted to work with her. This is my water. The international community here is awesome. I have made so many friends.

UNH IE: Can you talk a bit about your PhD program or your research area?

Bence: First, I had to figure out how to start over and make a life here. The first two semesters were basically figuring out what to do, the class work, my research area. I was really interested in cyber security, but there wasn't much of an opportunity here for that. In my first semester, I realized I wanted to start my own student club because I have expertise that other students could find useful in the professional world. What you learn in class is often very different from what they expect in the industry, so I created the Android Development Lab where students can come to practice what they learn in class, writing programs for mobile phones or developing new ideas for applications. It has become great learning environment and is now a self-sustaining club that is continually coming up with new ideas.

Since the beginning of 2015, my research has focused on artificial intelligence; in particular, real-time heuristic planning. I'm working on algorithms that would navigate autonomous robots (anything from a simple vacuum cleaner to a drone that flies in a forest) in an unknown environment.

Laszlo: I am doing applied mathematics. It's applied because the problem that we focus on is something that was not invented in the dark room. It's a problem that comes from serious engineering challenge, where we study two mathematical equations models to assess the dynamic stability of airplane wings. At a certain critical (high) speed, the wings start to experience rapidly increasing vibrations and can quickly lead to critical structure failure where literally, the wings

break. We are looking at a special case, where the wings are equipped with this “smart” material to help reduce the “flutter phenomena.” This is what my advisor has been doing for decades; she has worked with NASA. We are trying to see, using the different parameters - the geometry, length of wings, with the inclusion of this “smart” material - how the wing stability factor is impacted. It is rigorous mathematics; it’s not about simulations. We are required to work with mathematical equations to apply them towards something physically meaningful.

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