

# MY STUDENT EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

ANDREA QUIJANO, COLOMBIA

Arriving at a new country, to a new city, to a new university... To live a new life for a while... All those things were for me a great challenge. Traveling from Colombia to the Czech Republic and having my exchange experience here was an adventure filled with setbacks, learnings, growing, but above all, one with many great moments. When I first got here I was really scared of the things that might come, I was scared of being at a place in which I did not know the language, and which I knew so little about. Yet again, that was one of the biggest and most rewarding challenges of being in Hradec Kralove and at the UHK, because it impuled me to learn new things, to understand different ways of living, learning, and sharing. With this, I reaffirmed not only that the world is a huge place, but also that the way people see that world, the way they interpret it and live on it, is just as different as wide.

Being able to share with such a diverse group of people was really fulfilling in so many different aspects, perhaps with my Taiwanese roomies, I understood that even when there is a language barrier -actually three, taking into account English, Chinese, and Spanish- there is always a way to communicate and that smiling is a universal language.

Even when we had different daily routines, there is always a way to make things work, there is always a way to overcome the differences and being able to live and share in common conditions. That being said, one of my favorite things about the entire process, about the entire exchange, was the opportunity of getting to know new daily routines, new realities, new ways of seeing the world and new people from countries that I did not even know. Perhaps, that is why the country presentations were of my favorite events because it allowed me to share information about Colombia -a country that has been strongly stereotyped and that people usually associate with negative things- and to change the idea people had of Colombia. And just like I think we did that with our presentation, I know that I learned so many things that I did not know of the countries that were presented and I stopped seeing countries for their stereotypes, and I started to see them most uniquely and beautifully: thorough their people.

I have learned new things not by reading it on newspapers, or in a history book, but by sharing with people with different backgrounds, stories, and histories. And I think that's the beauty of the UHK exchange program because such a worldwide program allowed me to understand so much more than I could understand if I wasn't living it and sharing with so many people, so many countries and so many realities. As a result, days passed by and I was less and less scared, and increasingly grateful for every step of the way. Undoubtedly, this experience was fulfilling and precious for me.