2015 Interview with Zdeněk Pinc and Jan Sokol

We Never Intended to Establish a Faculty

What led you to the idea that you could or should establish a new faculty?

Pinc: That was never our intention! When I returned to Charles University in 1990, one of my goals was to create a kind of shared study program, ideally open to all university faculties. That didn't work out to the extent I had hoped, because back then, people still believed that a proper university education had to last five years or more. The idea of dividing the studies seemed like heresy. Moreover, the law changed – before the change, a university could enroll students who were not affiliated with any faculty.

Sokol: That part – that a student must be enrolled at a faculty – wasn't in the original draft of the law. It was added later under pressure from the university lobby.

Pinc: It was essentially a move against us.

Sokol: In a way, yes.

Pinc: It's hard to prove outright...

Sokol: ...but there was probably something to it. It was an effort to preserve the system in which students "belonged" to faculties. Though no one admitted that, in truth, they belonged to departments.

The Formative Years

What was the leading idea behind establishing the faculty, or Institute for Liberal Education (IZV)?

Sokol: That was Zdeněk's (Pinc) idea, but I'll try to explain. The concept was that education is a prerequisite for university studies. At old universities, including Charles University until 1840, every student had to go through a preparatory faculty of liberal arts to learn Latin and other foundational knowledge. We wanted to revive that in some way. Firstly, because at 18 years old, many students don't know what they want to study – this was evident in how often they changed programs. Secondly, in the humanities, especially, it's crucial to have some general overview. Disciplines often overlap; it's helpful if a psychologist knows some sociology, and vice versa, not to mention history and philosophy.
The second key idea was that studies should follow a liberal model: no fixed curriculum, students choose lectures, and must pass certain exams. We implemented that but later had to adjust. It turned out students often couldn't manage it on their own and failed too frequently. So, we introduced compulsory courses and exam deadlines.
When IZV was founded, we benefited from the downsizing of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Many were laid off, and the government provided funding...

Pinc: ...a hundred million. Two years in a row.

Sokol: ...to make use of these people, so we hired researchers leaving the institutes.

Pinc: That's really the only useful outcome of that governmental initiative.

Sokol: Yes.

Pinc: It didn't happen in 2000 but eight years earlier, and I'm a bit sorry this prehistory is being forgotten. Our idea at Charles University was a revival of the original concept – before there were faculties, there was the Studium generale with its liberal status, the Quattuor Artes Liberales. We built on that deliberately. The vision may have been mine originally, but Jan Sokol fleshed it out over ten years. He wrote a series of textbooks that cover what we understand as foundational education at IZV and FHS: Člověk a náboženství (*Man and Religion)*, Malá filosofie člověka (*Small Philosophy of Man)*, Člověk jako osoba (*Man as a Person)*, Moc, právo, peníze, etika a život (*Power, Law, Money*, *Ethics and Life).*
Last year (*the interview was conducted at 2015*), the VIZE 97 award went to Andrew Lass, an American professor from one of the Seven Sisters colleges. He speaks Czech, having spent his youth here. During his lecture at the Center for Theoretical Studies, our alumna Dana Léwová nudged me and said, "Look, he's copying you!" I said, "He is, but he doesn't know it. Years ago, I was the one copying him."
In the U.S., such studies are tuition-based, generously funded, and considered elite. In our early days, people mocked our program as "three years of vacation." When the faculty was named FHS, some ridiculed it as "The Faculty in Search of Meaning." (*Fakulta hledající smysl – editor's remark*) I saw that as a compliment. After all, seeking meaning is evidence that we acknowledge its importance.

Sokol: Similar models were tried in Europe during revolutionary periods. Karl Popper fondly recalled attending such a school in Vienna. The school lasted only a few years.

Pinc: Such experiments often don't survive. Maybe we won't either, eventually. But in America, liberal arts institutions hold their ground. Here in Prague, we were disadvantaged – the government dismantled research institutes only in certain fields. So, we had a surplus of some educators and a total lack in other disciplines. We had to work with what we had, shaping the institution as best we could.
The Academy didn't want highly qualified people to leave science and education altogether. They offered 100 million Czech crowns annually, twice, so these professionals could transition to universities. We reached out and took in everyone willing to join. Most stayed, some are still here. For example, Karel Müller, then already a docent with excellent international contacts, had never taught and doubted he could. It took him time, but he became an outstanding teacher. He often says he's my student in some sense, although older than me, because I guided him through those growing pains.
In the beginning, most people at IZV didn't want to be there. The students had all applied to other Charles University faculties but weren't accepted due to limited capacity. Rector Radim Palouš decided they could take another entrance exam – with us. And we, though I maybe shouldn't say it aloud, accepted all 360 of them that first year.

Sokol: The Academy offered us space in Holešovičky at the Mining Institute, a rundown industrial complex near Heydrich's turn. When they showed it to us, they thought we'd say no. But we imagined what could be done, and they took pity and offered Legerka instead – a former clinic for plastic surgery and burn victims on Legerova Street, where Jan Palach died.

Pinc: It was quiet except for the highway outside. When we arrived, it wasn't operating anymore but still looked like a hospital. White tiles on the walls. It was July, and we had to start teaching in the fall. So, we used leftover copies of *Přítomnost*, the journal we both worked on, as wallpaper over the tiles. This gave the place a unique look, and students could read while waiting in the halls.

It was a battle. For weeks, I worried that health authorities would shut us down. The environment was terrible. The only advantage: windows couldn't open to the street, or we would have died from smog. Ventilation only came from the cleaner courtyard side.

Sokol: The lecture halls had once been operating theatres, with huge windows that didn't open.

Pinc: And were never washed. I remember when health inspectors visited. Honza Sokol handled it brilliantly – the women were enchanted, like in a parapsychological trance, nodding along. They only suggested some air freshening. Honza promised to buy air purifiers. We bought them with prize money from the Hannah Arendt Award – but never used them because they were too noisy.

Sokol: We furnished everything in a makeshift way. Zdeněk had an office near the stairs, where he built a bird aviary.

That sounds like quite an adventure!

Pinc: It really was. And it created an incredibly strong bond between teachers and students. Some of today's lecturers were students back then: Josef Kružík, Ondřej Skripnik, Jarda Novotný, Hedvika Novotná, Filip Horáček, and even Jakub Češka, in a way. They lived through that era.

Be Prepared for Anything

On your sources of inspiration, for example American universities, you've already said a few things, but let me ask again: where all did you look for inspiration when creating the Institute for Liberal Education (IZV)?

Sokol: Zdeněk should probably speak more to that, since he came up with it all, but I think the European tradition played a key role. In a certain form, that tradition was preserved in the U.S., while here it was abolished in the 19th century. True, that was also because we didn't have gymnasiums and so on, but the fact that the university began with a sort of general education also served to maintain a certain coherence among educated people. A doctor, a physicist, or a journalist—they all shared a common foundation, allowing them to discuss not only professional topics but also things beyond their specialization. Think of the great figures in the humanities: Max Weber, who started in medicine and dabbled in all sorts of fields, or Georg Simmel—in the end, as Ivan Havel would say, they were all transdisciplinary experts. People who not only did various things but also combined them. That's their greatness.

Pinc: You had to look at the whole matter differently. Rector Palouš came to an off-site meeting of the CTS, which was a natural lab for changes at Charles University. He came with Professor Zahradník, the then-president of the Academy of Sciences, and immediately said: "The government has decided to release funds for integrating Academy of Sciences employees who lost their jobs due to reorganization. We're coming straight from that meeting. It's an opportunity for your educational project, Zdeněk, which you could present to us tomorrow." I didn't have any project at the time, just a wealth of experience from the dissident days and apartment seminars, so I said: "Of course, Radim, I'll prepare something by tomorrow." I had one night. But I prepared it. I presented it the next day, and Zahradník, even though he was a chemist, liked it and said laconically: "We'll do this."
A completely liberal curriculum, competitive comparative exams, and the result would be a ranking of students with a detailed description of what they had done. Higher-level departments would then select people from this pool. That was something I borrowed from the liberal curriculum of undergraduate colleges, specifically Harvard.
But the apartment seminars taught us something else entirely. There, people who couldn't officially teach gave lectures to those who couldn't or wouldn't officially study. The lecturer had to teach what they knew, and the listeners had to listen to what was available. Often their interests didn't align. The lecturer had to try to make it engaging and understandable, knowing he couldn't formally examine them because he couldn't give them a certificate that would mean anything. One peculiar experience for the lecturers was that no matter how well-prepared or educated they were, they quickly began to repeat themselves, because people didn't come for just two or three years, like in a formal program, but sometimes for ten years. So many of us independently came to the method of reading a good book together, sometimes in the original language. Slowly, carefully, with explanation, over the course of years. Nietzsche readings were legendary. We read him in German, though few really knew German. We even had a seminar where we read *Phenomenology of Spirit* in German, in Patočka's Czech translation, and in French, over three years. And that's worthwhile! The initial goal was to determine whether Hyppolite's or Patočka's translation was better. After three years, we concluded Patočka's was best. Internationally, Hyppolite's is preferred, because no one can verify Patočka's unless they know Czech. These were also our sources of inspiration. Our so-called "controlled reading" method comes from this: if you read a book thoroughly and must demonstrate, both in writing and orally, that you really understood it, it stays with you. But if you learn two or five lines from a textbook, it's useless and you usually forget it.

What was your vision for the goals of the program? What would your ideal graduate look like?

Sokol: You know, every teacher secretly imagines that the ideal graduate looks something like them. For us, they were a bit like tinkerers, like we became by coincidence. People who don't stress some narrow specialization, but think about

how philosophy, for instance, might actually be useful. How it touches and shapes human life—not just an academic career.

Pinc: Aside from people from the reduced institutes of the Academy of Sciences, there were others who came from the apartment universities. These were people who, twenty years ago or even earlier, were told that they would never do what they wanted. Honza was expelled from Archbishop Gymnasium, so when he was twelve or thirteen, it was decided he'd never graduate. He had to become an apprentice. But the linguistic and other foundations were already there, and he found his way to education. I studied a relatively elite field, but at 23 I learned I'd never do that work either. Honza became a watchmaker and goldsmith. I became a "Patrolling Dispatch Officer"—in a cooperative for the disabled, Martinská 4, Prague 1, and PHDr. was written on my desk. My colleagues were people whose lives had gone off the rails for various reasons. Life turned out very differently than expected. The Academy folks were probably good in their fields—they got into the Academy after all. And now they were thrown together with us. Even though you'd expect them to discourage us, they usually didn't. Maybe because they were afraid to discuss it, maybe because they understood it—I don't know. But the idea that people should be able to manage, wherever life throws them, really took root. And we managed to pass that idea to our students quite successfully. Our graduates are good at that.
We also believed that university education should stand on a solid base, like a pyramid. The base is the bachelor's program, broad and fundamental, so the pyramid stands firmly. The next level, master's, should be as short and qualification oriented as possible. The top is doctoral study, for academics. The number of people at each level should vary by orders of magnitude: thousands of bachelors, hundreds of masters, tens of PhDs. Charles University at the time believed the opposite: ideally no bachelor students, let other schools produce them, more masters, lots of PhDs. Under Rector Václav Hampl and likely still today, that's the prevailing view. So we had to adapt, and now instead of a pyramid we have a block or a barrel. But our orientation still stands: a person can cope well wherever life takes them. And I think we managed that well.

Sokol: That's a quality—not even a competence—that matters today more than ever. Who can say they'll have one job for life anymore? Especially young people in cities need to expect to do all sorts of things. That this quality would be something the, pardon the term, "job market" would value—I think we called that right.

Pinc: When I was a student, we still had job placements. The number of students admitted to each field was based on a state plan: how many archivists would be needed in five years—one in Uherský Brod, one in Přerov, one in České Budějovice. Then one got sent here, the other there, regardless of origin—though oddly enough, that kind of mismatch rarely happened. I changed programs several times mainly to get rid of the teaching qualification that came with job placement. Specialized fields didn't have that. I didn't want to be assigned. Luckily, job placements were abolished during my studies and never came back. But if you polled students today about bringing them back—whoa! That would stir things up.

Sokol: I don't think so. I don't think they'd want it. We had offers from companies to provide scholarships in exchange for five years of work afterward. It always failed due to total lack of student interest.

The Siege of Jinonice

Now let's move to something more practical or technical: how did the actual founding process take place, whether of the institute or the faculty? Was it hard to push it through?

Sokol: Formally, the founding of IZV went very smoothly. It was a revolutionary time. Accreditation meant sending in a piece of paper, the commission said "yes," and that was it.

Pinc: Rector Palouš founded four new institutions at the university. One was CTS (Centre for Theoretical Studies), a research institute with a transdisciplinary graduate program at the university, born from Ivan Havel's idea. In tandem with that, the Institute for Liberal Education was created – one of Radim's favourite ideas. The third institution, which Palouš was more or less forced to create, was CERGE (Centre for Economic Research and Graduate Education), because it attracted funding – and with that money, top American professors could be brought in to lecture here on the subject we were most lacking: economics. The fourth was the Environmental Centre.
So administratively, the founding was very simple. I was named director, though I was Radim's third choice. It was supposed to be Petr Vopěnka, but he became Minister of Education and left the university. The second choice was Petr Piťha, who got the Department of Civic Education at the Faculty of Education and couldn't dedicate himself to this. Then I was appointed. I was handed practically a non-existent institution – one small office at the Faculty of Education, a quarter of a secretary, and an honorary title, meaning I didn't receive any salary at first. But I did get one important weapon: I inherited the remnants of Marxism-Leninism. I was put in charge of all the departments at various faculties that had emerged from the former Marxism-Leninism institutes. That meant about sixty people whom I formally commanded, and I spent a lot of my life at various hiring committees where these positions were being filled – I had quite a bit of say there. But very quickly, my authority collapsed. A new funding system was introduced within a year; one based on the number of students – so this inheritance fell apart. Each dean could do whatever they wanted with the money they got. At that point, we faced a sine qua non: if we didn't want to humbly crawl back to our faculties—assuming they would even take

us—we had to get our own students. So, the difficulty wasn't ideological, but technical and organizational. Establishing a faculty was technically simple, but there's a principle that a faculty can be established by the rector as long as no one at the university objects. And if someone does, you wait…

Sokol: …until someone drops out.

Pinc: Yes, until one side or the other drops out—or dies off. Then something revolutionary happened: our mutual friend Jiří Gruša, a poet and writer, became Minister of Education—probably a record holder for the shortest term in office. Without him, I don't think any of this would have happened. He was only minister for about three months and during that time, he didn't do anything at the ministry except one thing: he handed over a building his predecessor Pilip had started renovating—intended to house various institutes under the ministry—and gave it to Charles University.
But the idea nearly won out at the university that no one would move into the new building; instead, everyone would just claim a corner for storing this or warehousing that. At the time, I knew that if we wanted to keep our program alive, we had to create a faculty, and if this opportunity had come, we had to take it—under one condition: that we move into Jinonice as a whole. It was said then that FSV would move in with us—they were also struggling with space.
Since the new building was bigger than we needed, it was decided that part of FSV and a few units from the Faculty of Arts—which also lacked space—would move in too. But no one except us really wanted to move to Jinonice.

Sokol: It even got to the point where one associate professor from FSV reported it to the public health authorities, so health inspectors came to shut it down.

And did they?

Sokol: No. But some things had to be redone.

Pinc: This building wasn't originally designed for educational purposes—it was meant for clerks, with little offices. We managed to create a lecture hall here—that was our contribution.
When we first came here, it was a shell, so some of the offices could be enlarged. They added elevator capacity and such, but the one thing we couldn't change was the corridors. That's why we had to be the first institution at Charles University to be thoroughly computerized. When the building was completed and we were moving in, suddenly a problem arose—FSV threatened to veto the founding of the Faculty of Humanities unless we gave up some space.
Professor Mlčoch, a great guy and then-dean of FSV, accused me at the rector's board meeting of having "taken over" the whole of Jinonice, claiming they desperately needed some space because they couldn't stay where they were. I had to give up space. Then he came back again, saying it still wasn't enough. So, in the end, what I originally wanted—to move in as a complete unit—didn't happen. The research center of the Faculty of Humanities stayed at Legerova, and the rest of the faculty operated in Jinonice.
Later, when we were evicted from Legerova—which was supposed to undergo major repairs (they still haven't started, and it's been about ten years)—we luckily got hold of a former nursery and kindergarten at Hůrka. We had to rebuild it, of course—it had those tiny toilets for toddlers, which had to be resized. But years later, city councilors decided to convert Hůrka back into a kindergarten, so the toilets we had enlarged got shrunk again, and we had to leave.
That's when the idea of having our own building really came to the fore. When the new rector, Professor Hampl, visited Jinonice, he walked around and said, standing in the hall: "So, what else is there?" He thought he had just walked around the dean's offices and was wondering where the rest of the faculty was.

Sokol: The founding of the faculty, of course, ran into opposition in the Charles University Senate and so on—it was quite a fight. Rumours were flying all over the university about what we were up to here. But in the end, thanks to the then-chair of the senate and future rector Wilhelm, we pulled it off. Wilhelm helped us a lot—he liked the idea, and to this day he serves on our academic council and regularly shows up, so he deserves to be acknowledged again and again.

It was already mentioned that the studies were more relaxed in the beginning. Did the study plan back then look very different?

Pinc: Not really. The mandatory exams and assessments for the bachelor's degree were pretty much the same as they are today. What had to be scrapped early on, though, was the idea of grading them using long scales. For a big assessment, you needed twenty-five points—what we'd now call credits. At that time, there wasn't a unified credit system yet; we actually had one of the very first credit systems at the university. The rule was that if someone passed the exam even with just one point, they could still move on. But the trade-off was a much worse overall grade, and they had to make up for those missing credits elsewhere.
At Harvard, as I mentioned, they would put out a ranked list—who came in first, second, third... all the way down to three hundred and seventieth. It was the same at Charles University back in Hus's time. Students at the bachelor's exam were lined up in a list, and those lists were kept. During Hus's trial in Constance, some academics even told him: "Brother, if you hadn't ranked so poorly on that list, you might not be here today!" But when Jerome of Prague was burned at the stake a year later, that kind of talk stopped—because Jerome had ranked second in his year, while Hus had been close to the bottom. And we had something similar. Every year, we knew who finished first, and there were even records kept of the all-time rankings—who placed where—because the point system was continuous. I always thought that,

from a competitiveness standpoint, it was really interesting. But it required a connection between the quantitative side of education—credits—and the qualitative aspect. The unified European system separated those two, so we had to let that go. But the exams themselves stayed pretty much the same.

Sokol: They just added limits for when students have to complete them.

Pinc: Right, they're now tied to a specific semester, and the upper limit is a one-semester delay. The fact that there were more credits back then meant there were way more elective options. Now, that whole principle of electives is being scaled back. These days, even students who only half pay attention have no problem earning the required number of credits. In fact, their options are practically endless. You can sign up for a course, then decide not to complete it because you already have more than enough credits—and nothing happens.
Back then, there were five modules, and you had to have four completed. You could leave just the fifth one open—meaning you could skip a course there. Within one module, it was possible to have a few unmet requirements, but if you had two open modules, you were either conditionally expelled or kicked out altogether.

That was way stricter than it is today.

Pinc: It sure was. But on the flip side, there was the Second Chance. I'm especially proud of coming up with that. If someone messes up and gets kicked out for a semester, they can keep studying — they just have to pay for that time themselves. Once they catch up on what they missed, they can return to regular studies. And if they don't manage to catch up during their Second Chance, they get another one. In fact, the Second Chance can go on indefinitely. The inspiration came partly from the Gospel: the idea that the door should never be shut, and that a reformed sinner is worth more than a whole squad of the righteous.
Take Břéťa Oliva, for example — he was one of those chronically unsuccessful students, studied here for almost thirteen years because he failed to finish twice within the maximum six-year time limit. Then, when the university decided to run a preventative check during the Plzeň turbo-student scandal, just to see if we had any cases like that here, Břéťa's name popped up in the system. He had just wrapped up his studies in under a year — because he'd recently started his third go at it — and he even graduated with top marks.
It was easy to explain, actually. The only slap on the wrist we got was for admitting him repeatedly, even though he paid his own way each time. When Břéťa finally made it through, he walked all around the faculty thanking everyone, and it turned out the credit really went to Ms. Dyršmídová, who was head of the Student Administration Office at the time, and to his then-future wife.
See, he was a bass guitarist, and whenever he hit trouble with his studies, he'd book a whole tour of rock gigs, earn some cash, pay for another Second Chance, and keep going. But of course, traveling with rockers all over the country would land him in trouble again — and it kept repeating like that. Eventually, his future wife locked his guitar in a closet and found him a job as a program coordinator at a local cultural centre somewhere in Hlinsko, on the condition that he'd get his bachelor's degree. She even went to see Helena Dyršmídová in person and talked her into giving Břéťa one last shot. And Břéťa — just to get that guitar back — studied and finished everything.

Heading towards specialization?

Is the current situation and role of the faculty different from what you imagined back then?

Sokol: I think in some ways it's still the same — especially in that the bachelor's program serves as a kind of starting point for nineteen-year-olds who don't quite know what they want yet. That's both an advantage and a disadvantage, but it still holds true, and because of that, we continue to get a decent number of applications — unlike some other faculties these days. On the other hand, things have changed — the faculty has really strengthened its position within the university, largely thanks to Benyovszky and the research department, which began seriously evaluating the faculty's performance through publications and similar metrics. Our master's and doctoral programs have grown significantly, so from the university's perspective, we're doing much better than we were back then.
But we old-school types are a bit concerned about what seems like a drift away from the original idea — that is, that the program is starting to break down into individual disciplines. The younger teachers, who don't have the same experience, tend to assume that every student is either a historian or a sociologist or a philosopher, and they treat them accordingly. That's the risk — that we might slowly be shifting toward the standard university model. We'll see.

Pinc: I don't think it could've gone any other way. When Sokol's possible years as dean were up, I didn't want to become dean — mainly because I knew something like this would need to be done, and I wouldn't want to do it. I would've dragged my feet and held everything up. And that would've been bad — I was very aware of that.
Alongside the people Honza mentioned, Josef Kružík also did an incredible job bringing order to things here. The fact that the faculty earned respect within the university is hugely thanks to him. We were always first in line for criticism — let's say we were more of an unwanted child than a wanted one — whereas now I'd say we're a fairly respected faculty. But I completely agree with what Honza said — where we gave ground, we probably had to. I can't really imagine this process not continuing in the same direction. So, it's only a matter of time before this becomes just another regular faculty — and I mean that in the pejorative sense.

Sokol: I wouldn't go that far. Some compromises were forced on us by regulations — laws, the Bologna Declaration, and so on — but teachers here have always had a lot of freedom. The space is there, and it depends on the teachers whether they realize it and make use of it, or whether they go all in on pushing specialized programs.

Pinc: I'm afraid that in the long run, it's going to go that way. It's not that the regulations are forcing our hand — it really comes down to people. But I think that the "golden years" usually play out over much shorter timeframes than we've already lived through. I don't mean it in a catastrophic way — like things are going to go downhill year by year. I see this blending into the broader university body as a long-term thing. And deep down, I hope that the other faculties might actually move in our direction a bit — because this idea of producing people with the narrowest possible qualifications just doesn't hold up in the world we live in.

Sokol: Even in the traditionally recognized fields. Universities today are under pressure both from the inside and the outside for not being able to adapt to new needs. We believe our model doesn't need to be reworked to fit those needs — because students can essentially tailor their own studies. They can take classes across the university — that's a really important feature.
For example, American bachelor's degrees can be either at a university or outside of one. Being at a university is crucial — because if a student knows from the start that they want to study something like Egyptology, they can sign up for those lectures from year one and study that exclusive language for the full five years. This idea that your studies don't have to be chopped up into separate stages — that still hasn't fully caught on here. Of course, if you're doing a bachelor's at some college, there's no Egyptology there. But the point of a university-based bachelor's program is precisely that you can choose what you want to focus on early.
Pinc: And that's exactly how our top students have done it.

Sokol: Yes, many students have taken that path — and still do.

How would you like to see the faculty develop further?

Sokol: Well, first off — we'd really like it to finally have its own building *(this came true in 2020 – editor's remark)*. That's important. After that, it's up to the faculty itself. We also must admit that this concept is thirty years old, and times have changed. We may still be a bit trapped in the mindset of that earlier era. I just really hope that our successors don't lose sight of the idea that, at least at the bachelor's level, the faculty should remain a flexible foundation for all kinds of paths. Personally, I'd love to see more of our bachelor's graduates become teachers. I truly believe — with all due respect to our colleagues — that we're not doing a bad job preparing people for teaching careers. And if more of our graduates went on to complete their teaching credentials, I think the education system would benefit. And there are plenty of other fields where this kind of broad foundation is valuable and pays off — it's not just wishful thinking. That's something I really hope the faculty will hold onto.

Pinc: I'd add one more thing — the faculty should try to maintain a high standard of interpersonal relationships. If you heard the outgoing dean's final speech during the handover, it was unusually ethical in tone — and not particularly cheerful. The dean was leaving with a certain sense of bitterness, because there are people here who treat the faculty environment in a destructive way. That's a typical threat to academic institutions. And for a long time, it seemed like we had managed to avoid it.
Let's hope we weather this storm too, and that those good interpersonal relationships stick around. That goes not only for the relationships among faculty, but also between teachers and students. We've hardly had any storms in that area so far.

Sokol: Oh, come on — we've had our share of rebellious students.

Pinc: That's fine — rebellious students *should* exist.

Sokol: I mean the kind that take things to the press. We've had scandals, too.

Pinc: But what's always been clear is that students are genuinely happy to be here — that's a deeply rooted sense. So, I really hope we can preserve that atmosphere. It's already become, in a way, a tradition. After all, all three deans who've led this school so far have placed the same emphasis on it — so hopefully it'll carry on into the future. At least into the kind of future we can see — which, for the two of us, isn't all that far off.

Marie Hlaváčková
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