A different planet?
What to expect and what is expected at Mendel University

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Czech society is characteristically very formal and it takes time to develop a personal relationship. Too much familiarity is not welcome at the beginning of a business partnership. However, the level of formality lessens as the relationship develops towards a friendship based on trust.

Due to the reserved nature of the Czech culture, the use of status titles in both verbal and written forms is extremely important in the business settings. You should refer to your Czech counterparts as ‘Mr’ or ‘Mrs’, ‘Dr’ or ‘Ing’ (Engineer) until invited to do otherwise. The use of first names without permission may be considered offensive as they are generally reserved for close friends and family.
Communicating with their hands or wild gesticulation is not typical of Czech behavior.
It is customary to shake hands with both men and women when greeting them. There are set rules for initiating a handshake. For example, it is expected that one should wait until an older person or a woman offers a handshake. In a familiar setting it may be customary that men and women will give each other a hug and/or kiss on each cheek; however, foreigners are advised not to initiate such actions. While talking, men generally do not touch other men unless they have reached a fairly high level of familiarity and comfort with that person. If one of the two persons is of significantly higher age or prestige, he/she might initiate occasional touching to show his/her assurances or for emphasis. This practice applies to a lesser degree for contact between men and women and it is usually considered a test of "good manners" that a man does not initiate any touching. The rules for a woman touching another woman are similar to those for men.
Regular eye contact is required if you want to be judged as trustworthy. Czechs will not necessarily maintain continuous eye contact (especially when they take their time to "think through" their response), but it is considered a sign of ill or "suspicious" intentions if a person refuses to make or is avoiding eye contact. DO respect your Czech counterpart’s sense of personal space. Although Czechs generally have quite a developed sense of space in personal dealings with one another, the actual distance depends very much on the context of the situation and the individual inclinations of persons involved. Distance is usually greater when speaking or dealing with not-yet-familiar people. The best guidance here is to observe. After an initial obligatory handshake, gauge each person’s degree of comfort with touching and their preference for personal space, and then adjust as needed while maintaining your own level of comfort.
It is not advised to wear clothes to school that are primarily intended for sports and relaxing. You may dress casually for regular classes, but your clothes should be clean, tugged, and not offensive or distracting in any way. It is preferred when you choose rather more formal style. Be aware that it is expected that you dress up for exams or class presentations.
Eating and drinking in a classroom during your classes is not advised unless you get your teachers approval. Otherwise, restrict it to your class breaks. And if you consume anything in a classroom, please clean up all your mess and put your trash in a trash can, which is typically by the door. Don’t leave it on or under your desk and if you mass anything up, clean it, so nobody needs to get dirty or even injured thanks to that.
It is generally considered inappropriate to be late for class, unless you have a really serious reason. It is suggested that if you come late, you come quietly, take your seat and perhaps even apologize to the teacher for your tardiness after the class. Some teacher may restrict you from your class if you are late. And it is highly possible you won’t be allowed to take your test or exam if you come late for it.

Test question: What about Czechs and punctuality expectations?
Preparations for classes

- Take notes during your classes.
- Read your study materials regularly, even if you are not reminded to do so.
- Do your homework. Work on your assigned projects.
- If you don’t understand anything, don’t be afraid to ask your peers and teachers.
- Be active, ask questions in the classroom.
- Don’t let the lazier and less responsible students discourage you from all that.

Be responsible, don’t consider less homework load to be a motivation to work less hard throughout the semester. Otherwise you may regret it during your exam period.
Good manners

- **Test question:** Which of the following is acceptable at public?
  - a. yawning without covering your mouth,
  - b. spitting in public,
  - c. littering,
  - d. chewing a gum when talking to another person,
  - e. not offering a seat to an older person or woman on public transit?

Coughing or yawning without covering your mouth, spitting in public, littering, chewing a gum when talking to another person, or not offering a seat to an older person or woman on public transit, etc. are considered impolite if not socially unacceptable. Don’t forget to behave with a special courtesy to women. In general, keep good manners.
If you are in any kind of emergency, it may be wise to call the 112 number, because there is a high chance you reach a person that can help you in English and connect you to someone who can help you deal with your situation.