Indiana and Warsaw Universities Celebrate 25 Years of Partnership

In October 1976, Indiana University undertook a bold initiative to develop an American Studies Center (ASC) at Warsaw University, matched by the creation of a Polish Studies Center (PSC) at IU Bloomington in 1977, now a unit administered by the Office of International Programs. For many years, the annual reciprocal exchanges received major funding from the U.S. Department of State. The terms of the agreement included short-term exchanges of faculty and center administrators who would develop the other center’s academic and cultural programs, library support for the centers, graduate student fellowships, visitors-in-residence programs, and sponsoring conferences. During the cold war years, the ASC was the only place in Poland where uncensored material about the United States was available, and those who directed the center received threats for keeping it open.

In September, Rector Piotr Węglerński of Warsaw University paid a 3-day visit to IU Bloomington to celebrate 25 years of cooperation, goodwill, and scholarly exchange. In addition to visits to the Polish Studies Center, to consult with Director Bill Johnston, he toured a number of science facilities at IUB, including the cyclotron, the School of Informatics, and the physics and biology labs. He met with faculty at each of those facilities to discuss the possibilities of future collaboration at each site. He also was able to meet more faculty members conducting research in Eastern Europe at the fall reception of the Russian and East European Institute.

Several past directors of the Polish Studies Center were able to attend the events, in particular, Mary Ellen Solt, the center’s very first director, who was accompanied by her daughter, Susan Solt. Solt, now professor emerita of comparative literature, was instrumental in helping to establish the ASC at Warsaw University and also served as the first director of IUB’s Polish Studies Center in 1977. In 1980, she was honored for her contributions to Polish-American understanding by being awarded Poland’s Gold Badge of Merit.

IU President Myles Brand hosted a special dinner for Rector Węglerński. At the dinner, the rector presented the Medal of Warsaw University to three recipients: President Brand; Dean for International Programs Patrick O’Meara; and Timothy Wiles, PSC director from 1984 to 1986 and again from 1991 to 1999.

The highlight of the rector’s visit was a concert of Polish music given in his honor and held at the Lilly Library. Performers were IU School of Music soprano Kinga Skrętkowicz-Ferguson, a native of Łódź, who was accompanied by pianist Leopoldo Erice from Spain. From Bloomington, Rector Węglerński traveled to IUPUI where he visited the Center on Philanthropy and the Center for Medical Genomics.

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