

POLISH CHAIR AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN NEW YORK



Why Columbia?

Columbia University is one of world's leading universities. It has a faculty of over 3,000 and awards some 400 to 500 doctorates each year. Dozens of Columbia alumni have won Nobel Prizes. It is also one of the most important academic centres of the US East Coast, with great influence over public opinion in the US – thanks in part to its outstanding Journalism School. Columbia has a long tradition of academic ties to Poland, with academic interest in the culture and history of Central & Eastern Europe stretching back to the end of World War II. Starting in 1948, there was a course at Columbia in Polish history and literature, led by Prof. Manfred Kridl (recommended for the position by Czesław Miłosz). In 1954 the East Central European Center, the first of its kind in the US, was established as part of the Russian Institute (now the Harriman Institute); for geopolitical reasons, Sovietology had always enjoyed a greater amount of interest than other areas of Slavic studies (including Polish studies). Today the Columbia Library has a strong Polish collection, with over 80,000 titles, and courses on Polish-related topics are offered in the Slavic Languages, History, Political Science and International Relations departments. The events of 1989 brought an increased interest in Central & Eastern Europe. Columbia took advantage of this trend to step up fundraising necessary to endow chairs in such areas as Ukrainian, Serbian, Hungarian, Czech and Slovakian studies, and a Romanian language course funded by the Romanian government. But there was still no chair in Polish studies.

Beginnings

Because of budget cuts affecting Slavic studies departments at US universities in the late 1980s, the **Kościuszko Foundation**, one of the most active Polish-American institutions, established a special group of teaching fellowships for lecturers from Poland. However, hopes for increased funding for Polish studies in the following years were not realised. In an attempt to address this problem, the Kościuszko Foundation decided to follow the popular American model for financing various undertakings from private donations, involving creation of an **endowment** to invest on the financial market. The profit



from investments is then used for the selected purpose. It was assumed that funds for financing the endowment would come primarily from Polish-American institutions. However, there was little tradition of private donations for academic purposes in Polish émigré circles. Thus in 2003 the Kościuszko Foundation proposed to the **Foundation for Polish Science** that it could participate in a project to establish a **Polish Chair** at the School of International and Public Affairs (as part of the East Central European Center) at Columbia University in New York. While Polish studies centres do exist at several American universities, they do not offer research degrees, and without the ability to award doctorates it is hardly possible to create a community of scholars and experts in the field of Polish studies. **In 2005 the Foundation for Polish Science decided to become involved in the project of establishing a Polish Chair at Columbia University, and signed an agreement with the university committing to support establishment of the endowment in the amount of USD 250,000.**

Actions

The amount necessary to establish the Polish Chair was a minimum of **USD 3 million** (the total endowment of Columbia University is nearly USD 4 billion). The endowment had to be fully funded by 2010. To this end, the following actions were taken:

The Kościuszko Foundation established the Visiting Professor of Polish Studies programme at Columbia University.

The Kościuszko Foundation committed USD 50,000 for this purpose every year for a period of up to 10 years. The Polish Senate (upon motion of the Minister of Foreign Affairs) approved additional financing for this programme for a period of up to 5 years. The Senate grant is administered by the **Semper Polonia Foundation** in Warsaw. Lectures under the Visiting Professor of Polish Studies programme were devoted to fields such as political science, history, economics, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies (the same fields that will be covered by the future Polish Chair. In addition to lectures, the programme also financed scholarly conferences and discussion sessions for the broader public and the press.

The programme was designed for humanities students, students at the School of International and Public Affairs, and students at the Journalism, Business and Law schools. One of the goals of the programme was to lay the groundwork for creation of the future Chair in Polish Studies.

Fundraising and related activities were conducted to build the endowment for the Polish Chair at Columbia.

When it appeared that collecting USD 3 million among the Polish-American community was moving very slowly and the initiative was not widely known in Poland, it was necessary to step up actions to promote the concept of a Polish Chair at Columbia and to fund the endowment. In the autumn of 2007, the Foundation for Polish Science organised a conference entitled 'Polish Studies Abroad', under the patronage of the Speaker of the Polish Parliament, which stirred interest in creation of the endowment among Polish businesses and media. Soon after that, the **Polish Consulate in New York**, which had supported the project from the outset, became closely involved in promotional activities and took on the role of coordinator for further fundraising. Thanks to the Consulate's coordination of the technical and legal aspects, the fundraising campaign began on a wide scale in Poland. From this stage on, the project was conducted jointly by the Foundation for Polish Science, the Consulate, and Columbia University. Individuals and private companies donated to the campaign. Funds from Polish donors were collected through a special account provided by the **Capital Market Education Foundation** at the **Warsaw Stock Exchange** (except for the **National Depository for Securities**, which made a donation directly to Columbia). The funds raised were then transferred to the university in late March 2009, as a result of which **the endowment fund for the Polish Chair reached the required USD 3 million**, and indeed exceeded this goal.

What next?

How will the ongoing work of the Polish Chair be financed? At Columbia University, all endowment funds are invested jointly, generating an annual return of about 7-8%. Use of the income is governed by a formula designed to stabilise the amounts paid out each year. The university retains a 7% commission to cover administrative costs, resulting in annual support for the Polish Chair from the endowment of about USD 150,000. This regular amount will be the foundation for the activity of the chair. Fundraising for the minimum endowment of the Polish Chair at Columbia concluded in the 1st quarter of 2009, but further contributions may still be made, which will help develop the activity of the chair. The next steps – conducting a competition to select the scholar who will head the Chair in Polish Studies, and formal establishment of the chair – will be handled by Columbia University, and are scheduled for 2009-2010. In subsequent years, the Foundation for Polish Science plans to initiate creation of similar Polish Chair in Germany and the UK.



Involvement by the business community

One might ask, what interest would Polish companies have in sponsoring the endowment of a Polish Chair in the United States? The firms who donated to the endowment were guided not so much by economic calculations as by a deeper understanding of the interests of Poland. 'Economic patriotism', a well-known phenomenon in highly developed countries, also exists in Poland. For a firm to join the list of official sponsors of the Polish Chair at Columbia University has not only a symbolic value in the business world, but tangible value as well in terms of promotion, image, and opportunities to work alongside a prestigious university.

Donors to the Polish Chair at Columbia University:

Warsaw Stock Exchange
National Depository for Securities (KDPW S.A.)
ENEA S.A.
Polish Energy Group (PGE S.A.)
Bogdan Fiszer Silesia Capital Fund
Katowice Special Economic Zone
Warmia-Mazury Special Economic Zone
Pomerania Special Economic Zone
Kostrzyn-Słubice Special Economic Zone
Małopolska Agency for Regional Development
Capital Market Education Foundation
Polish & Slavic Federal Credit Union, New York
Polish Army Veterans Association of America
Foundation for Polish Science
Individual donors
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Photos of Columbia University courtesy of the
East Central European Center at Columbia.