



A scholarship - pride or shame?

I have never expected that receiving a scholarship can become a source of shame, or at least a thing you would prefer nobody to know about. Unfortunately, that is how it is for me. Being a foreign student on a government scholarship in the Czech Republic is not the thing you want your Czech classmates to find out. Their reaction may not be what you expect.

One of the happiest days in my life was the day I got a scholarship to study in the Czech Republic. I knew it wouldn't be easy for me as an immigrant to study alongside Czech students, however I was really honored to be given this opportunity.

The Czech government annually offers a number of scholarships to students from developing countries. My country is one of them and I came here to do my Bachelor's degree. In my situation, you have to first study the language, which I did during a one-year preparatory course. Then, it is up to you to pass the entrance exams at the university where you would like to study. If you want to study for free and to get monthly financial aid, you have to enter a public Czech university and study in Czech.

When I first met other foreigner scholarship holders who were older than me, I was given valuable advice: "Don't tell anyone you are on a scholarship!" According to most of them, Czech people instantly change their attitude when they find out that a foreigner is on a scholarship in their country. Since their reaction is usually negative, I was strongly recommended not to say a word about this. So, one of the things I am most proud of should be kept secret?

I remember when a friend of mine told a classmate she was on a scholarship. Even though he conceded that she must be pretty smart to be able to study here, he told her angrily that his parents are paying taxes so that people like her can get scholarships.

Sometimes Czechs don't think about the fact that they are getting their education for free, and that it isn't like that everywhere. Unfortunately, my government cannot pay for my education due to its financial situation. That is why I am that much more grateful to the Czech Government for helping me get a good European education.

I cannot say that absolutely all Czech people have the same attitude towards governmental scholarship holders. I met Czechs that, on the contrary, supported me and said: "You must be a good student if you got this scholarship!" I think it also depends on the region. Prague is very popular among international students, so people may have more drastic reactions to them than, for example, in Moravia.

Many Czechs also do not realize that as scholarship holders, we also have to abide by much stricter rules than other students. We are given the scholarship only for a certain number of years, so we do not have the possibility of repeating a semester, or failing exams or even getting less than the necessary number of credits per semester. We can easily lose the scholarship unless we don't fulfill certain academic conditions. From this perspective, it seems to me that Czech students have an easier time with their studies. Scholarship holders are much more stressed about their academic results.

I can count on my fingers how many Czechs know that I am on a scholarship. In the city I live there is only one employee from the university and one friend of mine that know about it. There were so many cases when people asked me how I am studying in this country and, unfortunately, I couldn't tell them the whole truth.

I don't think I would be able to study abroad without a scholarship and I am very grateful for this chance. This financial aid is my main source of survival here and it is one of the reasons I chose to study in the Czech Republic. Even though I am so happy and proud of it, I have to keep it to myself, in order to maintain good relationships with my Czech classmate. I know that it is not fair not to tell my Czech friends about it, but I strongly doubt that they would have the same attitude towards me if they knew.