

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
Scan|Design Fellowship Program

Appendix # 8
Danish Student
Evaluation
2008-2009

EXCHANGE EVALUATION REPORT
for Danish Exchange Students

Ras Tin Nielsen, Graduate Student, Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen. Participating in the exchange from Autumn Quarter 2008 – Spring Quarter 2009.

I decided to apply for an exchange program in the US since I expected it to provide me an excellent opportunity to experience the high quality teachings of a major American university. At the Department of Political Science in Copenhagen I had for a long time been a student of international relations and more specifically East Asia relations. Starting my second year of graduate school I needed new academic challenges and looked towards the US for these. After looking into what universities in the US could accommodate my academic interests I decided that the University of Washington would be the best place for me. Not only did the UW Department of Political Science have skilled professors working on Asia, the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies also had many specialists in this field. This meant that the supply of courses at the UW was more than sufficient for me to be challenged in any regard. This also meant that I had very high expectations arriving in Seattle – most of them were academic, however I was also looking forward to a great time living in Seattle and experiencing the American way of life.

Arrival/On-site Orientation:

To begin with I had made reservations at a hostel in the northeastern part of Seattle. I had made reservations for about two weeks to allow me the necessary time to find a permanent place to stay. However it quickly showed that two weeks are not enough – or maybe I was not persistent enough. In any case I would recommend for future students that they take the time to find housing: It is very important to have a nice place to stay. On the other hand they should not worry too much – both FIUTS and especially Anni Fuller are very helpful in this regard. FIUTS held some orientations about housing and it was also possible to go and ask them for advice. Secondly Anni Fuller was very helpful (no matter the issue) and had good advice in regard to housing, banking services, and other practical stuff. I would add that the online portal www.craigslist.org is a very helpful tool for finding housing.

Academics:

The instruction I received at the UW was generally great. There was a high level of expertise among the professors. Also to my experience student-teacher relations were well-developed compared to the University of Copenhagen. The professors usually had the time to talk to you about both personal and academic matters.

The “myuw”-system also worked fine for me as soon as I learned how to make full use of it. It was a very useful tool to register for classes, check the schedule, access grades, etc. I would recommend any new student to get acquainted with this system as soon as possible. I had a good communication with the UW administration and the one time I needed help with some registration problems Ms. Tina Wong was most helpful and the matter was solved immediately.

Besides this the UW has excellent library and computer facilities. This has helped me in the preparation of both research papers and exams.

As a recommendation to future graduate students I will emphasize that there is a big difference between undergraduate and graduate courses at the UW. This is not something we are used to in Denmark and therefore it surprised me a lot. However I would suggest graduate students that they register for graduate courses since these are by definition much more challenging than undergraduate courses. If any future students have an interest in political science and East Asia choose courses with the following instructors:

David Bachman, Donald Hellman, Susan Whiting or Saadia Pekkanen. They are all highly skilled professors in their respective fields.

Housing:

I have already written a little about this, but I will try to elaborate on it some more. The most obvious option is to try and find housing on-campus. However to my experience this is often more expensive and you often have to share the same room with others. I would always recommend www.craigslist.org to try and find housing. I organized a house-search with 4 others and we soon found a place where we could all stay. We ended up living in the lower part a big house with plenty of room for all of us. Also I would suggest living off-campus since this is a better way to experience the city of Seattle.

Campus:

The UW campus is fantastic! It is very beautiful and there is a lot of stuff happening. It really gave me a feeling of being at an American campus for real. Also it is located close to shopping and grocery stores.

Cultural Aspects:

In my opinion Seattle is a very easy city to live in. People are generally friendly and welcoming, and most of them very helpful. Also American culture (at least northwest American culture) is easy to access. Besides having friends on campus I started playing soccer in a local soccer club in the very beginning of my stay in Seattle. This provided me with access to people from outside the UW and I try to stay in touch with these friends. I also made some other friends from outside the UW going to concerts.

Financial:

I am very grateful that the ScanDesign Foundation made it possible for me to come to the UW to study.

I set up a bank account at the Bank of America and asked them right away how to transfer money electronically. I received detailed instructions and after this I made wrote my Danish bank and asked them to follow these instructions. The transfer was completed with no difficulties. However it is important to notice that there is a fee for doing this – so make sure that you transfer only larger amounts so you don't have to do it too often.

Budget:

It is not cheap to live in the states. So think carefully about what you spend your money on. I paid about 700 dollars a month for the rent. On top of this I spent around 400 dollars a month on groceries, probably more than that. If you add the cost of transportation, books, shopping, mobile phone, going out, weekend excursions, etc. you will easily reach 2000 dollars a month. So depending on your budget be careful what you spend your money on. Try to make priorities for some fun trips out of town once in a while – it is a really good way to meet your fellow students.

Be VERY careful about choosing to set up an account for your mobile phone – It is extremely expensive! First of all in the US there are an infinite amount of extra charges and fees for mobile usage – and the funny thing about it is that nobody can explain to you what exactly you are charged for! If I could have done otherwise I would have chosen “pay-as-you-go” instead of having an account. This was definitely an unexpected expense.

Exchange/Scan Design Fellowship Administration:

I was not informed properly about the role of ScanDesign Foundation by my home institution. However Anni Fuller did a great job of informing me. As the ScanDesign Fellowship coordinator she did an excellent job and I think I speak on behalf of all the Danish students when I say that we could not have hoped for a better coordinator. Anni has been extremely helpful both with academic, practical, and personal questions. I have a hard time suggesting what could be done better.

I also find that the UW administrative offices have been most helpful and welcoming in their approach to me as an exchange student. My advisor George Moore was very helpful.

Program/Student Type – Overall Experience:

First of all it is difficult to suggest what kind of student for whom this exchange is best suited. However I think that any student going on such an exchange will be transformed and challenged in the process. And in my own experience I have benefited enormously from the process both personally and academically.

To any future student I would say that you have to be ready to take on a lot of responsibility – for yourself and for others. It is not necessarily easy to go away for an entire year – far away from everyone you know. But don't worry – if you take responsibility for yourself you will soon make new friends and have the time of you life at the UW.

The UW is a great place to study and Seattle is a great city to live in. I am definitely going back there someday. In my opinion my expectations were fulfilled, but it is also important to note that I was given a lot more than I had ever expected. And I would recommend everyone to go abroad for work or study. You learn a lot about yourself by doing so.

Again I would like to thank the ScanDesign Foundation and Anni Fuller for all your help.
It is widely appreciated.

Best regards

Ras Tin Nielsen