

## Exchange evaluation

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I applied for the UW with the aim to get an understanding of a different context than the Danish and European regarding environmental issues and discussions with special focus on the energy system. I am especially interested in the public policy aspect of these types of issues and discussions, and hence I applied to the Master of Public Administration (Evans School of Public Affairs) at UW, where I focused on taking the relevant environmental courses that they could offer. Furthermore I also wanted to study in the US to get a better understanding of the culture of the US, which I only had from second hand, e.g. friends and television. And since English is not my main language it can still improve, and I expected that a semester in the US could further improve my English.

I mainly choose to study at UW since it seemed to have a lot of relevant environmental courses for me. The existence of the exchange program between my department at AAU and UW was also an important factor, since it would ease the burden it otherwise would have been.

I expected my semester at UW could give me a better understanding of public policy issues and discussions regarding the environmental issues for the energy system in the US, which I expected to have similarities but also differences from the Danish and European discussions. This should give me a more global understanding of the issues and discussions, which could improve my ability to participate in these types of discussions and to come up with better solutions to the issues I will meet in my future career.

At my arrival to Seattle I already knew a student at the UW, which I had studied with at AAU as an exchange student. So until I found a place to rent I stayed at his place. I had tried to get a room online from Denmark, but that only gave me a few leads. I found it better and easier to just wander around the U-district to find a place, since there was a lot of housing possibilities in that area. However it can sometimes be a good idea to wait a bit with getting a room or apartment, since one in the beginning often meets other international students or Americans with a room for rent. Also a thanks to Anni Fuller for finding the time to pick me up at the airport, and giving me some hints for getting around Seattle and where to look for a place to live, when I arrived.

After finding a place to live, the FIUTS introduction activities started. I found these fairly interesting, but what they mostly helped me with was to connect to other international students and thereby getting a network of friends and acquaintances within a week's time, which were people I spend a lot of time with the rest of the quarter. Also some of these international students one meet through FIUTS have been in Seattle for a longer period, and have a lot of useful knowledge about the city and the US in general.

While finding a place to live and participating in different activities, I was trying to find courses that would be relevant for me to take at the UW. Unfortunately two of the most relevant courses I had found online from Denmark turned out to be cancelled that specific quarter. This made the course selection a bit tricky,

especially since some of the other relevant courses overlapped timewise. With the help of graduate advisor Tikvah R. Weiner and some direct contacts to several professors, I managed to get a schedule with only two courses overlapping each other with 20 minutes. I found that one of the best methods was to visit the teachers at their office, so that they could explain in person what their course's goal was.

The structure of the UW was, as I expected before arriving, somewhat different than what I was used to at the AAU. Where AAU is based around self-chosen semester long group projects, where the courses mainly are used to improve on the project and only fill up about 1/4 of the semester, the UW was more what I was used to before starting at the university in Denmark, where the courses had a more "strict" learning goal. Even though I knew beforehand that this would mean a big difference in my way of studying, I was after some weeks starting to find it an unappealing way of learning for me. Not that I did not understand the subjects nor disliked my teachers, nor that I did not learn anything from the courses, but the system of learning did get more and more tedious for me, which meant that it became more of an annoying chore to prepare for the courses than it had been at AAU. I did pass all my courses at UW, and I did learn a lot of useful and relevant tools and issues from the courses I had, and it did meet the goals for what I wanted to learn during my exchange, and it clearly gave me some relevant and interesting perspectives, that my studies at AAU did not cover. Furthermore I did get a better understanding of what my background gives me of advantages and disadvantages compared to students that come from a different background. So I do feel that I had a good quarter at UW, but I am not sure an extra quarter would have been just as good. However other students from other Danish universities that came with a somewhat similar study background as the one I have from AAU did find it a nice change to have a more "strict guidance" than they were used to.

I mostly meet Americans through my schools student organizations, which often held some social arrangements for all students. This was a good way of meeting and getting to know some Americans. Culturally Americans are a lot more direct the first time one meets them, than Danes. This was a bit of a surprise to me in the beginning, especially the first time a cashier asked me "How are you doing?". However after a few weeks one becomes used to hearing and using "How are you doing?" as a form of greeting to more or less everyone. But in general there are more similarities than differences between Danes (Europeans) and Americans (maybe especially except political and religious norms), so integrating into American society is not that difficult, at least not for the amount of time I was at UW.

Economically the US in general are cheaper than Denmark. However I found that bread and some types of meat cost more or less the same, or sometimes even more, when comparing price and quality, than in Denmark. Compared to Aalborg the housing costs were in general approximately the same. The utilities however were cheaper in Seattle, but often the rent was higher than in Aalborg. The ScanDesign scholarship from Denmark however did help me pay of some of the extra costs I encountered for going to the US and moving into a new place. I found the best way to get money to the US from Denmark was to start a free bank account in the US and transfer large amounts from Denmark when needed. Some banks seem to have a lower transfer fee than others, so it can be a good idea to check several banks before deciding.

Overall the quarter at UW was a great experience, where I did learn a lot, but also found time to enjoy my time there, and got to experience a lot of the US and its culture. The experience will without a doubt benefit me through my future work, and follow me through the rest of my life as a good experience.