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EVALUATION

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EXCHANGE AT UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

My name is Anne Bjerre and I am a student at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. I did an exchange in the academic year of 2010-2011 from September to June following 3 quarters at the Department of Architecture, College of Built environments, University of Washington in Seattle, USA.

Seattle is a beautiful city sorrounded by mountains, lakes, woods and beaches. In the area arround the city you can be lucky and get to see bears, whales, eagles etc, og you're always close to an amazing experience with nature.
The inhabitants of the city are some of the most democratic, well educated and tolerant people in the US, and the difference from Scandinavia isn't so great, except for the fact that the people in Seattle probably are a little nicer and more welcoming. So many of our prejudices are proven wrong, and for example, public transportation works pretty well in Seattle, and you can easily get by without a car.

When I arrived in the US, I instantly felt welcome and there was a good introduction for the new grad students at the architecture department. I was enrolled i grad school, since I had just graduated the bachelors programme in Copenhagen. I got to pick which studio I wanted to be a part of, and I got to pick classes from the entire College of Built Environment.
The school has amazing facilities, including lasercutters, cnc routers, very nice wood shop, a darkroom and a big 'digital commons'. At UW there are also great sportsfacilities at the IMA, with fitness, tennis courts, a pool etc.

I took a lot of interesting classes at the Architecture Department, and I can recommend John Stamets' "architecture photography", if you're interested in learning how to document architecture to the HABS/HAER standards, and have some experience developing film in a darkroom.
Steve Badanes' "design build" studio was a great experience as well. It's a spring studio, where a group of students design a smaller charity project for a Seattle community in need of a helping hand. After designing it, the students build the project, and therefor gain great hands-on experience, and get to stay outside and do hard physical labor all spring.

Generally it's just as stressful being a student at the UW, as it is studying at the Royal Academy. The difference is that at the UW you have multiple classes on top of your studio projekt, and all your teachers demand very much focus, time and effort from you. It can be very stressful, because usually you just want to focus on your studio project.
I also think tho focus of the assignments, critisism and guidance is very practically funded, so you really have to try your best to stick to your creative, aestethic and conceptual focus. But it is also a great opportunity to shift focus and dig into more practic details.

I don't think the american students are as strong as students from the academy regarding concepts, diagrams etc, and I don't think their general creativity is as strong ads we're used to.
But there are loads of teachers with each their academic expertise, and you can gain so much knowledge through the classes you take, and by taking advantage of each teachers field of knowledge.

Through 3 quarters, I have gained a big academic profit and I think that has to do with me setting very clear goals regarding what output I wanted from my exchange. There are great opportunities to expand your knowledge, and to focus on certain areas of architecture.

My exchange in the US has been an amazing experience both academically and on a personal level, and I would definetely recommend going to the UW, if you're prepared to work hard and make school a big priority.
The city and it's amazing sorroundings also makes for fantastic opportunities and experiences when you're out of school, which makes for a perfect combination. And by the way - great coffee everywhere!

So, thanks a bunch to the ScanDesign Foundation for making this happen for me!

Best Regards,
Anne Bjerre.