

**IP&E PROGRAM EVALUATION**

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**1. Arrival Overseas/On-site Orientation**

**Accommodations:** the university will make an offer to you, which you can accept or decline. If you decline their offer, then you must find your own accommodations. You can make a request regarding accommodations, but there are absolutely no guarantees (if you are a non-smoker, this is an important thing to note on the request form somewhere – there is no box to check regarding smoking, so you just have to remember to write that you are a non-smoker and would prefer a non-smoking place). The accommodations vary widely – from your own “mother-in-law” apartment, to sharing a room in a student apartment. Dormitories are nearly non-existent, though there is one near the school called Tietgen. They only allow a small number of foreign students here, though. If you do research, you’ll find that they have student “communal” apartment complexes, but most of these have a 6 month to 2 year waiting period. Sometimes you can sublet from someone living there, though. If you want to find a place on your own before you leave the U.S., you could try [www.boligmax.dk](http://www.boligmax.dk), or [www.boligfinder.dk](http://www.boligfinder.dk) if you speak a little Danish. You have to pay to join, but they send you a lot of announcements about available apartments, sublets, etc.

On-site Orientation seemed to focus more on the city than the university. There were bus tours and they made sure we knew where the local pub for students was. They also told us the history of the university and explained that the buildings of the university were spread out around the city, not gathered together into a “campus” as with the American modal. At one session they handed out a small, green piece of paper with the address of the Folkeregister on it. (They didn’t talk a lot about it, but that was a vital bit of information. You have to go there in person after you have found a place to live. Bring your passport, your admission letter to the university, and – most importantly – a contract of some kind proving that you live at a certain address. Then they will issue you a CPR number, which you cannot survive without). They also organized a very nice tour of the Royal Library, and a trip to the National Theater.

**2. Academics**

**Classroom Structure:** Very similar to our small classrooms. Usually lecture-style. Students are generally welcome to ask questions or make comments in class, though the students in the classes I took seemed a little less likely to do so than in my American classes.

**Instruction:** Lecture-style. Language classes incorporate a “language lab” component where students listen to a cassette of Danish sounds, words or sentences, and repeat what they hear into a microphone. The teacher can listen in and give individual feedback.

**Teacher/student relations:** all my teachers were kind, but the language teachers were the most approachable. Teachers hold office hours, as they do in America.

**Grading/Exams:** in Denmark students do not register for classes, but they DO register for exams, and it is VERY serious business. You must also choose what type of exam

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you will take (there is a confusing list of about 10 different kinds, and you can not take the same kind of test in two different classes). I advise asking a school counselor to assist you, rather than attempting to do so yourself. Especially as it causes a lot of trouble and ill-will if you do not do it correctly. (I thought I had done it correctly, and found out I hadn't a month after the deadline for registration had ended. I had to apologize a lot, and it was unpleasant. Best to avoid it. Have a counselor help you register for exams). The exam registration period is open for 1-2 weeks in March. Exams take place between mid-May and the end of June. No one knows the day or time of the exam until 1-3 weeks beforehand.

**Library Facilities:** there are many libraries – Germanic, Nordic, Linguistic, History, etc. at KUÅ. The library hours are very short compared to what UW students are used to. They usually close between 4 and 6pm and none of them are open on the weekends. Some libraries do not allow their books to be taken out even if you are a student, so this can be frustrating at times. The math, science libraries are somewhere else in the city. There are also many community libraries, and there's a great Main (city) Library ("Hovedbibliotek") off of Fiolstræde where you can get Danish and English books, videos, DVD's and the like. Your yellow "cpr card" is your insurance card, but it is also your library card, and you can check books out as long as you have your cpr card with you. The Black Diamond is the most beautiful library I've ever seen. You can take books out of there if you sign up online using your university card.

**Computer Center:** found in one of the "New KUÅ" buildings – the one between the "Old KUÅ" (reddish) buildings and the building where the Cafeteria ("Kantine") is. To use the printer you pay a minimum of 20 kroner to the attendant outside the computer room and it is put on your account. When you log on with your university i.d. and password, there is a small icon of coins you can click on that will tell you how much money you have left in your account. If you need to make copies of the document, it is easiest to just print multiple copies, as there is no copy machine available in the building. To make copies you either must go to "old KUÅ" or to the other "new KUÅ" buildings (though you will still need to buy a copy card over in the "old KUÅ" and the copy machines in the "new KUÅ" are very often broken).

**Classroom Facilities:** are great. They have a very cool blackboard system, where the boards slide up and down as needed. Lectures are given using overheads and/or blackboards.

The courses I took at KUÅ were meant to increase my understanding of Danish and Danish literature. As I am not a native speaker of Danish, my time in Denmark was invaluable to learning more of the language. The course I took in Danish short stories required a great deal of reading, so I felt that my reading comprehension increased especially during this time.

### 3. HOUSING

I opted to sublet an apartment. I found a place on Amager about 15 minutes from the university by bike through [www.boligtinder.dk](http://www.boligtinder.dk). I chose this option because I am older than most graduate students (40) and I did not want to live in a dormitory-type of situation. It was just a personal choice. I know others lived with roommates and had a wonderful time (also a few of them had the benefit of Danish roommates who spoke Danish with them at home).

#### 4. COPENHAGEN

This is a very manageable city for someone who is not comfortable in huge cities like New York or Chicago. You can bike or walk to many places, there are wonderful parks and lakes dotting the area, fabulous narrow cobblestone streets in some places, and a wonderful wonderful public transit system which is expanding and improving by the month these days. It is a terrific place to have a bike because everything is generally flat and there are super bike lanes where two bike riders can comfortably ride side by side. If you plan to commute by bike during peak traffic hours, though, you should be careful. It can be a little overwhelming if you aren't ready for it – sometimes groups of 30+ bikes travel at a clip very close together. Most importantly, if you are a pedestrian never never never stand in a bike lane – you can be very seriously hurt by fast bike riders, and it will be your own fault.

#### 5. HEALTH AND SAFETY

If you know how to be safe in Seattle, you'll be fine in Copenhagen, which is generally quite safe. After 6 weeks you are eligible to receive free health care in Denmark. When you get your cpr card you will also be asked to choose a doctor from a list they give you (of doctors near where you live). Your cpr card serves as your insurance card. It covers medical expenses in general, but it does not cover drug prescriptions.

#### 6. CULTURAL ASPECTS

It is difficult to meet students at school, though there is a student-run little pub in the “new KUA” building near the cafeteria. You can usually meet people in the cafeteria itself, too. Danish students tend to seem more aloof than international students, so it's easier to meet the international students – you usually share a class, or at the very least you are sharing the experience of being a foreigner, which also gives you something to talk about immediately – where are you from? why are you here? The “Studenthus” in town is also a place to meet foreign students, but they play such loud music it is difficult to hear people talk. One place I met some Danes was at “Literatur Haus” where “literature people” came to hear poetry readings or lectures and the like. There is no gym facility associated with the university, but there are a few gyms around town. Some of them only allow teams to join (i.e. you have to be on the volleyball or basketball or fencing team to come lift weights here) but not all are like that. There are also some nice pool facilities around town. These are places you can sometimes meet people. I met a few families at the swimming pool because I played with a child and then got to know the mother. However you meet people, you will very probably have to be the one to initiate. Once you do, Danes are friendly and happy to talk to you. They just don't like to start the conversation. Caveat: it is considered a little odd to start chatting with someone you don't know on a bus or the metro, and such overtures may be met with caution. The stereotype of an American is that he is loud and boisterous, sometimes rude, but at the same time strangely prudish (e.g. saying “bathroom” or “restroom” instead of “toilet”). In Copenhagen they do not like our country's politics, and they have much to say about that, but they usually do not blame individual American exchange students for the decisions made by their government.

## 7. FINANCIAL

### Assessing/Transferring money

Option one: Use your American visa or debit card to withdraw cash from ATM's in Denmark. Pro – it is simple to do (just note that your debit card MUST have a four-digit PIN number, or it won't work). Con – you will be assessed a rather hefty fee from your American bank and probably another fee from the Danish bank whose ATM you are using each time to withdraw money.

Option Two: open a Danish bank account. Pro – you will avoid all fees associated with withdrawing cash from ATM's. Con – you will not be able to use anything but cash for your transactions. In Denmark you can open an account, but they will not give you a credit card OR a debit card. Only people who live in Denmark and make regular deposits from a direct-deposit salary are allowed to have a "Dankort" which is nearly the only type of credit/debit card accepted in Denmark (though there are places where American Visa or MasterCard are accepted – Tivoli, some restaurants, some museums, places where tourists go) Grocery stores and malls only accept cash or Dankort. With my account I was given a card that would ONLY allow me to retrieve cash from an ATM (belonging to my bank). So that is what I did – I withdrew cash from my account and used that for all my expenses. The only exception was when I paid my rent. Then I got the bank account number of the landlord, filled out a form online, and the money was directly deposited from my account to my landlord's account (for a small fee). In this particular case, this was my only option, as my landlady did not want to deal at all with cash. Danes seem to use only 3 methods for paying for things: cash, Dankort, or account-to-account transfers. Checks do not exist.

I had hoped to open and keep an account in Denmark because I wanted to be able to buy Danish books online using my Danish bank account after I'd returned home (thus avoiding fees related to exchanging dollars for kroner), but this is not possible. Because the bank will not issue me a Dankort, merchants will not accept payment from me unless I use an American credit card (and pay the accompanying fee).

If you decide to open an account in Denmark, you must transfer money from your account in the U.S. to your account there (unless you are being funded in kroner from a Danish source). You can not do this by yourself. The transfer MUST be initiated from the U.S., but they must have the Danish account number you are transferring the money into. This you can not get until you open an account in Denmark, and you MUST be in Denmark to open the account! I got around this by going to my U.S. bank and getting my parents put on my account. Then I went to Denmark, opened the account and gave the number to them. They then filled out the form requesting the transfer and the transfer was made. It is a good idea, if you do this, to take a copy of the form with you to Denmark, just in case you need to use it to clarify what you want to do when you are sitting in the bank in Denmark.

**Budgeting:** Plan on around \$1800 a month including airfare and rent, food, books (very expensive), metro pass, some concerts or events, a couple of tours to places outside of Copenhagen, clothes, laundry expenses, buying or renting a second-hand bike, coffee, and an occasional lunch or dinner at a restaurant. Plan on cooking a lot of meals at home; it's much cheaper than eating out.

## 8. PROGRAM/EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATION

In Denmark the international office was staffed by very kind people, but they lost our university identity cards the first 2.5 weeks we were there, which prevented us from using the school's computers and printers to complete assignments, and hindered us in other ways – whenever we had to prove that we were university students. It was irritating, but the most frustrating thing was that they did not tell us that they had lost the cards. Instead they kept saying the cards had not come in yet and that we should call back in 2 days. We called back every other day and got the same story each time. It was only when they found the box of cards that one of the office workers told me they had been looking for them the entire 2.5 weeks. I did not appreciate that. I would have preferred them to be truthful about the situation from the beginning.

The on-site mentor assigned to us, Mariamne Stølen, was outstanding in her enthusiasm and kindness. She organized several trips for us (including one to Norway) and was always cheerful and organized.

The mid-March visit from Mariamne Stecher-Hansen and also from Anni Fuller were very welcome, useful, and much appreciated. I never felt that we had been forgotten, and when we voiced questions or concerns via email, their responses were always swift and helpful.

## 9. PROGRAM/STUDENT TYPE

I think an independent upperclassman or graduate student would be best suited to this experience. It is particularly helpful, of course, if the student wants to improve his Danish language skills, but this is not an absolute necessity. Students of architecture and design, urban planning, eco-issues, history, cinema, and Nordic studies (among others) would also benefit from the program. Students who require frequent classroom meetings, and a detailed syllabus with requirements and frequent deadlines, would not do well at KUA, where independent study is highly encouraged. I do not know about non-KUA parts of the university.

## 10. OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Overall, an excellent experience, and very enjoyable. The academic disappointments I experienced could not have been avoided as they stem from a fundamental difference between the American and Danish university systems. In particular, I would have liked to have known by January (when I left for Copenhagen) what classes were being offered at KUA and how they would relate to my academic program at UW. Since the university does not publish their list of classes until the second or third week of January, this was not possible. I would have liked to have known by November, when I bought my plane tickets, when my final exams would be. They could only tell me that they would be sometime between mid-May and late June, which is just how it works there. I would have liked to have known what grades I would receive at UW for my work in Denmark by September this year, but my Danish grades were not sent to me until August and they were not sent to UW for conversion to the UW 4.0 system until early December. These things can not be changed, but it might help new students to know about them beforehand, just so they know what to expect.