

Rebecca Holland Clark

University of Copenhagen, Denmark
guest student, fall semester 2008
exchange student, spring semester 2009

e-mail: clark.rebecca.h@gmail.com
phone: +1 208.938.9940

ARRIVAL OVERSEAS/ ON-SITE ORIENTATION:

Accommodations in Copenhagen can be relatively difficult to find so it is good to start early and find as many options as possible. Some specific programs offer housing in dormitories (primarily near the KUA campus) but all exchange students have the option to apply for housing through KU's International Office upon applying to the university. However, these accommodations will not necessarily be ideal (distance from classes/ city may be very far, students may be placed in cramped living quarters, etc.) so if housing is not provided directly through the program, I would suggest that before departing for Denmark, students should apply to several kollegier (dormitories) and find other options on the internet as a fall back. It may be best to arrive a week or two early to set up appointments and view the rooms/ apartments found online if a room in a kollegium has not been guaranteed.

The international office at the University of Copenhagen offers two orientation meetings at the start of the semester; one for students that arrive early to take a preliminary Danish language course and another during the first week of classes for students that arrive later. The orientation involves meeting at one of the main buildings in the city to outline helpful information such as computer access, library locations and hours, and also general information for incoming students. The meeting adjourns with a guided canal tour that allows students to mingle with other incoming international students.

The international office also offers group activities periodically throughout the semester that students are notified of via e-mail. These activities include soccer games, day trips outside of the city, and guided tours of museums and theaters in Copenhagen. Most programs at the university offer each international student the option of having a

mentor which I would highly recommend as it opens doors for more activities and contact with other Danish students.

ACADEMICS

Classrooms at University of Copenhagen can be very similar or very different to those at University of Washington. Depending on your faculty, lectures might be held in a campus-like setting with modern facilities like power point screens, white boards, etc. On the other hand, lectures can also be held in very old buildings scattered throughout the city where the classroom has pew like seats, limited writing space, and black boards.

Like UW, most courses consist of lectures given by professors and classes held by graduate students. The lectures cover the general material of the course whereas the classes function as a forum to practice acquired skills and ask questions about the lecture material. Depending on the size of the lecture, there is generally little interaction between students and professors although it is encouraged to ask questions directly to the professor during the intervals (lectures usually last 2-3 hours and therefore have 15 minute breaks on the hour). Professors do not usually designate office hours but you can usually set up an appointment via e-mail. Questions regarding course material should be directed to the teaching assistants for reason of expediency.

The examination process and grading scale at the University of Copenhagen are very different from that of UW. There is generally one final exam and no other opportunities to contribute to your final grade. Midterms, homework, participation, etc. may be voluntary or compulsory but in either case, they do not directly influence the final grade a student receives. Therefore, the final exam is comprehensive, usually 3-4 hours in length, and may be written or oral (although oral exams generally last a much shorter 30 minutes). The grading scale is a 12 point scale (ranging from 12, 10, 7, 4, 02, 00, -3 which roughly correspond to the UW scale A, B, C, D, F, and the remaining two are non passing grades). That being said, there is typically no grading curve and very few students receive the highest marks (in fact, it is typical that the majority of the class will fall between 00 and 4). Reexaminations are offered a month or so after the initial examination period has ended but re-exams may only be taken if a student receives a 00 or below (i.e. fails) the first exam.

Most departments are associated with a specific library but there is no general, central library for the campus located in the city center (although the campus in Armagar has a large, general library for students from various faculties). Library hours on campus are limited but there are many alternative public libraries throughout the city (e.g. the Black Diamond) where if you create an account, you can print and have access to all available books/ periodicals/ internet resources. Most libraries are equipped with computers for student use and may have extended hours to students that are able to activate and use their KU student ID card.

HOUSING

As an exchange student¹, one is able to request housing upon applying for admission. The International Office then offers you an accommodation (in a dormitory, house, shared apartment, or spare room) but the quality and location of the housing offer are not guaranteed.

My first living arrangement was in a shared apartment with a Danish student that I found through Danish exchange students that I met while in Seattle. My second accommodation was a shared apartment with another international student. We were able to find the apartment on the internet (boligportal.dk) and arrange a short-term lease with the landlord that enabled us to stay there longer than a typical one year contract period. This worked out quite well, was a relatively easy process, but some knowledge of the Danish language is necessary to navigate the majority of housing websites.

I would recommend, as a first attempt, seeking a kollegium independently. Kollegier are the equivalent of dormitories in the US but are usually large single rooms with a shared kitchen and/or bathroom. These are often ideally located, relatively inexpensive, and serve as a good way to meet other international and Danish students. Then, if the offer the international office makes is less than desirable, searching for a room or an apartment becomes the next best option and is less daunting than most people make it out to be. Check internet sites, University of Copenhagen's newspaper, and facebook forums for international students to snag a room for a short to medium duration

¹ Note that as a guest student, the International Office is not obligated to offer you accommodation and must therefore be sought through a specific department or other resources (internet, word of mouth, etc.)

of time.

PROGRAM/EXCHANGE SITE

During my studies of economics, my classes were primarily held in historic buildings belonging to the University of Copenhagen's city center² "campus". This part of the University is not a campus in the American conception of the word but is instead clusters of buildings and halls scattered throughout the city center. However, the classes offered by most departments are relatively close to one another so commuting between classes is usually not an issue.

The Life Science Faculty is located in Frederiksberg and its setup possess a more campus like quality to it while the Armager campus of University of Copenhagen, has a true campus set up but is some distance outside of the city center.

Copenhagen may be thought of as a decent sized city consisting of several smaller neighborhoods and the one in which one chooses to live may be determined by location, price, or personal preferences.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Danish government provides healthcare (excluding dental) to all residents thus the cost is minimal or often nonexistent. In order to take advantage of Denmark's socialized health care, students must register for a CPR card (which serves many additional purposes). Based on location of residency, each student is assigned a specific physician as listed on their CPR card whom they should call for general health questions and concerns.

As far as crime is concerned, Copenhagen is a relatively safe city and unlike many other highly populated and touristy European cities, petty theft is relatively uncommon. The most common form of theft is bike theft so it is always smart to lock your bike regardless of where you go and bike insurance is a common thing to have on more expensive bicycles.

Although there are very few areas of Copenhagen that are somewhat risky with respect to crime activity, the one neighborhood that has been subjected to several violent

² The Economic Department moves to CSS in 2009.

events throughout the last couple of years is Nørrebro, most of which has been a product of gang and immigrant related violence. There is no reason to steer completely clear of these areas as generally, they are safe, but a reasonable level of common sense and caution is encouraged when frequenting these areas, especially at night or alone (a combination of the both is highly inadvisable).

CULTURAL ASPECTS

Although Danes can come across as somewhat standoffish, there are several social settings in which both Danes and foreigners can participate and easily overcome whatever barriers may seem to exist. Some of these events are sponsored by various departments at University of Copenhagen (e.g. Friday bars). There are also many events that cater to international students specifically such as Wednesday nights at Studenterhuset, frequented by many Danish students as well. There are also plenty of opportunities for those that enjoy sports (especially soccer) to join a casual or more permanent league.

As noted above, the biggest cultural challenge is finding a way to develop a network of Danish contacts. This is most easily done just by putting yourself out there and keeping a positive attitude as knowing just one Dane is all it takes to open the doors to meeting many others. Danish culture is relatively similar to American culture but you'll always encounter little quirks throughout daily life.

FINANCIAL

Depending on your banking institution in the US, you shouldn't have any problem using a debit card to withdraw money from ATMs throughout Denmark (and Europe for that matter). The transaction fee for most banks is around \$2, the same charge to use an ATM outside of your bank's own in the US. It's a good idea to check with your bank before departing as transaction charges can be relatively high.

The other option is to open a Danish bank account somewhere like Nordea or Danske Bank so that money can be transferred from your US bank account to an easily accessible Danish account. The convenience of online banking also comes in handy when paying bills and fees in Denmark.

It's important to note that most places outside of major clothing shops do not accept credit or debit cards unless they have a chip. Therefore, one must either open an account with a Danish bank in order to get a VISA with a chip³, or the alternative is to carry around a lot of cash all the time, which is relatively inconvenient.

As far as monthly spending is concerned, a student can expect rent to be anywhere from 3.000 DKK to 4.500+ DKK (roughly equivalent to \$550- \$830+) depending on his/her housing situation. The popular mode of transportation in Denmark is a bike, which after a fixed cost anywhere from \$100+ to purchase the bike, is clearly free to use. Alternatively, there is the metro and the s-tog which you can either pay for by purchasing a monthly pass, a klippekort, or individual tickets, and city wide buses may also be used as a form of transportation. A monthly pass is cost efficient if you take the metro at least once a day. With a klippekort, each card has 10 clips and depending on how many zones you need to travel through, can cost anywhere from 120 DKK – 180 DKK (\$25 - \$35). Klippekorts are always more cost efficient than individual tickets. All of these tickets are available at machines located at the metro and s-tog stations or at any DSB counter (sometimes located in large super markets, etc.)

Food is also quite expensive in Denmark relative to the US and I would find it quite difficult to spend less than \$50 a week just buying basics at a cheap grocery store. Therefore, I would budget anywhere from \$200+ for food every month. That in no way captures the cost of restaurants in Denmark, which are incredibly expensive relative to those in the US. Eating out at restaurants is a rarity/ luxury in Denmark but cafes are nice alternatives as they still offer decent food but at a more reasonable price.

Some unexpected expenses I incurred while living in an apartment were paying for the installation of wireless internet and paying for all repairs out of pocket (as opposed to this responsibility falling on the landlord).

I received financial aid from the Scan|Design Foundation for my second semester at University of Copenhagen and there were no major complications in accessing the funds. However, because this source of income was outside of Denmark, in applying for a student visa extension, I had to provide evidence that I could financially support myself

³ Note that banks have different requirements as to granting VISA cards with chips to new customers. Usually you must have a flow of income in Denmark (e.g. SU, work, etc.) to be eligible. If not eligible, you'll receive a VISA electron, which is solely an ATM card and cannot be used as a debit card.

in Denmark by opening up a Danish/EU bank account and proving that I had a minimum of circa \$4,000. I don't believe this complication would arise if one was attempting to receive a student visa as opposed to extending it their visa, but it's something to be aware of.

PROGRAM/EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATION

I spent the first semester (fall 2008) at University of Copenhagen as a guest student, pursuing an unaffiliated foreign study in close contact with UW's Department of Economics. The IP&E did not technically administer this study abroad but I still received wonderful guidance from contacts like Anni Fuller at the IP&E office. As an exchange student my second semester (spring 2009), the IP&E administered my exchange and was always prompt to respond to any questions or concerns and were also very informative and helpful.

The only improvement I could recommend would be more information regarding extending a student work and residency permit (i.e. student visa) as I found this process to be very complicated and felt that there were not many resources that might serve as a guide throughout the process.

PROGRAM/STUDENT TYPE

This program is best suited for students that are very independent and enjoy being in a fast paced urban setting. Studying at University of Copenhagen is ideal for students looking to obtain additional knowledge within their area of study through courses that are complementary or altogether different, providing new and interesting perspectives. Students should also be willing to accept taking courses that may be more challenging than those offered at their corresponding level at University of Washington, as this is sometimes the case⁴. If a student is outgoing, independent and willing to take on challenges, studying at University of Copenhagen is a great fit for a study abroad experience.

⁴ This may or may not be because Danish students focus exclusively on one subject throughout their bachelor studies. Therefore, a third year bachelor's level course at University of Copenhagen may be equivalent to one at the master's level at University of Washington.

OVERALL EXPERIENCE

On an academic level, I expected to be able to study an area of economics (development economics) more intensively than I would be able to at University of Washington, in preparation for continuing to study this specific area of economics at the graduate level. My expectations in this respect were more than met as not only was I able to study the aforementioned development courses, I was also able to take several courses (e.g. econometrics, quantitative methods, mathematics, etc.) that furthered my personal research abilities and can be applied to many areas of economics and beyond.

From a personal perspective, Copenhagen was a great fit for me and met my expectations as wonderful European city in which to live and study abroad, so much so that I'm continuing my studies at the graduate level at University of Copenhagen. Culturally, the city is rich and diverse, the Danish lifestyle is both comparable and enjoyable, and the language and culture of Denmark is interesting and entertaining. I would recommend it to anyone with the ability to keep a positive outlook and step out of his or her comfort zone to try new things.