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ScanDesign Fellow, Fall 2009 – University of Copenhagen

With a ScanDesign scholarship, you can study in Aalborg, Aarhus, or Copenhagen at a variety of institutions. I studied at the University of Copenhagen, which is the largest educational institution in Denmark, and there are several campuses in different locations in the city. For this reason, experiences vary greatly based upon what you study. Since I am a Danish major at the UW, I studied Danish literature at the Dept. of Nordic Literature and Linguistics at the University of Copenhagen, so I can speak for south campus--KUA (Københavns Universitet Amager), home to the Faculty of Humanities.

At the beginning of the semester there were several welcoming arrangements for international students at the Faculty of Humanities, where general information as well as guides and brochures were handed out, as well as a smaller orientation specifically for international students at the Nordic Studies department. The latter was led by the student advisor for the department and was extremely helpful. Afterwards I felt well-acquainted with procedures at the department, and was shown where to register a username and password for a computer lab with printing facilities to which I had 24-hour access to with my student card. In general, the facilities at KUA are wonderful. In addition to the computer lab, I had 24-hour access to the Nordic departmental library, which has lots of great resources, study spots, and a copy machine. Furthermore there is a big branch of the Royal Library on KUA, which is great for studying, and there are also many areas on campus well-acquainted for group work.

The style of teaching in my Danish literature classes was very similar to that of UW classes—we received a syllabus with a list of texts, which I either obtained from the online Archive for Danish Literature or copied from books in the Nordic departmental library, and classes were a couple times a week with a mixed lecture/discussion structure. Class sizes are generally small, and obviously I was mostly with other Danish students, with a couple other international students. The biggest difference in the course structure was that, whereas at UW I was used to writing shorter papers virtually every week, the only homework throughout the semester was reading, and the only grade was one big paper at the end of the semester. This seems to be how it is with most humanities subjects. It can be frustrating to not get any feedback the entire semester (although I would recommend meeting with your professor mid-semester or near the end to discuss possible paper topics), and it is intimidating to have your grade hinge on one paper, but unlike at UW, I had lots of time to write the final paper. Lectures for fall semester went from September 1 – December 15, and the final paper was due January 11, because January is the exam period for the fall semester at University of Copenhagen. I will receive my grade at the beginning of February, when classes recommence. Having to work over Christmas break was unpleasant at times, but I will admit that it was somewhat nice to have time to completely focus on writing. Keep in mind that if you are spending fall semester at U.Copenhagen and you have

exams/papers/projects due in January (and they can be any time in the month) you may not be able to return to UW for winter quarter. It's best to check with your department.

When you apply for housing, you will be asked about a few of your housing preferences as well as a price limit. I set my price limit on the higher side and ended up getting my own apartment, which was roomy, furnished, and centrally located (15 minutes away from the city center). This is rare. Most students are either placed in a rented room in a private house or apartment, in a rented room in an apartment shared with other students (Danish and/or international), or in a room of a Kollegium (dorm), which is the option most people like best because there are well-attended common meals and activities. Keep in mind that location and individual situations vary greatly. It is possible to write in special requests (as to location and situation), which may or may not be honored. Otherwise it is up to chance. It is best just to see what your housing offer is because it is extremely difficult to find housing on your own in Copenhagen. This is because Danes most often go through family and friends to rent out a property. For this reason, there are very few places that even list apartment rentals. Do not go on Craigslist for Copenhagen; it is 99.9% scammers. If you do feel like searching on your own, the Danish version of Craigslist is Den Blå Avis (www.dba.dk) has some housing rental listings. The site is very useful for appliances and other items, but you must understand Danish to be able to use it.

Making friends in Copenhagen has been not that much different than it is when you move to any new place. The only thing that people seem to mention about making friends (and keep in mind, Danish students say the same about students at UW) is that although Danes are quite friendly, they tend to socialize exclusively with people they already know. My classmates were very friendly in showing me where to buy course readers et cetera, but do not expect people to come up to you and actively offer to be your friend. My friends ended up being a mix of other ScanDesign fellows, other exchange students I met through orientation or in class, and Danes that I met either through my classes, mutual friends, or through student activities, which I would recommend getting involved in. I made friends on a camping trip through USG (the student sports organization, which offers student prices on all kinds of activities), a 9-day trip I took to Russia, arranged by U.Copenhagen, and through BLUS (Copenhagen's queer student organization). Realize that there is no "normal" way to meet people. Your experience will consist of several different spheres, based on what you choose to get involved, and if you are willing to talk with new people you will make connections in a variety of different ways. There are lots of young people in Copenhagen, and there is certainly not a lack of fun cultural events and activities, so it is very easy to keep busy.

In general, Copenhagen is a very safe and livable city. Crime is low, but use the same common sense that you would anywhere else about safety. It is easy to find your way, and public transportation is both navigable and very well kept-up, albeit expensive. Copenhagen is one of the best biking cities in the world, with lots of bike lanes and special traffic lights for bikers. It is not hard to find a reasonably priced used bike, and the International Office can give you some

good recommendations. I can also personally recommend Baisikeli (www.baisikeli.dk) from which you can rent bikes for long periods of time, and some of the proceeds go to providing bikes to people in Africa. In general, Danes (especially those in Copenhagen) speak great English, so you will never have a problem communicating if you cannot speak Danish. However, I highly recommend taking advantage of the free Danish classes you are offered while studying as an exchange student in Denmark. Having just a basic understanding of the languages opens lots of doors, like being able to read free publications like art/music calendars, knowing what you're buying at the supermarket, understanding sale signs and menus, and being able to understand what people say to you on the street and in shops, and being able to respond beyond a simple thank you or excuse me. I study the language as my major at UW and cannot begin to list the many times that my knowledge and use of the language has afforded me greater insight and access to Danish culture.

With your student visa that you obtain before arriving in Denmark, you can go to your local municipality office and arrange to receive a CPR-number (like a social security number). When you meet with someone at the municipality office, you immediately receive details about your local doctor, and within a week or two you will receive a CPR-card which serves as everyday identification when picking up packages at the post office, etc. Expect to spend a lot of money during your time in Denmark. Food, drinks, clothing, transportation, books, rent—everything is quite expensive. Each person has different priorities and finds different ways to keep your savings from being completely drained.

The ScanDesign exchange program is great for graduate and advanced undergraduate students who are independent, self-motivated, and comfortable creating their own experience. It allows you to focus on your specific area of study and to get what you personally want out of your experience in Denmark, in whatever shape that may take, while also enjoying regular get-togethers with the other ScanDesign fellows. In Fall 2009 we had a great dynamic and ended up doing a lot together. Among other things, we took a trip to the art- and nature-rich island of Bornholm, had wine and cheese evenings, and had our own Thanksgiving. Overall, I'm very satisfied with my experiences. ScanDesign is very well organized was a wonderful opportunity.