

Lucas Meserve
Scan|Design Study Abroad Evaluation
One year at The University of Copenhagen, Faculty of Life Sciences

I applied to the Scan|Design Fellowship on the recommendation of Professor Clause Portner. He suggested that the University of Copenhagen's Faculty of Life Sciences (LIFE) would provide an opportunity to deepen my studies in natural resource and development economics.

My first few days in Copenhagen were certainly the most challenging part of my stay. I arrived early in the summer and did not have the benefit of a LIFE First Contact or a mentor. In addition, my kollegium did not provide Internet service so I had to rely on coffee shops and the University networks. LIFE did conduct an international student orientation but at that point I had learned most of what I needed to know by bicycling through the city and reading the school's website.

Before starting my exchange at LIFE I participated in the Copenhagen Classroom program. I did not know a great deal about the country or the language so the introduction was very valuable. Each module proved to be very helpful during my year in Denmark. The first week on the sociology of Denmark gave me a good understanding of Danish history and politics. Weeks two and three covering Danish literature and cinema provided good cultural literacy and helped me establish some common ground with the Danes that I met. The last week on Danish design was

During my stay in Copenhagen I lived in two different kollegiums and rented a room from a Danish family. My first residence, Signalhuset Kollegium was arranged through the University of Copenhagen for Copenhagen Classroom. I found that it was a great opportunity to meet people and have parties but not the best environment for studying. It was also quite expensive for a small bedroom with a shared kitchen, bathroom, and common space. The major downside of Signalhuset was that it was in the middle of the Ørestad development, a long way outside of central Copenhagen with very few services nearby.

The second residence was Bikuben Kollegium. This is the housing offer I received from LIFE's housing office. At 3,800 kr a month it was still quite expensive but it included a private room, bathroom, and kitchenette. Unlike my first kollegium, there was very little social life at Bikuben. While it was closer to the city center than Signalhuset, it was still outside of the city.

Finally, I moved in with a Danish family in Vesterbro. This was by far the most affordable option and it was the closest to the city center and my campus. In all, university housing will likely be the most expensive option but it is also the easiest to get. The kollegiums can either be excellent or obnoxious, depending on what you get.

While in Copenhagen I was enrolled at LIFE's Institute of Food and Resource Economics and mostly took classes from the institute. The teaching at LIFE was excellent; the professors are required to take a course in pedagogy and are mentored as they start teaching. I found all of my instructors to be very skilled in their fields and very adept at communicating their knowledge. I would say that the average quality of instruction at the Faculty of Life Sciences is higher than UW.

Not only were the instructors very highly qualified, but they spent a great deal of time with the students. Normally, I had more than twenty hours of lecture per week and was able to meet with professors outside of class. My courses were at the Masters level and the amount of reading and assignments reflected that. However, almost all the evaluations relied solely on a written or oral final exam. I do not enjoy high-stakes testing and found this to be the only negative aspect of studying at LIFE.

As much as I loved the instruction and content I found the grading scheme at LIFE to be much more challenging than the one used by the UW. At LIFE, a 7 (which is a 2.8 at the UW) is considered to be a good grade. In addition, a professor told me directly that economic students in Denmark tend to receive lower grades for a given amount of work. Any students headed to LIFE's Institute of Food and Resource Economics should expect to put up extra effort.

The good instruction at LIFE was matched by good facilities. I found the library, study rooms, and computer facilities to be easy to use and comprehensive. It was occasionally challenging to find an available computer with a printer but it was never impossible. Aside from the academic facilities, LIFE had two canteens that served mediocre food but at a reasonable price. In the summer, the student run Cafe Væksthuset provided excellent food and drinks with a discount to LIFE students. Finally, LIFE's bar, Acaciavej, has been called the best student bar in Denmark and it was a fantastic place to meet friends or new people.

The one club/organization that I became involved with during my stay was LIFE's First Contact (FC) program. It is a student led group of Danes and internationals that works to help new international students meet people and become comfortable in Denmark. I found out about the program by participating in one of their activities and later joined the group as a coordinator. I would recommend the First Contact program to any students attending LIFE.

An organization that I did not join, but would in the future, is USG. It is the athletic center for all students in Copenhagen. They have a very large selection of activities, from soccer to sea kayaking. The activities are expensive but I have only heard good things about it.

In general, I found the Danes to be very similar to Seattlites, friendly but insular. If you get to know one person it becomes very easy to meet others. However, meeting that first person can be a challenge. Most of the friends that I made in Denmark were international students or Danes that had spent a significant amount of time in the United States. I also found a tendency for Danes to distrust anything that might be non-Danish. This manifested in many different ways including Danish students sitting apart from international students and the current border control issues between Denmark and its neighbors.

As in all countries, learning a little of the native language is a huge help. I found that speaking a little Danish opened a lot of doors with Danes and made it easier to meet new

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people. That said, Danish is a very challenging language and it took me almost the whole year to develop an ear for it. I hope to take more time to study Danish and the other Scandinavian languages in the future.

I would have never even considered a study abroad opportunity like this one without the support of Scan|Design. Anni Fuller made the pre-departure paperwork infinitely easier than it seemed and was never without good advice. Once in Denmark, Marianne Stølen organized opportunities parts of Denmark and Norway that I would have never seen otherwise. Last but not least, the funding Scan|Design provided was essential for my trip. I could not have gone without it and I am very grateful.