

Sarah Brown
Neurobiology
Senior
University of Copenhagen
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EVALUATION

1. WHY AND WHERE:

- a. Why did you decide to study in Denmark as an exchange student?
- b. Why did you select the particular institution you studied at as an exchange student?

I decided to study in Denmark because I am interested in the culture around its social welfare state and political system. One of the main systems I focused on was its socialized healthcare system. Socialized medicine is almost a taboo phrase in the United States, but readily embraced in Scandinavia. I was and still am fascinated with why this is the case and sought to go deeper than that standard response that “the people are just different.” The emphasis on the influence of social context on the public’s acceptance of various political structures led me to study anthropology at the University of Copenhagen. With this question and focus in mind, I departed slightly from my scientific background and style of thinking to take on a more humanistic approach in tackling this question by using class discussions in my anthropology courses and everyday social interactions as a springboard for forming my opinions and conclusions about this question.

I remember coming to Denmark with preconceived notions about the well-known statistic that the Danes are the happiest people in the world. Through interesting discussions with Anni and others I’ve come to realize that “happy” isn’t necessarily the right word to describe the superlative sentiment that the Danes maintain, but I think that “content” might be a better descriptor. It seems to me that the Danes are content because of the egalitarianism and safety nets that they have worked hard to build in their society. I think this has a lot to do with the degree of trust that the Danes have in their government and fellow citizens. For example, I was absolutely shocked the first time I saw a baby stroller parked outside a café *with a baby in it*. I don’t think there is a city in the U.S. in which people would dare to leave their child unattended for any length of time. Yet this is common in Copenhagen. I was also surprised to see that there were no gates, doors, or scanners at metro stations. People are expected and trusted to buy and clip their cards and no issue is made of it unless they are caught by security on the metro, which rarely checks. I once asked some of my Danish friends if it is common that people cheat the system, e.g. hop on the metro without clipping or buying a pass. The response I got was that they wouldn’t cheat the system because they think it’s important to follow the rules and pay into it. What I took from this was that most Danes feel like they are paying a lot for social services, but that they also expect a lot from them. In this way, I got the sense that the Danish public feels a stronger sense of ownership in its government, whereas many Americans see a larger separation between themselves and the government and hesitate to give the government any more control over public systems than it already has.

I pursued my interest in health care and culture at the University of Copenhagen because I was hoping to gain a Danish perspective on health care as well as opinions from foreigners. Going to the University of Copenhagen allowed me to take classes with instructors that are the leaders in their fields at the international level. For example, I sat in on a public health class that had different lecturers every day, many of whom were consultants for the World Health Organization.

I also chose Copenhagen so I could live in Denmark's capital city. In addition to being a beautiful city with lots of history, I became increasingly aware during my stay that it is a very desirable place for foreigners as well as Danes. Copenhagen is very much an international city with many different flavors of arts and culture. This was apparent in the diversity of nationalities that people in my classes represented as well as the variety of restaurants around the city. Though I was very fond of this diversity because it reminded me of home, it was inevitable that I would also see some of the tension that arose between some people's need to assert and maintain Danish language and culture and foreigners' desire to benefit from some of the many opportunities of living in Denmark. I had an interesting experience with this as a foreigner who appeared to be ethnically Danish. One of the first questions I was asked by Danes was whether I was Danish or had Danish relatives. I took this as a compliment and felt that I likely benefitted from this because Danes were more likely to try to speak Danish with me, whereas my Asian friends who were at a similar or more advanced proficiency usually got English responses. This made me wonder if I would assimilate as easily if I had a darker complexion and brown hair. I met a Danish lady with dark eyes and hair who said that even though she was born in Denmark and her parents and grandparents were Danish, she would often be asked by fellow Danes, "Where are you from?...your Danish is so good!" She seemed almost insulted by this, but was used to it. When I asked her about immigrants' experiences in becoming naturalized Danish citizens she said that it is common for the younger generation to call themselves "Copenhageners" instead of Danes. I think this is telling of the need for people to create their own identity while assimilating to another culture. Socialization and assimilation processes interest me greatly, and it was especially illuminating to discuss these concepts in the context of my anthropology courses at Copenhagen University in terms of transnationalism versus cosmopolitanism and to observe Danish culture—from everyday interactions to waiting in line at the immigration office.

2. ARRIVAL/ON-SITE ORIENTATION:

a. Please recommend accommodations for future students upon arrival.

I highly recommend having accommodations lined up before you arrive in Denmark, since decent housing is difficult to come by, especially in Copenhagen. City Center (near Strøget, the main shopping street) is probably the most convenient for students. The safest neighborhood is probably Frederiksberg (which is actually its own city, but within Copenhagen, but also the hardest to pronounce). Østerbro is also desirable. Nørrebro has the reputation of having more violence, but it is also close to some of the student residence halls. Vesterbro is the new happening place for a lot of younger artists. It is also known as the meatpacking district, for good reason, it is home to various sex shops and seedy hotels—I don't recommend walking alone on Istegade at night. If you are unable to find housing or your lease doesn't start until a week after arrival I suggest using couchsurfing.org. I would also recommend using couchsurfing to meet Danes, as many people on there would be more than happy to meet with you for coffee and/or show you around and give you insider tips about the city. I've only had good experience with it and I hotels and hostels are very expensive in Copenhagen.

b. If your host institution had an orientation, what did it cover and how did it help you adapt?

University of Copenhagen offered an orientation. It covered the Danish / European credit and grading system, the concept of "hygge" and put in several plugs for the culture courses. It also offered a free bus tour of the city, which I thought was very helpful in getting myself oriented and meeting other international students. There was also a presentation by Erasmus Student Network, which is basically student government for social activities that collaborates with other universities across Europe. I highly recommend becoming a part of this, as they offer some great discounted group trips to museums and other cultural sites. I met some fantastic friends and it's a great way to meet Danish students as well.

2. ACADEMICS:

a. Please evaluate the instruction you received in Denmark. Compare the following to the University of Washington's system:

- classroom structure

The classroom structure at the University of Copenhagen was similar to that of the University of Washington except that the class sizes were smaller and instruction was more like a dialogue with students rather than straight lecturing.

- instruction

It's possible that I lucked out with my professors, but I felt like I connected with them better than most UW professors. They were not only interested in your argument or opinion, but why you came to that opinion. This teaching style was especially helpful in my anthropology class where we tried to examine our assumptions about cultural biases with the guidance of our professor.

- teacher/student relations

I felt that I connected with my professors on a more personal level at KU than at UW. This was in part because my instructors made themselves available outside of class time to engage in social activities with students, such as meeting with a group with us at a potluck. Interactions between Danish instructors and students seemed more casual than at UW, as mine insisted on being called by their first names.

- grading/exams

This is one of the main academic differences between KU and UW. At KU, your entire grade depends on the final exam or project, which is much more intense than finals at UW. However, I was rarely graded on class participation.

- administration

The administration was very helpful, but electronic resources tend not to be. KU does not have a (functional) version of myUW, so registering for classes and exams—this is done separately-- can be very confusing. The best thing to do is consult with the course's departmental adviser.

- library, computer, and classroom facilities

The facilities are not as nice or available as at UW. This is in part because KU does not have a school campus, but rather is spread out in the city. Classroom buildings are often old buildings converted to classrooms, so finding your way through them can be frustrating and the heat sometimes doesn't work. The computer labs and libraries are often not connected in the same network and have early closing hours compared to UW.

b. Please evaluate the quality and content of instruction. **c.** In general, what did you like best and least about your exchange institution?

The quality of instruction was very high. It is not likely that I would be able to study anthropology at UW in a lecture with only 14 students, all from different countries. The course material was well chosen and interesting and professors made efforts to cater the subject matter to student interests. My only complaint is the library system (see above) and reduced contact hours compared to UW.

When it comes to Danish language, however, I think that Studieskolen is head and shoulders above KU. It is immersion style, smaller class size, and much more emphasis on conversational Danish and pronunciation than KU. I absolutely enjoyed my Danish class and it was also a great opportunity to meet foreigners who are learning Danish in order to live in Denmark, which I think gave me an interesting view at a cross-section of immigrant – Danish society.

d. Are there any courses or instructors you would recommend to future students?

Aja Smith, Anthropology.

Esben Lydiksen, Danish Language at Studieskolen

e. How did your study abroad coursework relate to your UW education?

Though my studies at KU were somewhat of a departure from my major in Neurobiology at UW, my first lecture in medical school focused on the subjects I learned about at KU, specifically culture and the human side of medicine. The topics my physician instructors at the University of Michigan Medical School touched on had already been examined in my anthropology courses, and in fact Kierkegaard had a lot to say about how doctors should treat patients, which will be covered in further detail in upcoming courses. My coursework at KU was also a nice compliment to my UW education because I had to opportunity to explore topics in global health in more detail.

3. HOUSING:

a. How would you assess the housing arrangements in Denmark compared to those in Seattle?

I was dissatisfied with the housing arrangements that KU made, so I moved to a much better situation. Housing tends to be more expensive than Seattle, but the residence halls are nicer. One of the things I had to adjust to was the small bathrooms, in some cases the shower is not separate from the sink and toilet and the fact that water is very expensive in Denmark and the Danes are very conscious of that.

b. What housing options were available to you?

Because I was on a tight budget and my application wasn't in as early as other international students, the university put me in a less than desirable situation.

c. Which did you choose, and why?

I chose to live with a Danish lady so I could gain access to Danish culture.

d. What would you recommend?

Get your housing application in as soon as possible and request a residence hall. Egmont is the most social and I had lots of fun visiting and meeting friends there. The dorms at KU are much nicer than those at UW.

4. EXCHANGE SITE:

Describe the campus/location of your program and surrounding community.

My campus location was near the botanical garden (near Norreport Station) and my other course was held across town at the Amager campus. Commuting between the two is manageable by metro but preferable by bike. The International Office is near Frue Plads, in City Center. Coordinating errands and trips between these locations can be inconvenient and time consuming compared to UW's central campus, but cycling between them gives fantastic views of the city.

5. HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Please describe any health or safety concerns (e.g., quality of medical facilities, unsafe districts, theft, etc.) associated with your study abroad experience.

Copenhagen is a relatively safe city, but I wouldn't recommend walking alone at night, especially in Norrebro and Vesterbro. Because Copenhagen is so much a biking city, walking alone makes you stand out more than usual.

My wallet was stolen on the bus at the beginning of my stay in Denmark. There are several different automated telephone trees to navigate through to find lost and founds, all of which are in Danish. This was a very frustrating process and my only saving grace was that my CPR card was in my wallet, which has my address written on it so it along with my drivers license were returned in the mail. My debit, credit cards and cash were of course left out of that package. So, my advice to you if this happens is to already have a CPR card in your wallet, and have a replacement debit card. If not for that, I would not have been able withdraw cash until my bank sent me a new one, which could have taken at least 2 weeks. Also, it is best to use skype to cancel credit cards or make calls overseas.

6. CULTURAL ASPECTS:

a. How did you integrate into the culture and meet members of the community?

(e.g., mentors, clubs, sports, extracurricular activities, pubs, etc.)

I went on all Erasmus cultural excursions and events and met great people – international students and Danish students through that. I also highly recommend getting a mentor through KU, which is basically a Danish student in your department who will show you around and be your friend. I also joined a rock climbing class and met some fun Danes through that. Also, Marianne Stølen and Anne Line Andersen are fantastic coordinators and have a wealth of information about things to do in and around Copenhagen. They plan several excursions that you definitely shouldn't miss.

b. Describe cultural differences and challenges you encountered and how you addressed them. (e.g., gender issues, social etiquette, stereotypes, etc.)

The difficult challenge and cultural difference I noticed was the reduced eye-contact and interaction with strangers compared to the U.S. At first I found Danes to be very conversationally efficient and almost aloof: if you ask the time, they will give you the time and won't pursue conversation any further. From my experience they are not particularly fond of small talk, but if you have a legitimate question they will give you a complete answer and are very helpful. Getting around this requires having an activity in common with them. Mine was rock climbing. After the second session the Danish climbers I met invited me out to beers afterwards and I felt completely accepted into their group. Overall, I found that Danes can be hard to meet, but once you get to know them they can be the best friends you'll ever make.

7. FINANCIAL:

a. Please describe how the Scan|Design Fellowship support assisted you/made a difference.

The Scan|Design Fellowship helped immensely in funding my exchange in Denmark. In fact, if I did not receive the fellowship I would not have been able to go.

b. What is the best way to access/transfer money from the U.S.?

My bank, U.S. Bank, only charged \$2 to withdraw cash from a Danish ATM, so that was easiest for me. It is also a good idea to set up a Danish bank account. The American dollar may fluctuate during your stay, so sometimes it is advantageous to transfer your money into Danish kroner, but this is a gamble. Also, some of the cheaper European airlines do not accept American debit/credit cards, so it's nice to have a backup.

c. How much spending money do you recommend per month? Please include rent, food, transportation, etc.

\$650 per month for rent, though it is possible to find less expensive places but you will have to sacrifice desirable location/quality. Food: \$700 per month, assuming you don't eat out. Transportation: \$60, which I believe is the price for a monthly train/metro/bus pass—get one of these if you don't have a bike or live far away from city center since you'll run through clipcards very quickly.

d. Please note any unexpected expenses you incurred.

Basically, everything is more expensive in Denmark. I suggest bringing a very warm jacket for the winter and rain boots. It is also a good idea to have a few passport photos on hand, because you'll need them for a lot of different ID cards once you arrive.

e. If you used Financial Aid in addition to the Scan|Design Fellowship to fund your program/exchange, were there any complications? If so, how did you address/resolve them?

The only complication was at the end of the semester when UW hadn't received my grades yet and assumed I failed or did not take any classes. Expect KU to take at least a month to post grades / get you a transcript. I emailed UW about this, but they still withheld financial aid disbursement for awhile. Now it is taken care of.

8. EXCHANGE/SCAN|DESIGN FELLOWSHIP ADMINISTRATION:

a. Please comment on the effectiveness of the Scan|Design Fellowship services at the UW and activities in Denmark. What worked and what could be improved or changed?

Having coordinators at UW and in Denmark were very helpful. They did a fantastic job and helped make my experience very special.

It would help to have all the funds disbursed at the beginning, since there are many costs that must be taken care of right away, including the Visa application (\$200) and airfare (\$1000+). In fact, the second portion of my fellowship was not disbursed to my account until after I had emailed at least twice. At this point it was late June or early July and UW had frozen my direct deposit because of the transcript issue I mentioned above. Much confusion and worry could have been avoided if the funds had been disbursed earlier. Thankfully, this has all been sorted out.

Also, more time allotted for guidance before the fellowship was awarded would have been helpful. Future groups of Scan Design fellows will likely have a longer period between notification of acceptance and departure date, but for me it was very rushed. Students need at least 5 months to get visas, flights, and housing abroad sorted out. Several reminder emails about the transition process would be very helpful since there is a lot of information to digest. By this I mean separate emails about the visa application, cultural activities, and Danish university items. A useful tips for living in Denmark would also be useful upon arrival, which outlines the difference between the expensive and inexpensive grocery stores (Irma, Føtex, Netto), where to get a Danish SIM card (7-11 is the easiest), etc.

I was very impressed with the way American fellows were given opportunities to meet and socialize with Danish fellows. Meeting and befriending them helped get a sense of Danish culture before arriving and they had a lot of good advice and friends to put me in contact with in Denmark.

b. Please evaluate services and effectiveness of the UW International Programs and Exchanges Office. UW IPE was very helpful and accommodating. However, I wish there was a more efficient way to take care of credit transfers electronically.

c. Please evaluate services and effectiveness of the host institution.

Some of the things I took for granted at UW, such as 9-5 business hours and an electronic scheduling system did not exist at KU. However, the personnel were very good about responding to emails with any questions or problems I had, mainly with getting a transcript to UW promptly.

9. PROGRAM/STUDENT TYPE:

Please describe the type of student for whom this program is best suited and what advice would you give to future students going to Denmark?

I think Denmark is appealing to many different types of students, and my experience was greatly enriched by interacting the other scanlinger with very different backgrounds and interests. If I were selecting fellows I would try to make sure that they were genuinely interested in Danish culture and willing to explore Denmark. I also think it's important that people don't arrive with too many preconceived notions about Scandinavian culture and are okay with being flexible, committing to cultural excursions, and open to new ideas.

10. OVERALL EXPERIENCE:

a. How would you rate the quality of the overall experience in Denmark?

I had a wonderful time in Denmark. By the end it was difficult for me to imagine wanting to live or travel anywhere else. I loved my classes and learning about Danish culture and language. I only wish I could stay longer. I plan to return in the near future and possibly live in Copenhagen for an extended period of time if my career (and the udlandingservice) allows it. For now I plan to maintain my Danish contacts and hope to get to know Danish exchange students studying in Ann Arbor, where I will be going to school for the next four years.

b. How realistic were your expectations, both academic and personal and how did the Scan|Design Fellowship make a difference?

I expected Denmark to be expensive, but the cost of living still gives me sticker shock. The Scan|Design Fellowship helped tremendously in making my exchange possible. I also expected to meet Danes as easily as I befriended the Danish scanlinger studying at UW. As it turned out the Danes

in Copenhagen were for the most part a bit harder to get to know, but I also had less in common with them. I expected there to be more contact hours at KU, especially since I was used to many class hours per week at UW.

c. What did you consider to be the greatest benefit and challenge of studying in Denmark?
The greatest benefit and challenge was meeting Danish people. As mentioned above, sometimes it was a bit difficult to break the ice, but I now have lifelong friends there.

FEEL FREE TO ADD OTHER COMMENTS YOU MAY HAVE.

Please submit your evaluation as an e-mail attachment to afuller@uw.edu

THANKS.