

Evaluation of Anne Hoffmann's exchange

My name is Anne Brenøe Hoffmann, I was on an exchange at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-M) in the fall semester of 2010 and study normally economics at the University of Copenhagen. I am 21 years old and studied on my 5th semester when I was on the exchange.

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In the summer 2009, I was in the US primarily in order to attend to summer seminars held by FEE (Foundation of Economic Education) and IHS (Institute for Human Studies) but also to travel a bit around in the Midwest and on the East coast. There, I met a lot of young people mainly from the US but also from many different countries, we had many interesting discussions and I really enjoyed this cultural meeting with young people of other nationalities than my own. For that reason when I came home again to Denmark I felt that I needed to go abroad to study in order to gain more experiences about other cultures and ways of life. I wanted to study outside Europe in an English speaking country so why not choose the US after my nice trip in the summer?

In order for me to be able to study abroad, I needed to take at least one course which is mandatory in my program. So after looking in the course catalogs at all the exchange universities with which my university has exchange I only had four possible universities, because the universities in general are very bad at announcing what the content of their courses are; at least when it is econ undergraduate courses. I already had one friend from Madison, who was on an exchange in Copenhagen, which was the reason why my first priority was Madison, where I also ended up going.

I did not have any specific expectations since I did not know much about Madison or the university, though of course I have some expectations of meeting a lot of Americans and experiencing how the American everyday is for a student. I did not want to get contact to many other exchange students, but instead I wanted to focus on meeting American students. The fact is that many exchange students going to Denmark end up almost only knowing other exchange students because they hang out with each other. That was what I experienced the year before I went on the exchange because I was active in the exchange club for economic students at my university.

Before I departed I found a place to live, bought the health insurance I needed and got the visa. Else there was not much to do since I would arrive 10 days before the semester start and would have time to fix what I needed. For me, this way of preparation worked fine and could not really be improved except that it is good to know that the preparation for the visa is a bit long.

Regarding to the arrival, if you arrive before you have a permanent place to stay there is an organization called Madison Friends of International Students (<http://iss.wisc.edu/mfis/>) which has volunteering families to host students. They also have a free welcome picnic for international students, which is worth checking out.

My home university had a mandatory general introduction for all exchange students, which was the only orientation and activity they had. So that was not really a good informational help. My home university paid my tuition fee and I received a scholarship of 10,000 Danish crowns. The host university has so many great student organizations both with the perspective of international students and also just with the focus of a hobby. Regarding to this, I think Madison is a great place to go to because it is very easy to adopt and find an organization/club with your interest. I joined a language conversation club (GUTS) where I got a conversation partner who is now a good friend of mine. In addition, I was selected to join a club (BRIDGE), which is half Americans and half exchange students where everybody gets an American/non-American friend. The application deadline for this club is before semester start. I also went to some events in a politics and society club where we discussed interesting political questions. I got information about the Scan Design Fellowship very late, which is the reason why I did not get help from the coordinator to integrating. In addition, I do not think it is important since there are so many other organizations helping exchange students to feel welcome.

UW-M is great at instructing exchange students of what to do and when in order to enroll for classes etc. For that reason, I only have positive things to say about the instruction from the university compared to my home university. At the beginning of each course the teachers explained very well how the course would be and about the exams, which means that I think the quality and content of instruction was good. What I liked the least about the academics was that the participation counted throughout the semester, which I am not used to at all, but on the other hand the final exams did not require as much work as I am used too. The thing I liked the most was that each student got a personal contact to the TA's and that the TA's are PhD students, which they are usually not where I study in Denmark.

I had a course with Howard Schweber, who is professor in political science. He is popular among American students, but I did not like him because he talked really fast, unclear and unstructured. After I asked him if he could speak a bit slower, he did the opposite. In another course I had Professor Florencia Mallon who is a really good communicator and I would highly recommend her courses.

I found the Madison Community Co-op (MCC: <http://www.madisoncommunity.coop/>) through my friend from Madison. So I applied for the International Coop and Hypatia Coop, which has to be done early (no later than March I would guess). I got accepted at both places and choose Hypatia which I am so happy about I did. I have heard that the international coop is also good, they like parties all the time, are many exchange students and when I was on an exchange there lived three Danish exchange students. Hypatia is a smaller coop (around 14 people) and mainly has people living there from the US and who studies for a master or PhD, which means that the average age is a bit higher and that the experience fitted a bit more to my expectations about living in the US. It was such a great place to live; I liked it much better than where I live in Copenhagen. There were always some people hanging out in the kitchen so if I was in the mood for small talk that was an option or if I wanted to be alone I could just go to my room.

UW-M is a very big university with around 40,000 students, which makes Madison to a university town. Even it is a relatively small city there is always something going on because of the very active student life with various organizations. Campus covers a really big areal and ends where the main street (State Street) starts. Campus has many libraries - it is very hard to believe for a Dane – but they seriously compete with the bars Fridays and Saturdays evenings as a place to go for students. I have never seen that many students all around always and so energetic studying – this is something the Danish system could learn from.

It is mandatory to buy a health insurance (585 dollars for one semester). I have some neck problems so I went to a physical therapist frequently, which was for free and the therapist did a very good job. Another time I went to the doctor, which worked perfectly fine. For that reason I do not think there is anything to fear regarding to the health service compared to the Danish. I had bought the medicine I needed before leaving Denmark, so I do not know how it works buying medicine though I do not think it is a problem.

I had already been in the US twice before the exchange, so I knew which kind of society I would go to. In addition the American culture is not much different from the Danish, so I think the integration to the host country culture went easily. I did not really hang out with other exchange students because that is what I can do in Copenhagen. Instead, I hang out with people from my coop, some other students from my classes and in that way I was introduced to other local students. As earlier mentioned I also participated in some clubs. Therefore, I think it was very easy to get contacts to American people but of course you have to be open-minded and sometimes ask about some stupid questions.

The Scan Design Fellowship was a nice financial help to achieve and made it easier for me to get some American experiences, such as visiting Chicago, going to different sport games etc. Though, I did not know about it when I applied so it did not affect my decision to study abroad. I got the money as a check, which I think would work more easily as a transfer to the students' bank accounts instead. My fixed monthly spending was 500 dollars which paid for my rent and food in the coop where I lived. It is much more common to go to restaurants in the US than in Denmark but on the other hand restaurants, bars and cafés are cheaper. For that reason I guess that my additional spending each month was around 100 dollars. The local busses in Madison are for free for students so you do not need to think about that cost. In addition, I had one time costs of health insurance and books. I bought all my books used from amazon.com, which I definitely recommend compared to the bookstores, since it is much cheaper. I think, I bought books for around 300 dollars.

The Scan Design Fellowship "club" was a really great thing for us Danish exchange students; it made it possible for us to get some costly experiences of American culture. I am very thankful for all the events our coordinator arranged for us. For another time, I think it would be useful to get contact to the American coordinator a bit earlier, than what was the case on my exchange. Before semester start we met in a park for a picnic which was a nice way to be introduced to the club. During my stay we had many awesome events which I only can talk positively about.

Since UW-M is a big university with a big variety of organizations, fields of study and types of personalities, I cannot say that this university only suits one type of students. Madison is a liberal city, relaxed for instance regarding to the dress code, and a student town. For that reason if you want great cultural experiences every week it is not a good city to go to compared to Copenhagen, since there is not opera, ballet and theater of same quality or variation as in a capital city. It is a perfect university to go to if you want the American experience of college life.

My overall experience was fantastic! I got the experience of the American everyday life, student life, met many nice local people and got to experience American holydays such as Thanksgiving, Halloween and Christmas, which was exactly what I had wished to. I did not have many academic expectations since I did not really know what I could expect. My academic experience turned out to be very nice and very interesting. The Scan Design Fellowship Program made a difference regarding to my cultural experiences

such as going to sports game and skiing which I really appreciate. Regarding to academia the fellowship did not affect which I also think would be inappropriate. My greatest benefit of studying abroad was the successful experience of integrating in another society and becoming more fluent at English. A big challenge for me was to integrate in the academic way of studying because you are required to study hard through all semester compared to Denmark, where it is only the final which matters.

I had such an awesome semester abroad, so I definitely recommend all my friends to do the same!