

Evaluation of Exchange Program Fall 2010 and Spring 2011

Student from University of Copenhagen, Denmark, going to UW-Madison, Wisconsin

Why study abroad?

To go and study abroad I new would give me a broader understanding of my major in Psychology. Psychology is both studied and focused on differently in the States than in Denmark and Europe in general and that is why I decided that the United States of America would be the most obvious choice for me. When I look through different colleges in the country I realized that it was not an easy pick. But UW-Madison got my interest because it has a highly academic profile as well as being situated in a very good college town that would give a very good American experience for many guests. I decided to apply for a yearlong stay, because I heard from former students that one semester is too short and you at least need to stay there for four months before you get adapted. I expected a great American experience where I could meet many new people, mostly Americans, but also international students. Also I was looking forward to go to school differently. At the same time I could travel around the country as I new that I was going to have several brakes during my two-semester long stay. And so the whole application process began and I decided that I would take a course in Academic English before my arrival, so I would be more familiar with the language and get an idea on how to write academic papers in English.

I tried very hard to find an apartment before I left the Danish country, but it was rather difficult. When I came to Madison a host family (which I requested through UW) picked me up, and I looked for an apartment when I got to the city. After 3 days of searching I found a good place and I lived there for the first semester. In my second semester I decided to move to another apartment – a place that was more promising in social activities and closer to State Street, as well as a bit cheaper. All in all I found the whole application process easy. One thing that I could have done better in my preparation was definitely to search for an apartment much earlier than I did. The first week in Madison was very stressful, and I could have prevented that by finding an apartment before hand. Start searching as soon as you get accepted (January) and not in May!

Arrival/on-site orientation:

We had very few introductory meetings at the UW, and I went to all of them. As the university is very big I felt very disoriented and I would say that more information and activities was definitely needed. But meeting with ScanDesign and get information with their help was very helpful and even though I had expected more contact with the Americans and the school, I was positively surprised that a foundation offered their help in our stay here in the States. I was surprised because

I didn't know about this foundation before two months prior to my arrival. In spite of the introduction there was planned for us, I would recommend to have a bit more activities at the beginning of the semester (the first two weeks), because I still felt very disoriented - mostly due to UW's lack of activities for their many international students.

How about the academics?

UW send out many helpful emails through our account on their website. I was not in doubt on how to enroll, and if I had any questions I could just contact my advisor. They were very good at informing about personal advisors, emails and phone numbers. The system was quite different from my home university. Here you had to choose your own classes and there are so many, so the difficult part was to keep track of which ones you can take, and which ones you can't. I would recommend for other students to stay close to your academic advisor, who will be happy to help you through and picking classes that fits your required classes.

The American exam-system is very different from Denmark, as you will have 2-3 midterms/exams on the subject, instead of just one big final exam. I liked that I always new how well I did which kept me motivated throughout the semester.

Housing situation:

I ended up living at the Christian Science Organization building because I couldn't find anywhere else that suited me, and because I was recommended this place through my church. But I will only recommend this place if you like to have your own place and doesn't want to be super social, as people living there are a bit reserved. The location is very central though. I decided to move to another house with three college students. I found the place through Craigslist, which has many housing opportunities, listed. I would recommend finding people who are subletting, that way you don't necessarily have to find furniture and roommates. I would definitely recommend people to find places with many social opportunities, as you for sure will end up spending too much time on studying if you don't have any friends to hang out with.

Exchange site?

UW-Madison has the best location I could ever think of. The campus is huge, close to water (from the lake), has great running/biking trails, and is right downtown with many restaurants and cute shops. You get a free bus pass and the public transportation is very convenient, as you need it to go shopping in the different malls that are located miles away from downtown. The weather is

beautiful. The summer and fall is nice and warm, and the winter is very snowy, so you'll experience all seasons. ScanDesign arranged a successful ski trip!

Students on this campus love sports, and you have so many sport and fitness opportunities. I spend many hours at the SERF, where you can go to various classes for a little fee.

Did I feel safe?

Going to UW-Mad you are forced to buy the SHIP, health insurance, and that is pretty expensive. Even though you have your own insurance that covers everything, they won't accept it. Hopefully SHIP will get a waiver program with Denmark, as they have many with other countries. That way you will save money and don't need to have two insurances.

UW-Mad wants every student to feel safe, and they do a good job. You have free safe rides (taxis) when you are out late at night. If you walk late on campus you can get safe walks, where two persons will follow you around campus/downtown.

From a cultural perspective:

I met people through my church and the people that I lived with. But most of my time and social activities I did spend with people from ScanDesign. But through common friends and roommates we all got to know some Americans and international students.

I thought it would be much easier to get to know American students, but due to huge lecture halls, I felt kind of insecure and really didn't communicate with that many students. In my second semester I definitely felt different, and through my new roommates I feel that I've already got to learn some other students. The culture here is different in some ways, and off course I missed home at some point especially during the holidays. But the friendships I got through ScanDesign helped a lot on my homesickness.

Financial – resources and expenses:

Studying at UW didn't give high living expenses, but books and insurance made it a bit tough on the budget. I wasn't aware of the ScanDesign foundation before I applied to study abroad, so it came as a positive surprise to know that the foundation helped us that much financially.

I recommend that you have around \$1200 a month that cover:

Housing/rent \$500, food \$400, and incidentals (clothes, personal items) \$300. Also you need to consider books and supplies \$500 (depends if it's science books or not) and insurance \$1400. In general you live cheaper in Madison than Denmark, but since you don't have a job as a special student in Madison you don't have that extra income.

How was the Exchange/ScanDesign Fellowship administration?

ScanDesign was very good at informing and coordinate different activities in our group. Julie Allen and Karen Bien did a good job in coordinating, and information through email was helpful. Maybe I could recommend that we get information and contact from ScanDesign a bit earlier prior to arrival in Madison. But as soon as we got to Madison I felt that I was welcome in the fellowship and I new that this foundation really was to make connections between Danish and American students.

UW-Mad is very good at inform students through email (ISS-office) and primarily all information went through mail. The administration works very well and every time I have any questions about my status and my student situation I get useful responses and help.

Program/Student type:

I had a great experience as an undergrad and was abroad two semesters. I will definitely recommend others to do the same thing, as it has given me so many experiences and actually gave me inspirations for my further education in grad-school. All though it was very good, you have to consider carefully which classes you want to attend and make sure that you actually are allowed to take those classes. Some classes are only for majors who need those specific classes to go into grad school, and UW don't give special students seats to these classes. I experienced that I needed to find classes in other departments and some of my pre-approved classes was full and I had to find similar classes elsewhere than I had requested. Prior to my arrival I actually talked to my advisor about my bachelor thesis and if it was possible for me to write it at UW and find a sponsor for this project. She approved before I came to UW, but when I got there she had trouble finding a sponsor. But it all worked out, even after a bit stress. So, all in all you need to make sure that the classes you wish to attend are available and accessible.

Overall experience?

My fall semester as an exchange student has been great. I got really good friends, which I ended up going on a road trip with in my winter break. You have to take advantage of the breaks, because school take a lot of your energy and you spend so much energy on learning new material, speaking another language, meeting new people and in general adapt to a new culture. I am looking forward to my second and final semester as an exchange student, which probably will be different in many ways. New classes, new roommates, I have learned how to live in Madison and I know the exam-system and how to handle different school problems.