

## EXCHANGE STUDENT EVALUATION REPORT

**Student Name:** Mads Frølund Poulsen

**Institution where you studied:** University of Washington

**Semester of participation:** Fall 2014

**E-mail address:** Madsfpoulsen@gmail.com

### 1. Pre-Exchange. Why and Where:

- a. Why did you decide to study in the US or Denmark as an exchange student?
  - During the fall of 2013 I met a couple of exchange students from the University of Washington Department of Architecture at my school - the Aarhus School of Architecture. They introduced me to the program at UW and to the city of Seattle, which really made me want to go. The approach the subject is more technical at the US, and I wanted to expand my technical knowledge and develop my professional vocabulary in English.
- b. Why did you select the program/University?
  - I had heard so many good things about the University of Washington, and the classes they offered were very different from those in Aarhus. I could explore a lot of new thing, so it seemed (and was) a very good supplement to my studies.
- c. What were your expectations?
  - I expected to learn a lot about American culture and to expand my vocabulary both for every day and professional use. Academically I expected another way of studying, but I didn't quite know what to expect from the classes I took – I wanted to keep an open mind and just get the best experience possible.
- d. What preparations did you make prior to departure?
  - I tried to figure out as much as possible about the university and the classes before I left. After being admitted, I received a lot of E-mails with information on the University, the exchange programs, activities and classes, so the information was very easily accessible. I still had a lot of questions when I got to Seattle though. My contact person at the department of architecture was very helpful – she helped me find the most relevant courses and explained how to register for them.
  - It was important to me to figure out how to get around, so I spent some time looking at different modes of transportation – if I could rent/buy a bike, take the bus, metro, light rail etc. It is much easier to just ask around when you get there though; people are better at helping than the Internet. I ended up buying a used bike, which I actually ended up bringing home with me.
- e. How could you improve your preparations?
  - By looking more into visa application procedures – it is a long process getting a visa, so be ready to apply as soon as you get the paperwork you need from the university.
  - My recommendation is to find and ask people who have been or still are in the city/at the university you are applying to about advice. They have been through the same process as you, and they are normally happy to share their experience and knowledge.
  -

## **2. ARRIVAL/ON-SITE ORIENTATION:**

- a. Recommend accommodations for future students upon arrival.
  - Ask your network if they know someone in the city you are going to – I learned a lot from living in a house with American students and speaking English with native speakers.
  - In Seattle: the university can find private housing for the first couple of weeks. Look for housing on Craigslist and through student organizations at the school – “FIUTS” might be very helpful.
- b. Comment on the orientation and activities offered at both your home University and the host University, what did it cover and how did it help you prepare / adjust after arriving?
  - My home university has a mentor program, where local students help exchange students getting settled in the city; showing them around, helping to find a bike, accommodation etc. They also arrange dinners, trips, social events and more. The orientation from the school itself might be a bit poor, so it's better trying to get in touch with local students before.
  - As described earlier, the UW provided me plenty of information before getting to Seattle, and there was a whole week with events and introduction on the campus arranged both by the school and by FIUTS before school started. The introduction given by the school very much covered everything from where to go to get what and how to sign up for classes, to formal information about visa and insurance.

## **2. ACADEMICS:**

- a. Evaluate the instruction you received. Compare the following to your home institution's system:
  - class registration
    - It's hard to compare, since the systems at the two schools are very different. At the Aarhus School of Architecture we don't sign up for classes, since we only do workshops and studio projects. When signing up for workshops, we receive an email describing the different workshops and a link, where we choose our priorities – you might not get your 1<sup>st</sup> priority.
    - At the UW, you sign up for classes through an online schedule, and you have to make sure classes don't overlap and that you get the right amount of credit points. It was a bit confusing using the system at first, so the student advisor helped me sign up for classes.
  - classroom structure
    - We were 10 people signed up for the studio I took, and we had a professor coming in 3 times a week for 5 hours. We had a lot of time to talk with the professor individually. In Aarhus there are normally 2 professors to 40 students, and they come in 1-2 days a week. In both cases you get a personal desk in a studio space shared with the other students.
    - The other classes were lecture based with 20-60 people in a class. The lectures were normally followed up by assignments and homework, mostly individually.
  - instruction
    - Both schools have very competent teachers/professors with background in professional practice and great teaching skills.
  - teacher/student relations
    - I had a close relation to my studio professor, and we had plenty of time to discuss my project. The teacher/student relation was more distant in

the other classes, but I always felt I could go to the professors with questions.

- grading/exams

- The grading systems for studio projects are very similar at the two schools – you get a final grade after the final presentation assessing the project as a whole.
- There were a lot of exams in the other classes at the UW, which is unfamiliar to me, since there are no exams during the workshops and studios at the Aarhus School of Architecture.

- administration

- The UW is good at informing and scheduling, while you might get important information with short notice in Aarhus.

- library, computer, and classroom facilities

- Both schools have great studio facilities with “private desks”. The workshop, digital fabrication, library and printing facilities at the Aarhus School of Architecture are extraordinary, but the facilities at the UW are good as well though – especially their computer facilities are good. The UW department of architecture lacks a proximate material shop.

**b. Evaluate the quality and content of instruction.**

- The overall quality of the instruction at the UW was good, and I feel I gained a lot of new, relevant knowledge and attained new skills. The difficulty of the content varied a bit from class to class, but it was also nice to have some easier classes, which gave me more time to focus on my studio project. I was very satisfied with the content and quality of the studio I chose, which was my top priority. It was a challenging project with a lot of new and more technical aspects to it.

**c. In general, what did you like best and least about the academics?**

- I liked the professor to student ratio in studio and the difficulty and relevance of the project. The more technical approach at the UW was also very giving. I didn’t like the big amount of exams during classes, which I think was too time consuming. The time would be better spent on lectures or work on assignments.

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

- I would definitely recommend professor Dan Stettler for studio projects, and Kimo Griggs for material classes. I would recommend his class “making and materials”.

**3. HOUSING:**

**a. How would you assess the housing arrangements?**

- 

**b. How did you locate your housing?**

- My friend in Seattle, who I knew beforehand, had a vacant room in his house. We were 6 students in a house with a shared kitchen, living room and two bathrooms – it was a great experience living with local students.

**4. EXCHANGE SITE:**

In general, please describe your impressions of the host University campus and its location and surrounding community.

- The university has a beautiful campus centered around the spectacular Rainier Vista – a narrow park stretch that focuses the view of Mt. Rainier. The 4400m mountain can be seen on clear days. It’s a well functioning campus with good sports and study facilities. There are plenty of restaurants, bars, cafés, shops, and supermarkets close to the campus as well, so everything you need is within reach when at school.

## 5. HEALTH AND SAFETY:

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

- I didn't experience any safety issues during my stay.

## 6. CULTURAL ASPECTS:

- a. How did you integrate into the host country culture and meet members of the community? (e.g., mentors, clubs, sports, extracurricular activities, pubs, etc.)
  - Living with local students gave me a big network of American friends, which was a great way to experience the culture – they were good at inviting me to parties, concerts, dinners etc.
  - I joined a bike-polo club in Capitol Hill, which was a fun way to meet the locals.
  - The Scan|Design Foundation also arranged a lot of events, where I met Americans – we also went to see and experience a lot of things through Scan|Design.
- b. Describe cultural differences and challenges you encountered and how you addressed them. (e.g., gender issues, social etiquette, stereotypes, etc.)
  - The social inequality in the US is a huge contrast to what is seen in Denmark. There were a lot of homeless people in the streets – of all ages, genders, and races.
  - The people in Seattle are extremely good at using the surrounding nature – Seattle has mountains and water on both sides. Outdoor sports and activities are very common, and I was surprised how much people went out into the mountains and onto the lakes.

## 7. FINANCIAL:

- a. Describe how the Scan|Design Foundation Fellowship assisted you / made a difference in your decision to study abroad.
  - The Scan|Design foundation supported me with 1000 USD, which helped me pay visa and plane tickets.
- b. What is the best way to access/transfer money?
  - By making a bank transfer
- c. How much spending money do you recommend per month? Please include rent, food, transportation, etc.
  - My rent was 700 USD per month, my living expenses (food, beer etc) were about 300 USD per month, transportation was covered by the university, I spent 100-200 USD per month on trips, concerts and other cultural experiences around Seattle.
- d. Comment on the relative "cost of living" between your home University and the host University.
  - The relative cost is higher in Seattle than home in Aarhus, because there's another culture for going out to eat for lunch and dinner, which I very rarely do at home. The food prices are very similar – and it's cheap to get a decent meal (8-10 USD) at a restaurant, but it all adds up, when eating out a couple of times a week.

## 8. EXCHANGE/SCAN|DESIGN FELLOWSHIP COORDINATORS AND ADMINISTRATION:

### Coordinator team

Comment on the assistance by the Scan|Design Fellowship coordinators and administration before your departure, upon arrival, and during your stay. What worked and what could be improved or changed?

- I wasn't very much in touch with the American Scan|Design Foundation prior to my departure – I got the grant from the Danish branch. The coordinators in Seattle contacted me shortly after my arrival in Seattle, and they were great at inviting us to dinners and events. Lauren created a Facebook page, where we got a lot of information about all the events, and where we could ask questions.
- The Facebook page worked really well. It was easy to get in touch with the other exchange students and to find information. It would be nice to receive an email with some information on the Scan|Design Foundation before arriving in Seattle.

### **Activities**

Comment on the number and type of activities arranged by the coordinators. What worked and what would you like replaced with some other activity.

- I don't remember all the activities arranged, but I felt there were plenty – and very well organized events. We had an introduction party/get together with an introduction to all the people from the Scan|Design Foundation, alumni, and new exchange students. The wine-tasting trip to Oregon was amazing – it was great to see Oregon, experience the wine-land, and to have a whole weekend together with the exchange student, Lauren and her friend.
- Everything was really well organized, and I really don't know what should be done differently.

Suggestions for activities we should add to the program

- Seeing a football game would be a great activity – Either seeing the Huskies or the Seahawks would be an interesting.

•

### **9. PROGRAM/STUDENT TYPE:**

Describe the type of student for whom this exchange is best suited and what advice would you give to future students.

- I feel any student could benefit from the exchange program at the UW with Scan|Design.

### **10. OVERALL EXPERIENCE:**

- a. How would you rate the quality of the overall experience?
  - I really enjoyed being in Seattle, it was an experience of a lifetime. I'm sure I'll be going back sooner or later!
- b. How realistic were your academic and personal expectations and how did the Scan|Design Fellowship Program make a difference?
  - They were quite realistic. I learned a lot – both academically and as a person. I learned a lot from the more technical approach to architecture, and I definitely brought back experience I wouldn't have gained at home. Experiencing the American society from within makes it easier to understand the political issues in the US – a country much bigger and complex than Denmark. The exchange also gave me experience to reflect upon my own education, which I think is important.
  - The Scan|Design Program made a huge difference by introducing me to local Americans within my field and by arranging trips I wouldn't have been able to do myself.
- c. What did you consider to be the greatest benefit and challenge of studying abroad?
  - The greatest benefits have been on the personal level. Studying abroad exposes one to new people, different cultures, and other ways of thinking. I've learned a lot about myself and about the US – but also about my home country.

- The biggest challenge of studying abroad is keeping contact to the people at home – all the new impressions make time pass by so fast, and you've got to be very present all the time to keep up!

**FEEL FREE TO ADD OTHER COMMENTS YOU MAY HAVE.**

I can't thank the Scan|Design foundation enough for supporting my study abroad semester in Seattle and for organizing so many great events.