

## EXCHANGE STUDENT EVALUATION REPORT

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**Student Name:** Berit Thorson

**Institution where you studied:** DIS – Study Abroad in Scandinavia

**Semester of participation:** Fall 2018

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

- a. Why did you decide to study in the US or Denmark as an exchange student?
  - I chose to study in Denmark because I really loved the DIS program and knew I wanted to be in Scandinavia. Also, I had met some Danish people before and was hoping I could see them again!
- b. Why did you select the program/University?
  - The academics and travel opportunities that DIS offered really appealed to me.
- c. What were your expectations?
  - I expected that Denmark would feel very foreign to me, and that it would be difficult for me to get around.
- d. What preparations did you make prior to departure?
  - I started to get in contact with the people I had met a few years ago, and I looked up cultural norms and expectations. I also tried to start learning Danish.
- e. How could you improve your preparations?
  - I could have done better with learning basic Danish, and I should have looked into the history of the country more because that's very central here.

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

- a. Recommend accommodations for future students upon arrival.
  - I loved living in an LLC at DIS – it was very well-organized, and I felt like I was able to get a perspective on Danish life while not being in a homestay
- 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?
  - The orientation at UW-Madison was alright, I think it covered the main things and I left it feeling more prepared than going into it.
  - The orientation at DIS was wonderful and definitely was more beneficial than the one at my home university.

### 2. ACADEMICS:

- a. Evaluate the instruction you received. Compare the following to your home institution's system:
  - class registration
    - Much easier and less complicated
  - classroom structure
    - The structure was much more engaging and brought in the real world to the classroom to make lessons relatable. Every class was directly related to our lives and that made learning the material easier and more fun.
  - instruction

- All the professors I had were wonderful. I never felt like a professor didn't want to be there or wasn't engaged with the material or didn't care about my specific learning. Plus, all the classes were pretty small so it wasn't hard to get to know the professor on a more personal level.
- teacher/student relations
  - I had very good relationships with multiple professors while abroad. They were all very engaged in my learning, especially when I came to them outside of class. The professors at DIS also seem to understand that the students are there to study abroad, so at times they adjust the schedule if the students are talking about how busy everything is (such as around travel weeks).
- grading/exams
  - There are fewer graded assignments overall – much of the grade is left to a final test or presentation. However, I think the grading is easier, so it doesn't feel like as much work is needed to get an A.
- administration
  - DIS administration is very helpful.
- library, computer, and classroom facilities
  - All the facilities are clean and open and very easy to access.
- b. Evaluate the quality and content of instruction.**
  - I think the quality and content of instruction was surprising in the best way. The professors were amazing, and I felt like I learned a lot more about the world in these classes than any others I've taken before.
- c. In general, what did you like best and least about the academics?**
  - I most liked the direct relationship between what we learned in the classroom and what we could experience in the city. I also really enjoyed having a core course and travel breaks.
  - I least liked the attendance policies and that most of the grades were given in the finals.
- d. Are there any courses or instructors you would recommend to future students?**
  - I would *very* highly recommend Travel Writing with Tommy Heisz Madsen to any and all students even the least bit interested in the course. It was a wonderful experience and Tommy is lovely to work with. It was challenging in the way that it made me go out of my comfort zone, but it was easy in that I wanted to do the work for the class.
  - I would also very highly recommend to students interested in taking environmental science, specifically, classes with Susanne Buchardt (especially the core course) because she's really good at explaining difficult concepts and the "why" rather than just giving facts. She cares about effort as much as she cares about understanding and she's also just a really interesting woman.

### **3. HOUSING:**

- a. How would you assess the housing arrangements?**
  - I wish we'd gotten more interaction with Danes but overall I really liked my housing.
- b. How did you locate your housing?**
  - I researched all the options on the DIS website

### **4. EXCHANGE SITE:**

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

- I really liked the DIS location, but it isn't really a campus, and it's not particularly conducive for meeting people who aren't in your housing or core course. The area of DIS is lovely and vibrant.

## 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 had no concerns while there.

## 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.)
  - I got involved in research and had a Danish mentor and I signed up for the visiting host program where I was able to spend time with a Danish family. I became pretty close with one of their daughters and she showed me some of her favorite restaurants and such in Copenhagen. I also met some Danes through my SRA (social residential advisor).
- b. Describe cultural differences and challenges you encountered and how you addressed them. (e.g., gender issues, social etiquette, stereotypes, etc.)
  - I struggled a lot with the Danish homogeneity throughout my time there. My friends and I noticed a few racist (and sexist) jokes and the community as a whole is very white that doesn't really seem to accept people who aren't white very well. That being said, on an individual level most Danes I met and interacted with seemed very accepting and weren't against immigration, so I think that trend of not accepting immigrants and "others" is hopefully beginning to change.

## 7. FINANCIAL:

- a. Describe how the Scan|Design Foundation Fellowship assisted you / made a difference in your decision to study abroad.
  - I knew I wanted to study in Denmark, but I was unsure of how much I would be able to travel or really engage in the community while I was there, so the money from Scan|Design assisted me in those respects. I felt much less pressure monetarily which allowed me to more fully enjoy my time in Copenhagen.
- b. What is the best way to access/transfer money?
  - Credit cards are probably the most common forms of payment. A lot of Danes have mobilepay and many places accept Apple Pay, too. Make sure to get a credit card that doesn't have transaction fees!
- c. How much spending money do you recommend per month? Please include rent, food, transportation, etc.
  - Get a transportation pass of some sort because it saves a ton of money! Minimize food spending by cooking most meals except for the ones where you are with others and the meal is part of a fun time. There's so much to do and the food is just as good in other parts of the world. I didn't have to pay a monthly rent, and I got a stipend that lasted most of the semester for me, so I can't speak to that.
- d. Comment on the relative "cost of living" between your home University and the host University.
  - Relative to each other, DIS wasn't terribly more expensive than my home university because in Copenhagen I didn't have to pay rent. With travel expenses, though, DIS was much more expensive.

## 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 think the pre-departure activities and information could be improved. More specifics would be great and more meetings ahead of time to meet people would be fun!

### **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 loved the activities that I went to! I was sad that I couldn't go to more but they often fell on travel dates for DIS, so I was usually out of town. I really liked the Smorrebrod-making activity.

Suggestions for activities we should add to the program

- During winter it might be fun to do a group ice skating trip!

### **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.

- This exchange is best for a student who is willing to learn more about a culture than they would otherwise by simply arriving there, and for a student who is interested in meeting people from different backgrounds and places.
- I would advise that students in the future make the most of their opportunity! Scan|Design is an incredible institution and the fact that they provide so many fun activities and experiences is a very unique chance, so take advantage of it!

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

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

- On a scale of 12, I would rate the experience a 12 (or 13). I had an amazing time and I would go back in a heartbeat.

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

- Scan|Design helped me with getting a better personal experience in Denmark because of the exposure to different aspects of the culture. I think there are parts of the Danish culture I would not have experienced without the Fellowship Program.

c. What did you consider to be the greatest benefit and challenge of studying abroad?

- The greatest benefit to studying abroad, for me, was the independence and the exposure. I was, for the first time in my life, completely alone. I had no support system and I had to figure all of my problems out by myself and I had to take care of myself. I also was exposed to many new people and places and cultures, and I learned so much from each of them.
- The greatest challenge of studying abroad, for me, was feeling like I was missing out at my home university. I felt like I was missing important things that my friends back home were doing and that I wouldn't be able to stay close with them. However, looking back, the experiences I was having will be much more impactful on my future than one semester without my close friends right next to me. It's possible to stay in touch with home and still be very present in Copenhagen.