

## EXCHANGE STUDENT EVALUATION REPORT

**Student Name:** Elizabeth Umbanhow

**Institution where you studied:**

**Semester of participation:** Summer 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 was eager to have an immersive educational experience in Denmark, and in particular Copenhagen. As a landscape architect, teacher and now a PhD student I was quite aware in advance of study abroad of design trends and history of the built environment in Denmark, but had not previously traveled to Scandinavia or experienced life and design there.
- b. Why did you select the program/University?
  - I selected the "University of Washington Seattle - Copenhagen Classroom" because of the interesting mix of study subjects related to my own interests, namely film and architecture, and was equally curious to have some foundational introduction to literature, history and politics. I was also particularly interested in understanding design through the course lens of diversity and immigration in Denmark and Scandinavia.
- c. What were your expectations?
  - I anticipated a well-rounded introduction to Danish culture and politics, as well as gaining some remedial skills in the language.
  - I also looked forward to visiting a number of physical sites in Denmark, as well as personal visits to Sweden in order to experience and document important designs of the built environment
  - I had anticipated more interaction with Danish students (both graduate and undergraduate) rather than foreign students studying Danish.
- d. What preparations did you make prior to departure?
  - I read some preliminary information about Danish culture on my own, started required course readings, as well as investigating new trends and examples of good urban design.
  - I brought gear for running, cycling and hiking.
- e. How could you improve your preparations?
  - Denmark was quite expensive, which I was aware of going in, but I wish I had better prepared in terms of budgeting for meals.

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

- a. Recommend accommodations for future students upon arrival.
  - The location of the program accommodations was excellent in the Meatpacking District in Vesterbro. While it was a bit odd, in my mind, to stay at a hotel, rather than dormitories or home-stays, I am flexible and was also prepared to share a room with classmates. However, sharing beds with strangers (a fellow classmate) was quite unexpected and uncomfortable at a variety of levels.
  - Although the hotel did have a small kitchen with a fridge and microwave, it was not set up to cook in, e.g. no stovetop or oven, or pots, pans and utensils. This made cooking and eating in challenging.

- 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 transition to both the course and country were relatively easy. It was a well-organized classroom experience with a capable program director who created a highly structured course with clear expectations and coherent series of fieldtrips, cultural experiences and shared meals.

### 3. ACADEMICS:

- a. Evaluate the instruction you received. Compare the following to your home institution's system:
- class registration
    - Registration for the UW classes was relatively simple.
  - classroom structure
    - The classroom logistics and structure was straightforward in terms of both familiarity and ease.
  - instruction
    - A good mix of UW professors and local resources, both formal academics and informal experts in other disciplines.
  - teacher/student relations
    - Relations between students and teachers were informal and informative, while still maintaining a professionalism and respect.
  - grading/exams
    - Grading and exams were fair and clear. It would have been nice to receive more feedback on written work.
  - administration
    - This wasn't necessarily apparent to us, but clearly was a well-oiled machine since as students we were not subject to any apparent snafus or fiscal issues.
  - library, computer, and classroom facilities
    - Gaining access to language class online study course did not occur until the second week of classes, which proved somewhat of a setback in terms of staying current with in-class instruction and expectations. I did not use the KU library, but did study at the municipal library, which was terrific. It would have been nice to have desks in our rooms and/or a more formal study space in our accommodations for work in the evenings—there are only so many cafes you can hang out in and study.
- b. Evaluate the quality and content of instruction.
- Good materials, solid structure, interesting themes, capable instructors, and interesting guest speakers.
- c. In general, what did you like best and least about the academics?
- The mix of lecture, guest lecture and field trips for all four mini-units of the course—politics/history, literature, film, architecture/urban design—was useful and stimulating. For the most part, each unit both complemented and built upon the other, with some helpful overlaps, but not too much repetition of materials. The materials used in the class were appropriate, informative and interesting, providing an excellent introduction to the themes and ideas of the course.
- d. Are there any courses or instructors you would recommend to future students?
- By and large this was a good introduction to the country and culture and that should be the expectation of future students.

### 4. HOUSING:

- a. How would you assess the housing arrangements?
  - Per my comments above, the location of our housing, in a Copenhagen hotel, was excellent, right in the heart of the hip/ster neighborhood in Vesterbro and close to our classrooms as well as restaurants, parks, event spaces and transportation. The hotel was fine and the breakfasts provided through the program were lovely. It was somewhat challenging not to have full kitchen facilities, but my only true complaint was, again, having to share not just a room but a bed with another classmate.
- b. How did you locate your housing?
  - Housing was arranged through the program.

## **5. EXCHANGE SITE:**

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

- The host university Copenhagen University, was excellent, both in terms of the physical facilities and location, but also in terms of interesting design spaces.

## **6. 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 about safety. Some other participants who were not seasoned cyclists did feel uncomfortable with some of our group expeditions and admittedly a large, inexperienced group of tourists on bicycles was a bit harrowing. However, we were given an overview of bicycle rules, etiquette, as well as provided lights, helmets and bike locks.

## **7. 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 took advantage of having a bicycle through the program and cycled 20 miles + on a daily basis, visiting museums, parks, going to concerts, movies, coffee shops, etc. I am fairly conversational, so enjoyed chats with a lot of Danes on an informal basis, as well as making formal appointments with design professionals as part of my own educational and professional development.
- b. Describe cultural differences and challenges you encountered and how you addressed them. (e.g., gender issues, social etiquette, stereotypes, etc.)
  - I tried to be sensitive to the ways in which Danes speak to each other, behavior on the street—walking, cycling and going by bus and train—as well as reading a bit about social customs and etiquette, which was helpful. I've traveled widely in Europe, so Copenhagen did not feel alien. Certainly I had a heightened consciousness of issues of race and ethnicity and tried be sensitive both to the concerns/biases of white Danes in conversation, but also felt comfortable talking to a range of people about challenging political and social issues.
  - I am a seasoned cyclist and intellectually aware of Danish infrastructure for bicycles, but admittedly it took a day or two to become comfortable/familiar with riding in heavy bike traffic. Nonetheless, this was one of my favorite aspects of being in Copenhagen and having a bicycle available for use! Critical way of travel and understanding Danes and Danish culture.

## **8. FINANCIAL:**

- a. Describe how the Scan|Design Foundation Fellowship assisted you / made a difference in your decision to study abroad.

- I would not have been able to participate in the program without the generous support of Scan I Design. The program offered the opportunity to visit a remarkable design city, to garner new knowledge of a Scandinavian city, as well as provided the time and place to conduct preliminary research for my PhD dissertation.
- b. What is the best way to access/transfer money?
  - I utilized credit card and ATMs for withdrawal of cash without issues. I had made arrangements with my bank and credit card company in advance of my departure.
- c. How much spending money do you recommend per month? Please include rent, food, transportation, etc.
  - Rent and transportation (bicycle) were included in our program costs. I spent much more on food per month than I had anticipated because I thought I would have cooking access.
- d. Comment on the relative "cost of living" between your home University and the host University.
  - Seattle is an expensive city. Copenhagen is, however, significantly more expensive than Seattle in terms of food, travel (elsewhere) and entertainment. However, in many respects, the main costs—housing and transportation—were covered under the aegis of the program and we were quite fortunate for that.

## **9. 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 did not have direct contact, except through email, but it seemed a relatively smooth process. I was sad to have missed a Scan I Design reception at my home university due to the fact that I received last minute notification of the event. Otherwise, I received information and updates that were helpful.

### **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.

- Many of the visits and conversations with representatives from diverse communities, as well as experts in the arenas of literature, film, design and politics were fantastic and added depth and meaning to the program.

Suggestions for activities we should add to the program

- In future, it would be fantastic to have a family stay, if only for a weekend.
- Although it might be difficult with the intensity of language classes, it would be nice to have a little more free time during the day for exploration.
- If the architecture component of the program is retained, it might be helpful for non-designers/non-artists to have some preliminary introduction or exercises introducing students how to keep a sketchbook and/or basic steps for drawing. The preliminary plan/section exercise was great but more of that would be helpful.

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

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

- Although the program may serve a graduate student well in terms of providing a basic introduction to Scandinavia and specifically Danish culture, I think the program overall is best suited to motivated and curious undergraduates.

## **11. OVERALL EXPERIENCE:**

- a. How would you rate the quality of the overall experience?
- Overall, the opportunity to live, travel and study in Denmark was invaluable. In addition, being able to interact with Danish faculty and other professional experts and to travel to Aarhus and other sites within Copenhagen were rich. The program provided an engaging, well-organized multi-disciplinary introduction to the country and culture, as well as addressing more specific themes of diversity and immigration through the different disciplinary or subject lenses.
- b. How realistic were your academic and personal expectations and how did the Scan|Design Fellowship Program make a difference?
- I was delighted to participate in the program. I had anticipated that I would be able to spend more time pursuing some of my own research interests but did not fully factor in the amount of time spent in the classroom as well as the time required for studying for the Danish language course.
  - As mentioned above, the support of the Scan | Design Fellowship made the critical difference between being able to participate and not having the financial means to do so.
- c. What did you consider to be the greatest benefit and challenge of studying abroad?
- As an older student and experienced traveler, living and working in Europe is relatively easy at this point. Language can be a barrier, however, this was not the case in a country where citizens are fluent in English as well as other languages aside from Danish.
  - The benefit of travel to any new and/or unfamiliar place is the pleasure and challenge of learning and examining new customs, social structures, histories, etc. as well as to be able to look critically backwards and forwards at one's own assumptions and understandings which inevitably change with travel to new places.

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