

EXCHANGE STUDENT EVALUATION REPORT

Student Name: **Alexis Blakey**
Institution where you studied: **Aarhus University**
Term(s) of participation: **Academic Year 2014-15**
E-mail address: **blakeya10@gmail.com**

1. WHY AND WHERE:

- a. Why did you decide to study in the US or Denmark as an exchange student?
I decided to study in Denmark because it was a great way to study in a country that spoke a different language, yet not necessarily have to speak the native language myself. I could navigate everyday life without knowing Danish and I could attend the regular university.
- b. Why did you select the program/University?
I decided to study in Aarhus because of the school size (very similar to UW-Madison), affordability (compared to Copenhagen) and the transferability of courses.
- c. What were your expectations?
I only had expectations on what I could find on the internet and through past participants. I honestly didn't know a great deal about Denmark beforehand.
- d. What preparations did you make prior to departure?
I contacted previous Aarhus participants in order to get a better understanding of what I would need and could expect to experience.
- e. How could you improve your preparations?
Take a basic Danish course beforehand, so that there is at least a basic understanding when arriving.

2. ARRIVAL/ON-SITE ORIENTATION:

- a. Please recommend accommodations for future students upon arrival.
Sometimes students arrive before university housing begins, in that case I recommend CitySleepIn or airbnb.com for short term accommodation. Long term, the university should have a housing guarantee so that should be fine.
- b. Please 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 adapt?

2. ACADEMICS:

- a. Please evaluate the instruction you received. Compare the following to your home institution's system:
 - class registration
It was a bit difficult to select classes as we were now only allowed to take courses within one study line and there were no time tables listed during our selection process. I had to reselect classes three times because of a "potential overlapping" of courses, which there was no way for me to know about since no class times are provided.
 - classroom structure
Very similar to UW-Madison

- instruction

Much less authority from the professor. Not as much explicit directions given from the professor. A lot more group work.

- teacher/student relations

Much more equal. Call professors by first name and are able to challenge and question professors ideas. You're expected and encouraged to develop your own ideas, even if they conflict with the professors'

- grading/exams

It was annoying that some of the courses were only able to be graded pass/fail. It was also quite interesting to have your entire course grade rest upon your final exam instead of homework assignments and midterm exams spread out throughout the course.

- administration

Frustrating process, honestly probably because of my lack of understanding of Danish practices and vice versa. Communication was not as efficient as I was used to in the US.

- library, computer, and classroom facilities

Similar, although it was very odd to me that the school library closed at 6pm and was hardly open during the weekends.

- b. Please evaluate the quality and content of instruction.

Great! I love that students are encouraged to independently think. It did feel a bit overwhelming at some points, as if the teacher gave us too much freedom and not enough explanation/direction.

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

I liked that the students were pushed to form their own ideas rather than forced to learn only what the professor believed to be valid. Sometimes the option for free thinking went a little too far and there were too many potentially valid ideas.

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

Within Arts, Stephen Joyce and Jody Pennington

3. HOUSING:

- a. How would you assess the housing arrangements?

Very different from Madison. The fact that they can potentially be many kilometers from campus, there are no campus dining services. But they are generally in better condition than UW dorms.

- b. How did you locate your housing?

Housing was assigned through the International Centre Housing Office and then my AU assigned mentor helped me physically find it.

4. EXCHANGE SITE:

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

I considered it Denmark's version of UW-Madison. It was a good college town, with plenty of young people and youth activities.

5. HEALTH AND SAFETY:

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

Denmark is pretty safe, personal safety was not an issue. Making doctor appointments was easy enough, yet their availability was very limited when compared to American standards.

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 volunteered at the student house and joined Friendship Ambassadors, Run for Friendship and ASV volleyball club.

- b. Describe cultural differences and challenges you encountered and how you addressed them. (e.g., gender issues, social etiquette, stereotypes, etc.)

Danes are stereotypically hard to befriend and (by American standards) a bit standoffish, but it's just that they do not want to invade your privacy. As an exchange student I needed to acknowledge that I was going to have to be the outgoing one and very persistent. I would say yes to event invites, even if they weren't the most interesting, as I looked at these events as a great way to broaden my horizons and get exposure to new things. Social etiquette was a bit more difficult to navigate as the community I was most part of was international and therefore had large ranges of social etiquette. I think the most important thing is just to be conscious and not easily offended.

7. FINANCIAL:

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

I already knew I wanted to study abroad and ScanDesign only became an option once I chose Denmark.

- b. What is the best way to access/transfer money?

I had UW-Credit Union so I was only charged 1% fee every time I used the ATM, with no ATM fee. I would suggest that or opening a Danish bank account and transferring a lump sum right away.

- c. How much spending money do you recommend per month? Please include rent, food, transportation, etc.

I averaged around \$900 a month, half of which went to rent.

- d. Please comment on the relative "cost of living" between your home University and the host University.

I would say Aarhus is generally more expensive than Madison, but especially for "luxury" items (going out, public transportation, imported foods).

8. EXCHANGE/SCAN|DESIGN FELLOWSHIP ADMINISTRATION:

- a. Please comment on the assistance and activities by the Scan|Design Fellowship coordinator before your departure, upon arrival, and during your stay. What worked and what could be improved or changed?

Maria was a great coordinator! She reached out to us to see how she could help prior to our arrival. She was open to suggestions as to activities and events which the Aarhus group wanted to participate in. It's great to have a coordinator in Aarhus, as we were unable to attend most of the Copenhagen events .

- b. Please evaluate services and effectiveness of the University administrative offices.

There were many times I felt neglected. Our advising office was definitely understaffed. When my personal advisor left for vacation (during the last week of course registration), we were not given warning or provided with a temporary advisor. I found it most efficient just to go into the office, rather than email. Also

all of the offices seemed to be completely separate, so often if one office couldn't help, they had no idea where to next direct you.

9. PROGRAM/STUDENT TYPE:

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

I would say an ideal student for this exchange would be an outgoing student. Danes respect privacy and will not typically openly welcome newcomers, so an exchange student must be willing to be persistent and open to new experiences in order to break through the typical Danish exterior. I would suggest utilizing the student house (they have plenty of free/low-cost bonding activities for international students), but also make an effort with Danes. You will most likely be required to form a group in class, make sure that you are part of a Danish group.

10. OVERALL EXPERIENCE:

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

Overall I loved Aarhus. The administration was sometimes difficult to work with, but patience and persistence is key.

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

ScanDesign was an excellent resource in raising my experience here, as it gave me the opportunity to see a more authentic side of Denmark. Bornholm, Legoland, and Skagen are some of my favorite memories from my experience abroad, and I would never have experienced that without ScanDesign.

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

The greatest benefit and challenge in studying abroad would be learning more about yourself. Sure being abroad introduces you to new culture/language/way of life, but it's being immersed in that situation and being forced out of your comfort zone which provides the benefit and challenge. If you're up to the challenge and able to capitalize on the newly expanded comfort zone, then that's where the benefit comes in.

FEEL FREE TO ADD OTHER COMMENTS YOU MAY HAVE.

I loved Aarhus so much that I decided to stay for my Master's degree here. If any new Aarhus ScanDesign students are interested in connecting with me, feel free to give them my email (blakeya10@gmail.com).