

EXCHANGE STUDENT EVALUATION REPORT

Student Name: Kami Lemke

Institution where you studied: Aarhus School of Architecture

Semester of participation: Fall 2014

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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?
 - ScanDesign offered an irresistible opportunity to move abroad and study that I couldn't pass up. Denmark is known for great design, so as a student of architecture, it was an ideal place to participate in a design studio and learn within a different studio structure than my home university, The University of Washington.
- b. Why did you select the program/University?
 - The program chose me – after a last-minute rejection from The Danish Royal Academy, the Aarhus School of Architecture willingly accepted me as an exchange student.
- c. What were your expectations?
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- d. What preparations did you make prior to departure?
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- e. How could you improve your preparations?
 - If I had been able, I would have worked harder to secure housing outside of the kollegium network, and closer to the school and to the center of town. Finding housing independently was difficult for me as I was traveling for two months before my arrival in Denmark.
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2. ARRIVAL/ON-SITE ORIENTATION:

- a. Recommend accommodations for future students upon arrival.
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- 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?
 - There was a very informative lunch session with Natalie, the ScanDesign coordinator in Copenhagen, at UW before departing to Denmark where we were able to ask questions and she helped to prepare us for the transition. I had a better understanding of some of the culture and aspects of the climate that might be very different from what I had experienced before.
 - The orientation at AAA was brief and introduced the new international students to the technology of the school and how to use the library. Missing was a campus tour or even a map guide to help us find locations in the future. There was also no instruction on the workshop facilities, which would have been valuable.

2. ACADEMICS:

a. Evaluate the instruction you received. Compare the following to your home institution's system:

- class registration

- No registration – students at AAA are enrolled in one course, the design studio. During the first week, students rank their top choices after a presentation of each studio and are assigned to a studio.

- classroom structure

- My studio was large – over thirty students – and we were each assigned to an instructor who was loosely responsible for overseeing our progress. We were able to meet with all instructors, however, provided we arranged a meeting time with them. To supplement and support the studio projects, we participated in lectures and workshops, such as a thatch roof instruction and a BIM course.

- instruction

- The involvement of the instructors varied a great deal. I believe there were officially five instructors participating in the studio, but two lived/worked in Copenhagen. Of these two, only one visited Aarhus on a few occasions. The three local instructors also varied. One was a PhD student, so she was extremely busy and eventually had to excuse herself from studio meetings altogether. The remaining two were fairly attentive, though they were both busy with work outside of the university as well.

- teacher/student relations

- The rapport between students and teachers is rather informal. Everyone goes by first names and teachers participate in the annual Christmas lunch/party that the students put on each fall, which includes a great deal of drinking and recklessness. The teachers I interacted with were helpful and knowledgeable and fair.

- grading/exams

- The only grade I received was the passing grade at the end of the term. There were no exams, as there were no real classes.

- administration

- The administration at AAA was not quite as sharp as that at the UW. Often they needed reminding about activating student access keys to studios, misspelled names on important documents or got names completely wrong (such as on my acceptance letter that I needed to submit for my visa), and were difficult to reach or took a long time replying to questions. I was not notified about the school's housing offer until the last minute because they had been sending all of my emails to the wrong address. In fact, I am still waiting for my housing deposit to be returned through the school, three months after my lease was up.

- library, computer, and classroom facilities

- There are very few computers available for students to use. It is advisable to arrive with a computer with all of the programs needed for project work. The library was wonderful, when it was open, which was from 8:30 – 3:30 or so on weekdays, with shorter hours on Fridays (typical of Denmark). The studio space I was in was too small for the amount of students that were placed in it, although we were provided with (low) desks, chairs, lamps, and waste bins. The workshops have great tools, like a giant laser cutter, metal shop, robot, waterjet cutter, and foam cutters – but many of them, like the laser cutter, require a fee, which is bothersome, especially when everything in Denmark costs more to begin with.

- b.** Evaluate the quality and content of instruction.
 - Although I only had contact with three or four instructors, in studio and in lectures, they were all very well-informed, knowledgeable, and passionate about what they were teaching.
- c.** In general, what did you like best and least about the academics?
 - The hardest part of the academics for me was scheduling desk crits with my instructor. Without pre-set deadlines or meetings, it was difficult to stick with a self-imposed deadline. I met with my instructor only three times individually to discuss my project. Sometimes, knowing that the meetings were so rare, I didn't feel prepared enough to bother the instructor with what I had produced or felt too much pressure to present something astounding, when all I needed was a little bit of advice. The resulting design and drawings are something I am proud of, but it felt strange operating so independently.
 - Also difficult to adjust to was the level of work done by other students in the studio. The live/work balance is much healthier in Denmark, with students and faculty taking more time off on weekends/weeknights, but for me it felt like my fellow students were not working very hard and they also made poor excuses about why their drawings were inadequate, etc.
- d.** Are there any courses or instructors you would recommend to future students?
 - The studio that I was in, Regenerative Architecture, was probably the most similar to a design studio in architecture at UW. It followed a straightforward progression and the outcome was similar to what is expected at UW. I might recommend taking a studio like MAD where students design and fabricate various pieces, like furniture or temporary installations – that way there is an opportunity to use the workshop tools and some of the better facilities at the school.
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3. HOUSING:

- a.** How would you assess the housing arrangements?
 - I accepted the offer from the school to live in a dorm or kollegium. For my needs, it was adequate. Since I was there for a short time, I wasn't interested in buying furniture or spending a lot of money/effort on my housing. The dorm was affordable, but it was outside of the city center and required that I ride the bus (not free for students like at UW) or ride a bike. I did a combination of both commute types. I had my own room and bathroom with furniture provided, but I did have to buy linens for the bed and bath. I shared a kitchen with 14 other students, from all over Aarhus, mostly undergraduates. They were friendly, although there were some issues with cleanliness in the shared spaces.
- b.** How did you locate your housing?
 - The school and the housing coordinator arranged the dorm room.

4. EXCHANGE SITE:

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

- AAA is located in a great place – at the edge of old town Aarhus or the Latin Quarter, which is full of windy cobblestone streets and tiny shops and restaurants. I was happy to have a campus there because I was able to wander and explore the area, which was more interesting than other Aarhus neighborhoods. I have heard that the school is planning a new campus in a different neighborhood, so that may all change in the coming years.

5. HEALTH AND SAFETY:

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

- The risk of theft was definitely higher at AAA than at UW. Students never left valuables out and always locked things in a locker when leaving the studio. In fact, the last day I was at the studio, there was an attempted break-in and the door handles were knocked off of the doors.

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 met several friends during the international student orientation and would go out and do things with them. Also with students in my studio. I wasn't involved in any sports or clubs.

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

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7. FINANCIAL:

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

- The fellowship was a major factor in my decision – I would not have been able to pay for travel, accommodations, and tuition without the financial help and I would not have gone without it.

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

- I'm not sure if it is the best way, but I used a credit card with no international fee for most of my spending. Because I didn't set up a Danish bank account, I had to pay rent in cash at the post office, which involved using the ATMs to withdraw the amount I needed.

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

- I can't say about the total spending money, but my rent was about \$400/mo.

d. Comment on the relative "cost of living" between your home University and the host University.

- It is definitely more expensive to live in Denmark, though Aarhus is cheaper than Copenhagen. Dining out at restaurants is where I noticed the greatest difference between costs.

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?

- The coordinators were very helpful and I can't recommend any changes.

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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.

- Maria, the coordinator in Aarhus, was very nice and flexible about our activities.

Suggestions for activities we should add to the program

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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.

- Attending AAA is best suited for a student who is confident and able to work independently. I wouldn't suggest the exchange to someone who has never traveled before – someone with more experience fending for themselves is ideal.

10. OVERALL EXPERIENCE:

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

- Overall, I am glad that I participated in the exchange and I appreciate the new perspective about design and architecture that I gained at AAA. If I did not cherish these new ways of thinking and ideas that I have returned with, then my outlook would be different. There were many frustrating aspects in dealing with AAA administration, which I continue to struggle with all these months later.
- Aarhus was a great, manageable city to live in for the exchange. There are a lot of interesting developments happening concerning urban design and architecture that I look forward to following in the future and I hope that I can return to see how the city has changed.

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

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

- The greatest benefit is the new knowledge and perspective that I have gained that is unique to studying architecture at AAA. I value the new ideas and ways of thinking that I have because I know they are unique and a result of the exchange.
- The biggest challenge was not knowing anyone initially and being somewhat cut off from friends and family. Communication back home is more difficult while abroad when considering the different time zones and convenient methods of talking.

FEEL FREE TO ADD OTHER COMMENTS YOU MAY HAVE.