

Scan|Design Foundation Evaluation

Student Name: Megan Hopp

Institution where you studied: University of Copenhagen

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1. WHY AND WHERE:

a. Why did you decide to study in the US or Denmark as an exchange student?

I decided to go on exchange in Denmark after a visit to Copenhagen 2 years prior. After spending two weeks in the city, I realized instantly that it was a place with a culture and atmosphere in which I could thrive and learn. It reminded me a lot of Seattle, which made it feel like home, even though I had never been there before and knew practically no one. However, it also retained the mystery and excitement of an unknown city and culture. For myself, I knew that I needed to put myself out of my comfort zone and experience a new way of life to gain a better perspective on the world and myself, and Denmark seemed like the perfect place to start.

b. Why did you select the program/University?

I study computer science, and the University of Copenhagen is renowned for its CS program. Additionally, having the campuses centralized in the city of Copenhagen was a huge plus for me, as I knew it would allow me to absorb an abundance of culture and experiences in the hub of Denmark.

c. What were your expectations?

I honestly didn't know exactly what to expect from the culture, people, and education, but I what I wanted was to learn more about myself and how I adapt to uncomfortable situations. I feel as though I have accomplished that, and now I cannot imagine living a life in which I am not constantly trying to challenge myself and try new things, meet new people, and go new places.

d. What preparations did you make prior to departure?

It was necessary to obtain a residence permit for my stay in Denmark, which included going to San Francisco with the appropriate documentation in order to get biometrics completed (which essentially meant taking my facial photograph and fingerprints). Additionally, I bought insurance for my study abroad, which is mandatory for all exchange students to purchase at the University of Washington.

I alerted my bank in Seattle that I would be going abroad, so that they would not suspect fraud while charges were being made in Europe. I could have also updated my cell phone service to allow international use, but I opted to go without my American phone, and simply got a prepaid phone once I got to Copenhagen.

All of these preparations were relatively easy to do, but planning was necessary to ensure that nothing was forgotten.

e. How could you improve your preparations?

The process of getting a residence permit is a bit confusing at first, as I had to have documentation on residency of the US, proof of financial support, proof of acceptance to the university in which I would be studying, a letter of intent as to why I was going abroad to Denmark, payment for the permit in cash (about \$300), and another form of identification. Once I realized everything I needed, it was simple to go through the rest of the process, but figuring out what was needed caused a bit of stress and frustration for me. To improve for a future departure, open communication with the Danish embassy/consulate and asking explicitly for what is needed will alleviate much of that stress.

2. ARRIVAL/ON-SITE ORIENTATION:

a. Please recommend accommodations for future students upon arrival.

N/A

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?

The orientation at KU was very thorough and clear. It was a 4-day long program before the semester started, complete with campus tours, seminars on what is expected of international students as well as what resources are available to them if they find themselves in need, and a mentorship program with Danish students who are very friendly and helpful in making sure you get settled easily and quickly so that you can start adjusting to Danish culture. Coming from a completely different education structure in the US, I found the explanations of what is expected of students in Danish universities and how evaluations are made extremely helpful. It made me feel much more confident going into the first days of courses.

2. ACADEMICS:

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

- class registration

The registration system is not as intuitive as the University of Washington, but I found that early preparation and planning out which courses are appropriate to take for my degree path, talking to advisors, and familiarizing myself with the system and documentation on how the system works was very helpful.

- classroom structure

Classroom structure in Denmark is very different from the University of Washington. There is less accountability by professors and staff, and there are almost no graded assignments during the term to check on how you are progressing. Students are expected to speak up and ask questions of, or argue with, the professors to stimulate academic discussion and debate. This is much different than the “sit and listen to the lecture, ask questions during quiz section” style at the University of Washington.

- grading/exams

Grades at the University of Copenhagen are mainly determined by the final exam (in my case, at least). There is typically an oral exam, which lasts anywhere from 20-30 minutes, after which you receive your course grade. Written exams are sometimes given as well, but in my case I only took oral exams. It is a very different setup than the typical American style of having weekly assignments, midterms, and then final exams or projects. Additionally, classes are rarely curved like they are in the United States. Potentially everyone in the course could get a perfect score, which makes the learning environment more collaborative and supportive, as there is less competition amongst students.

b. Please evaluate the quality and content of instruction.

The quality of education at the University of Copenhagen is world-renowned. The faculty is of a very high caliber and they are extremely good at what they do and how they teach.

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

I enjoyed the group-work, as it allowed me to learn more from my peers, both about the course content and the culture of Denmark. Additionally, as classes were not curved, I felt much less pressure to ask for help from my peers or to offer help to others, as they were genuinely willing to help me so that we all did well in the course, instead of trying to “beat the curve.”

3. HOUSING:

a. How would you assess the housing arrangements?

The housing at the University of Copenhagen is a bit hectic, as it is very limited in the city. I truly enjoyed living at Signalhuset Kollegiet, but I know some students did not get their first choice in housing or did not know how to go about educating themselves on their options. Browsing the Housing Foundation website and housing accommodations page early on is helpful in fully comprehending the options available to students and which locations would be most suitable.

b. How did you locate your housing?

I received a housing allocation through the Housing Foundation.

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.

Copenhagen is very safe, in my opinion. I never felt threatened in any part of the city while I was there. Additionally, medical care is provided for all exchange students with residence permits by the government of Denmark. Doctors within a certain number of kilometers are assigned to each and every citizen or resident of Denmark, so health concerns can be addressed easily.

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 lived in a kollegium, which was fantastic for getting to know the culture and the members of the community. There were many social events and opportunities to explore the culture with people both from Denmark, and Europe in general. Social life is definitely a major part of Danish culture, whether it be hosting dinner parties with friends, or going to events on campus. There is a plethora of opportunities for social interaction and to get to know the life in Copenhagen better.

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

There were few major cultural challenges I faced in adjusting from Seattle to Copenhagen. The main adjustment was learning about the biking culture, as there are prescribed rules for bikers on the roads as well as for pedestrians to respect the space for everyone.

In general, Danes are very open-minded about sexuality and gender issues, so that is something to be aware of when going to Denmark. They are very accepting of all people.

7. FINANCIAL:

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

I could not have had the amazing experience in Copenhagen without the support of the Scan|Design Foundation. Denmark is an absolutely incredible country, filled with great culture, people, food, ideals, and nature, however it is also quite expensive. The financial support provided through the fellowship allowed me to fully take in all of the incredible experiences I was having without the extra burden of finances. Additionally, the cultural outings and social events put on by the Scan|Design fellows were priceless in the memories made, lessons learned, and lifelong friendships formed.

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

The cost of living in Copenhagen is quite a bit higher than in Seattle. I would estimate roughly twice the cost for accommodation, food, and other expenses.

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?

All of the coordinators for Scan|Design were extremely organized, communicative, and friendly. They were helpful in offering advice, help in getting situated, and information on Danish life and culture. They were open to suggestions on activities and feedback, as well. I would not change a single aspect.

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

The University of Copenhagen administrative offices are also very helpful, but not always the most communicative or punctual. I had to reach out and ask about important matters to ensure they were being attended to. That being said, they always did an extremely good job at what was required for the task or request.

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.

This type of exchange is best for an independent, open-minded, and adventurous student who is willing to fully immerse him or herself in a new culture and learn as much as possible. There is a lot of planning and organization that goes into preparing for this type of exchange, so a highly motivated student is best-suited for this exchange. If they are willing to put in the work, they will be able to reap the full reward that Denmark offers and have their lives changed forever.

10. OVERALL EXPERIENCE:

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

The quality of my experience was very high. Even though Scan|Design allocated an amount of money to me to chase my dream, I cannot put a price on the experiences and time I spent in Denmark, so I will forever be in debt to the Foundation and the people I met that helped me achieve my goals and added even more brilliance to an already phenomenal experience.

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

I do not think I fully understood the impact Denmark would have on me. It helped me grow academically, and as an individual. I feel as though I found out what I was really made of while I was there, and that unexpected self-realization is the greatest reward from my time abroad. Without the Scan|Design Fellowship Program, I would never have been able to take this journey and reach this new chapter in my life.

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

The greatest benefit of studying abroad are the challenges you face. They help you grow as a person and discover how much you are truly capable of. The biggest challenge of studying abroad is going back to your old life, but you can take comfort in the fact that you will always carry a piece of Denmark (or wherever you travel) home in the knowledge and maturity you gain from each experience.