



Exchange Report

THE BASICS

Your name: Scott

Your email address: sstubbs@uvic.ca

Your partner university: University of Copenhagen (København)

Your UVic major during the exchange: BSc Geography

UVic session(s) during which you did your exchange: Sept – Dec 2006

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GENERAL EVALUATION

Please rate your overall exchange experience on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 5

Comments:

It is great getting to travel to the far corners of the world and meet an extreme wide range of people that are the same age as you and grew up in the same neighborhood to others from many other countries that you never knew anything about!! On top of that, studying in Europe is great because, in great contrast to North America, all the countries are so close together and air travel is very inexpensive. This means that I have traveled from Copenhagen to Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, Prague, and obviously all around Denmark.

I must add that my situation is much different then most because I am living here in Denmark with my eldest sister and her new husband. The biggest reasons that I traveled here was to attend the Danish half of their wedding and get to spend some time with them, learning of the way that they live over here. This has of course given me many opportunities that all other exchange students are not offered and allowed me to see how Danish people live day to day. It has also not allowed me to live as other exchange students have where there are only reliant upon themselves. But I feel it has worked out great for me.

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ARRIVAL

How satisfied were you with your experience of arriving in your host country or city? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 2

Comments:

This once again was a very unique situation.....I flew Vancouver to Copenhagen via Heathrow airport in London. The day I flew was one day after the terrorist scare at Heathrow, so obviously the security was utterly ridiculous and delays were unavoidable. Not only this, I was not allow to even carry a magazine or book on board the plane and they made my throw it all out. It was just a long day that was frustrated even more because no one knew exactly what was going on and all the different securities were telling you different things and they basically just did whatever they wanted?!?! And when they are carrying M-16's, you just listen and don't argue if you want to continue you journey...

What assistance, if any, did you receive when you arrived at your exchange destination?

Well once again, I had my sister, her husband and his parents traveling on the same day but flying via Frankfurt. So they had a much easier flight with less security and then they just waited at the Copenhagen airport for me to arrive.

How difficult was it for you to obtain your travel documents (visa, etc.)?

To obtain the original residence permit was very simple actually. They say that it usually takes two or three

months and I had my permit in 6 working days!! But...I was also told by the Danish consulate in Vancouver that my residence permit WAS my work permit as well which would allow me to work a maximum of 15hours per week. Well, I just got a job for December and now that I can read a little Danish, I noticed that right on the residence permit, it says that this permit is not valid for work...hmmmm. So, I had to go fill out exactly the same 5 pages of paperwork as I did for my residence permit, with the difference of checking one box. Now that is going to take one to two months to receive (I will be home by then) and then I have to take that permit to another office to get a tax form that lets my employer know how much they are allowed to tax me!! So, until I give my employer that, they are going to tax me the maximum amount of 60%!!!!!!

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ORIENTATION AND ASSISTANCE

How satisfied were you with the orientation and assistance available to students at your partner university? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 3

Comments:

Well, there is a mentor program offered here where they will match you up with an older student that will show you the ropes and where you need to go. But, I did not use this program since I had two guides that could answer any questions I had. But, from what I did hear, the University of Copenhagen accepted about 1500 exchange students whereas they had never had more then 1000 before...But they maintained the same amount of resources and people to assist this much larger group. This meant that on average, there was one mentor for about 50 exchange students and that is ridiculous. This is even more ridiculous when you learn that this university is not a single campus university. There are classrooms, buildings, offices, faculties, etc. spread out all over the entire city!! So, you may have a class in one place, then a 20minute bike ride to your next class, thus making it even harder to learn your way around the school grounds.

How easy was it to find information you needed to know right away?

Well it is nice how almost everyone can speak English here!! But, not all the information you need is translated into English, so it can be hard at times!! It was often stressful and frustrating even just trying to find out what days my classes started on!!

What help did you receive from the international staff or office?

The international office was helpful when you ask them specific questions that they feel are related to them. Often, they tell you that they are not in control of that and that you will have to go speak to another office and that office can be down the street or across the city!!! One large issue that I had with the international office was that they sent an email to all exchange students in our school email account telling us that we can ignore any email sent to us in Danish because all important emails will be sent to us in English. Well, that is COMPLETELY wrong!!! About 95% of the emails I receive are in Danish and a few of them are very important and I have missed things because of this!! So, I was extremely frustrated when I was told this incorrect information!!!

What was your impression of the international staff or office?

They were definitely helpful when you went there, but, as I mentioned about the massive increase in exchange students, they often had too much on their plates at all times!! I don't see why they would accept this much larger number of students if they were not able to handle it with the resources they had available.

What was the orientation like at your partner university, if there was one, and how well did it suit your needs?

I touched on this above in the comments section...

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange site and were there people you could talk to about what you were experiencing?

As I have already told, I had people to rely on and help me get adjusted. My situation also allowed me to play soccer with a local mens football club which was great!!

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HOUSING

How satisfied were you with the housing available to students? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 5

Comments

Well I had a room that I helped my sister and brother-in-law finish building for me in their basement. So housing for me was no problem at all...But with other students I have met here, it was a much different situation!!! Once again, the larger number of students and the same resources to assist those students became a real big issue!! Students were told that they would be offered housing by September 1st if they had required it, but some people had to end up living in hostels at their own expense for up to three weeks because the international office was not able to find enough placements for all the students with the resources and staff they had available to them. There also are very few 'student residences' and many people are just living in apartments or even are being billeted in other peoples houses. Then the prices range from about \$175 to \$700 per month!! And location varied greatly as well with some living in the downtown area and some are a 40minute transit ride away from the city center.

How early could students move in to housing at the beginning of term?

Like I said, many students had to fend for themselves with no "promised" accommodations being offered until mid or late September when they were promised it for the beginning of September!! I know this actually annoyed one friend so much that he returned home and dropped out of the exchange program. And the extra expense of having to live in a hostel (if they could find an available room which was hard to find) definitely annoyed people greatly.

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities?

There is no meal plans because there are no residences with cafeterias. There are a few cafes in different faculties around the city which are usually a little more reasonably priced compared to the rest of the ridiculously expensive food here!! Well actually, everything is just ridiculously expensive!! Some people have apartments with private kitchens, others have communal kitchens within an old residence building and others have brand new res buildings that are stocked with all brand new, name brand gear!!!!

How satisfied were you with the food?

The food is good, but the price is not!!! For example, though I don't eat fast food, a basic meal that will cost you \$5 to 6 in Canada will cost you \$11 to 15 here!! For the same thing!!! Even a half bottle of water at 7-11 will cost you \$4!! Then, for going out for food, at the most basic place to even get a burger and fries or a sandwich that would cost you under \$10 in Canada would be a minimum of \$15 to 20 here or more! Actually, the ONLY thing that is less expensive here is beer. And I am completely serious!! Everything but beer is much more expensive here!!

How close are the residences to the university?

Well I live in the town of Ringsted that is 60km away, but by a regional train it only takes me about 37min to get to town. But for the apartments and residences of others, some are literally 5 steps away (from some school buildings) and some are 30km away?!?! They are spread out all over the place with no pattern.

Could students stay in the residences during major holidays?

I believe so...

Which residence would you recommend to UVic students?

Any one that you can be accepted into!! Actually, the way they do it is they ask you how much money you are willing to spend a month on rent, then they will find you a place that is that amount!!! Like I said, prices range from 800-3450 DKK (about \$175-700) per month. But I know of some very nice ones that are about 1500 DKK in the Amager area.

If you lived in off-campus housing, how easy was it to find?

already told you...

What should future UVic exchange students know about living off-campus?

BUY A BIKE!!!! It is the only and best way to get around in this town!!! Most students either live in Amager or Nørrebro. Actually, the biggest piece of advice is just make sure to take a very good look at the place in person

before you accept it because some of my friends have been offered places with insect infestations, or one bathroom for an entire floor, or one pay per use shower for an entire building that is located in the basement.... So go check out what you are offered before you take it because there are lots of nice places.

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COURSE REGISTRATION

How satisfied were you with the registration process at your partner university? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 1

Comments: Holy crap this was frustrating and took me months to figure it out!!!

Please describe the registration process at your partner university.

Well, they don't always register for classes beforehand, but sometimes do...you apparently just have to know?!? Most of the time, one does not register for the course until October when you actually sign up for the exam, not the course. But then, sometimes you have to be pre-registered for a course otherwise you cannot take it. And of course, most of the websites are in Danish with extremely general and much less useful editions in English that only have a fraction of the needed information.

What kind of help was available?

Once they have accepted you into a faculty, they get an email from an advisor in that faculty that says please contact me with the courses that you want to take and I will make sure that you get signed up for them...sounds great...But you have to find the right person to talk to in each faculty if you want to take a course in that faculty because they are all separate. And you cannot sign up yourself as WEBREG, but rather you have to get someone to register you into classes. Ya...it's just as frustrating as it sound!!!!

How successful were you in registering for classes you wanted?

Well here is another fun story...see, I am a BSc Geog student and I was accepted into the science faculty here. But the frustrating thing was that all of the first year classes are only taught in Danish and most of the other courses are taught in English...but I was not told this until mid-september. So, I found only one science course that actually interested me so I finally found the correct person to contact and explained my situation thoroughly so they signed me up for it...Then, I couldn't figure out when or where the course was going to be held?!?! Eventually, after I got many emails of mine translated into English via my sister, I realized that the course had started two weeks before any other course and that I had already missed about 20hours of instruction before any of my other courses even had begun...then, I finally figured out that they had just changed this class from an English-taught to Danish-taught without changing its status online. This is when I learned that all first year was taught in Danish only... So, needless to say I dropped the course. And then I was told that because of my previous experience, I would be able to take any of the other bachelor or master level courses if I wish, but all of them build on basic skills with particular computer programs that are only taught in first year courses....Right here, this is basic Danish politics where once you are in, you are set for life, but to get into the circle is ridiculously impossible because there are always 5 requirements that contradict one another and you always have to do one thing before you can do the next, but u can't do that till u do this, and u can't do this till u do that, then....yada yada yada...it just runs you in circles while they tax the hell out of you!!!!!! Anyways, after that tangent, even though I am in the science department here, I am taking no classes!! It was easy to enroll in my Danish language course and Danish culture course because they are specific to international exchange students. Then there was also my masters level 'Conflicts in Africa' course which sounded interesting and that was fairly simple to sign up for as well.

What advice would you offer to next year's exchange students about registration at your partner university?

Set some time aside...and don't just assume that they will let you know what to do or when to do it!!! You are just a number and numbers mean nothing when there are lots of numbers to deal with!!!

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ACADEMICS

How satisfied were you with the academic program at your partner university? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 3 or 4

Comments:

I already vented about the science faculty and my fun dealing with them...But the other courses are much nicer. The Danish culture course and Danish language course are a must do for someone who comes here. They allow you to understand the Danes a little more and also to visit a few places of significance to the Danish culture. Those two courses I would highly recommend to all who travel here.

How did the style of teaching at your partner university compare with that at UVic?

Not too different in the delivery of the material to the student, but the assessment of students is drastically different!!!! Here I will give u a course-by-course breakdown.

Danish language course – here, we had two three hour lectures a week and the only test we had was one final written exam. The other parts of your mark was for attending over 80% of the classes and a short oral conversation with a classmate before the written exam.

Danish culture course – Once again you have to attend 80% of the classes for 7.5 ECTS (European Transfer Credit System) and then you have to write a final 8-10 page paper worth another 7.5 ECTS.

Conflicts in Africa – Here, all we have to do is one 10-12 page paper with at least 1000 pages of related readings in your reading list which has to do with the ECTS.

How did the workload compare to what you would expect at UVic?

haha, work!!! Ya, I kinda did nothing all semester!!! Wait, I probably shouldn't be telling you that...oh well. And I am not the only one. There is very little work that anybody has done because of the lack of midterms, assignment or other exams or papers. But I should have been doing some more readings, that is just screwing me over for now when I have to make it up.

How many courses did you take in your first term abroad?

3

Your second term?

only one term

What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other UVic students visiting your partner university?

3 or 4. Because the reason to go on exchange is rarely only about the schooling, it usually has to do much more about experience, growing, traveling and just having fun.

What specific courses would you recommend to visiting UVic students?

The beginning Danish language course and the Danish culture course.

Why?

I explained them above...

What advice would you give UVic students about succeeding academically at your partner university?

keep up with your readings...

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your partner university?

I have not been to a computer lab, the royal library is fantastic and I just use the internet at home.

What electronic devices would you recommend a UVic student bring (laptop, PDA, etc.)?

laptop is always useful...

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COSTS

Books - per term: books....ahhh....

Accommodation - per month: 800-3450 DKK (\$175-700 cdn)

Meals - per month: depends if u eat in or out, how good of a shopper u are, and how much u eat

Local transportation - per month: about \$300 because I have to take a regional train...

Health insurance - per term: paid for by the Danish state (your CPR card that u get when u arrive)

Personal spending - per term: once again...depending on what u do...but everything is more expensive

Communications (phone, etc.) - per term: phone plan was about \$30 because everyone just SMS's here
Other university related fees - per term: tuition!!!! \$2500!!! And get used to meeting Europeans that have free education, get paid to be a student, complain cause some of them only get paid 400 euros a month to study in Denmark while you are paying more then that with no funding except your own personal savings....ya, it's frustrating especially when I had to pay extra for my language course therefore meaning that I am paying \$1200 per course here for the two other courses. And extremely frustrating when I get none of the benefits of being a student here such as free, or even discounted transportation because danes get reimbursed through a government program called SU and therefore I cannot get it.....yet they still complain that they are not getting paid enough to attend school....trust me, I have won a few arguments here once they understand the exchange rates...

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EXTRA-CURRICULAR/SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

How satisfied were you with the out-of-class opportunities at your exchange site? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 4

Comments:

What organized activities (clubs, sports, etc.) were available to students?

There is a group based around the mentor program that offers outings and trips. Each faculty offers weekend cabin trips near the beginning of the semester. I played with a men's football club in my town but that is only because I knew someone to get me in...

What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays?

find some cheap plane tickets on sterling.dk and go see Europe!!! It is not like you are here everyday!!!

What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus?

none....and like I explained above, trying to get anything done that involves Danish bureaucracy can be frustrating and take a long time!! So if u plan to work here, get your work permit right away because it can take a long time!!!

Off-campus?

good luck!!! The only reason I found any work is because it is at the same place that my sister works...IKEA. Regardless of where u want to work, u will most likely need to know how to speak Danish and that is no easy feat!!!

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

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SAFETY AND HEALTH

How safe did you feel at your exchange site? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 5

Comments

Especially after seeing a few other European cities and knowing many North American cities, I feel safe to say that this is the safest place!!! It comes from the fact that there are people living everywhere!!! Even in the city center, above the shops, there are people homes. So at any given time, if u were ever to get into a situation and u were to yell, it would only be seconds until someone was there at your aid. I have heard that Stockholm is safer then here, but I would be very surprised to see a cleaner or safer city around!!! That is by far one of the nicest things about this town, no homeless people or bums, very clean, very safe, extremely large amounts of bikes and bike infrastructure, many non-car areas in the city center, polite people, and people follow the rules!!!! To an extreme!!! If you are waiting at a crosswalk at 4am and it says do not cross, even if there is no car in site, a Dane will wait to cross until they are supposed to!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Weirdos!!!

What are the biggest safety concerns for future exchange students going to your exchange site?

finding a home

What are the biggest health concerns for future exchange students going to your exchange site?

being able to afford food

PERSONAL AND CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

What was it like making friends?

very easy. I have met people from all corners of the world!!! Get facebook.com, it is the best way to stay in touch with friends and met people who are coming here.

How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students?

well, other than my sister's and husband's friends, not very successful.... They actually tell you at the orientation meeting that Danes are very closely connected people and they are very tentative. Danes are well known to have small groups of very close friends that are almost like family. And to be accepted into a group of Danes it takes a long time, but once they allow you into the group, you are pretty much family....this can literally take years to be accepted though, and my sister had to find out for herself...

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange site?

Well coming from a city that has had European settlers for only about 150 years at the most to a city that has a history going back 1000's of years is a little overwhelming at times. Just to think that many of the buildings in town are easily built in the 1600's is kinda weird...but awesome!!! Once u get used to not understanding 99% of the conversations going on around you, it really is nice to be somewhere so foreign.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging?

mostly I am just not used to being around so many people that are not speaking a familiar language!!!! But I learned how to cope with this very well, especially after football matches, just keep drinking...

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

the long history and all that has happened here!! It is kinda crazy and mind blowing!!

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?

Everyone is very friendly here and helpful. It is nice for exchange students to be able to come to a new place and just start new. There is no one here who knows anything of your past and they just get to know u for who you are.

As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university?

There is lots of walking or bike riding so that might pose a problem. Then with the buildings, there are some that are brand new and state of the art, but there are also many that are hundreds of years old and many do not have elevators or those that do, don't always work.

For students who are visible minorities in your host country?

I do not see any issue with any minorities here in Denmark. I know that the Muslims are not the biggest fans of Danes after the whole cartoon issue last year. But other than that, it is a very multi cultural country and people from all over the world.

TAKING STOCK

What are the three most important things for students to take with them when they go to your host country or region?

residence permit, lots of money....ummm, a love of beer

What are the three most important things you would tell a UVic student who is going to your partner university on exchange?

make sure your classes are straightened out!!,

buy a bike here !!!!! it is the only and best way to get around!!! They usually only cost 100-200 second hand have fun and experience as much of as many different things and places u can

What was the most rewarding part of your exchange experience?

getting to travel to places I have never been before, meet many new friends from all over the world, see how different cultures live, play football on a European team, try to learn a new language...

What was your greatest challenge on the exchange?

having a gf in Victoria...haha

Trying to learn how to speak Danish!!!! I suck at languages and man they don't pronounce what is actually there, they just make up some sounds and ignore other sounds!!! Frustrating!!!

learning the pretty much all Europeans get free schooling or many even get paid to go to school!!!!

getting taxed 60% by the government at my job and not seeing ANY of the benefits that other students here do!!!

How has your perspective changed as a result of the exchange?

surprisingly, my view of Americans has changed the most for the better....well atleast ones that grew up on the coasts.

also learning that Europe is a vastly different place then north America, but in many ways it is exactly the same as well

seeing how not the whole world drives big gas guzzler cars, SUV's and trucks like in north america

What else do you want to say about your exchange experience?

absolutely worth it!!!! I wish everyone could experience something like this because it makes u learn so much more about the rest of the world and also about yourself at the same time!!