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My introduction to the concept of “Study Abroad” came when I was 14 years old. I clearly remember standing in the art classroom wondering where my drawing “buddy” from the previous year had gone. I learned she was far away in Italy attending an Italian school for the arts. “Wow,” I remember thinking, “What a great thing to do. That’s an experience I’d like someday!” Since that moment I strove to find a year in school in which I felt comfortable leaving my home behind and studying abroad. Europe was always my desired destination, for the education system fits my needs well and a western culture seemed necessary for my field of study in sustainable architecture and urban planning.

The program selection process was simpler than I anticipated. I spoke to a study abroad advisor at Portland State and upon hearing my passion for architecture and sustainable building, she recommended the Danish Institute for Study Abroad, DIS, located in Copenhagen, Denmark. Quite honestly, I had never known much about Denmark, but after reading through the DIS catalogue and doing my research I knew this was the perfect program for me. I especially liked that they offered a full year program as that suited my study objectives.

The preparation for my departure was one of simplicity. I have, thanks to my parents, had the opportunity of traveling quite a lot so the anticipation was only of excitement and not of fear. DIS provided many packets of information to assist my careful preparation. Their infinite knowledge of student’s needs is impressive for not once did I feel disconnected or unaware of what I needed to bring or what to expect. I prepared for my departure by attaining a proper European cell phone as well as a bank account with a pin (European credit machines require pins). I also knew that upon arrival I would be expected to have a portfolio of my previous work. In short, my preparations were successful. DIS did a thorough job providing information on housing, clothing, food, and school supplies and I felt totally prepared.

Because I arrived in Copenhagen a week before student housing opened, I stayed at a hostel. I would recommend the hostel by the name of *Dan Hostel* to any future student, there are multiple locations and all of the facilities were clean and friendly. Once the program started, there was a series of events to help us adjust to the city and our new school. There was an Opening Ceremony that the faculty clearly takes pride in conducting for the students. Not only did this introduce us to the founder and the major faces we would meet around the campus, but it also created an atmosphere of inclusiveness and welcome to the incoming students. Along with this my home university had held a meeting for all students intending to travel abroad. I had found this nice but not necessarily needed. The follow up to the DIS Opening Ceremony was another orientation lead by the Architecture Department to introduce us to our program and faculty.

This was beneficial for us because it gave us more perspective of what the semester would look like and what expectations we would meet.

A ScanDesign Fellowship program coordinator, Anne Line Anderson, contacted me before my departure to Denmark. She was very nice, helpful and made it clear that I could contact her with any questions or concerns about my arrival in Copenhagen. I can't say I ever felt the need to contact her for help because the school was such an efficient provider of information, but it was very comforting to know the availability was there. Continuing into my semester Anne Line kept in close contact, consistently inviting me to events and activities lead by the fellowship. She was such a good force for me in Copenhagen to be in contact with; I am very grateful. Some activities that we, the ScanDesign awardees, were taken on include but are not limited to: a two night trip to Nordsjaelland a Northern area of Denmark that is known for it's beautiful country side and clean ocean. On this trip we were provided housing in another ScanDesign coordinator's home where we made traditional Danish food and took a long bike ride to see the surrounding area. What a lovely experience. Another event Anne Line and Mary the other coordinator had organized was a wonderful and warm Thanksgiving for all of us American students studying in Denmark. This was especially significant for many of the students here, for it is often difficult to be away from family and friends for such long periods of time.

For my experience in Copenhagen I chose to live in a shared apartment with a Danish roommate. The housing options provided by DIS were many but it was obvious to me which one I would enjoy. This was a wise decision because I tend to be a very independent person with a packed schedule due to architecture studios. The women I lived with were welcoming and interested in showing me the Danish lifestyle while still coexisting respectfully in the living space. People who are independent and have been living by themselves comfortably for many years like I have would enjoy this housing option immensely. Another significant plus of the housing options offered, is that within each living situation there are many opportunities to become involved in the community and culture of the city. In my own experience, I lived with a girl who was very involved in the art scene in Copenhagen and would invite me along to events and showings. This broadened my horizons past the school offerings and made me more comfortable in the city. I also found that getting involved with sports teams within the city was effortless. I am quite interested in Roller Derby and was quickly given a place on the Copenhagen team. If I had a less intensive school schedule it would have turned out to be a hugely positive experience. I do feel that the DIS school offers an extensive variety of sports for students. There are also clubs, sports, work-study, and networking options that are easily accessible thanks to Anders Larsen and the housing and activities team.

There were many interesting cultural aspects to the Danish society that I found different from America. But of course that was to be expected. A fascinating difference was the street cleaning and general awareness of garbage. As bland of an observation as it may seem, I was consistently shocked at how

clean the entirety of the city was kept, even after street fairs or festivals. Another societal norm that surprised many of my fellow students and me was the lack of racial cushioning. In America there is effectively a stigma that one must never mention racial difference or even acknowledge race for fear of being considered prejudice. In Denmark that was just not the case. The Danish people were open and while respectful did not hide from standards that we create in our cultural infrastructure in America. It took an adjustment for me to become used to this blunt awareness and openness, but it also taught a lot of us an important lesson. One can be respectful and tolerant while still open and willing to discuss the obvious fact that we are all different.

Another cultural difference that I found wonderful is the education system in Denmark. I had friends in the Child Development program at DIS and I learned from them that Danish education pays special attention to teach the need to be out doors among many other important ideals. A Danish friend who taught at a Copenhagen elementary school asked me to lecture about America, my study abroad experience, and answer questions. I was astounded by the 6<sup>th</sup> graders' knowledge of America, of California (my home state), and their probing questions about my experience living in a non-socialist country and having Mr. Obama as President. Perhaps it was refreshing after having told many of my American peers I was studying in Denmark and receiving questions such as, "Is there an ocean?" Happily I found my program at DIS reflected these high educational standards.

Registering for classes brought to my awareness that they offer one core course for 6 credits each semester along with an array of classes to fit any student's needs. My first semester's core course was Architectural Foundations; the second was Urban Design Foundations. I was pleased with the level of professionalism brought to these studios and other classes by the instructors while I still felt the availability for a close relationship with them. More than once fellow students and I were invited to our professor's home for dinner. This in American would undoubtedly be considered strange and certainly not done often. I also found my Danish professors had an advantage in teaching that some of my instructors from the past did not. The advantage is that every professor was a working professional in the architectural or urban design field which brought a fresh, up to date edge to coarse work that we wouldn't other wise attain. The relevance of the projects we were given was inspiring. The next factor I found appealing was the size of the average classroom, I did not have any class over 25 students, and this provided an intimate and productive experience. In terms of facilities available to us, DIS provides two fully equipped computer labs with all of the design software one needs as well as an extensive library. The only issue I came across academically at DIS was the grading system. At the end of each semester grades were sent to our home in America, and while this may work for students who return home from their semester, I was a full year student so I could not receive my grades as my parents are rarely home – they travel. Generally speaking though, the academics were complementary to my learning

style and I felt in comparison to my home university, DIS offered a well rounded and successful education.

As a major Scandinavian destination, Copenhagen is very expensive. From food to clothing the drastic difference between the pricing of basic goods is comparatively huge. The ScanDesign scholarship of 5,000 dollars definitely helped me afford my year abroad. Europe in general is expensive for an American, and while my drive to attend this wonderful school was substantial, receiving a scholarship from ScanDesign made the experience just that much more possible. Students who have chosen the housing option of a Danish Roommate or Kolligium like I did are provided a food stipend of about 500 dollars a semester. As for the cost of living and transportation, unfortunately I do not know because like the food stipend, our rent and bus passes were covered by tuition as well. If I must put out an educated guess of how much housing, food, and normal activities would cost a month I would put the amount between 1000 and 1400 dollars. Within the year I luckily only had two occurrences that many other students encountered, the first was the cell phone company that continuously billed me at about 300 dollars a month when I had not used that much time on it. I fought the bill numerous times but they were unwavering with it and it caused a huge monetary loss for me. The other issue was the Danish/American customs situation. While I was in Copenhagen my computer crashed and as an architecture student it is required that one has a functioning computer. My only option was for my father to send me his old laptop for which I was charged 1000 dollars to retrieve upon its arrival to the country. This was devastating for my bank account that month and as hard as I tried to get through the customs system to speak with someone who could possibly help me my efforts were fruitless and very upsetting. I do not know what I would recommend to others in this situation, for all I know is that it is impossibly expensive to send objects of value purchased in the USA to Denmark.

While money was a factor of concern in Copenhagen health and safety were not. The school is located in the Latin Quarter, which refers to the old university near the DIS campus. This area is known for being trendy and lively with bars, cute cafes and lovely shops. The Latin Quarter has beautiful small squares and winding streets and wonderful transportation access. As it is largely a student community and since there are always eyes on the street due to the many apartments, safety is not an issue. The only problem some students would encounter is having their bicycles stolen when left on the street over night. As for the surrounding communities they all felt comfortable to me and I never was afraid of walking alone day or night. Just like any city there are small streets to avoid but it wasn't a problem for me or for my fellow students. Only once during my year in Copenhagen did I need to visit a doctor due to having a bad cold. The doctors were professional and the appointment process was easy. Upon arrival to the country one is given a Social Security card on which the phone number and address of the doctor in your neighborhood is written. This is whom you contact for any emergency or basic needs and they are helpful and efficient.

Hopefully the factors I outlined highlighted the exceptional level of professionalism and student interest of the Danish Institute of Study Abroad. If asked what kind of student would most benefit or succeed in this study abroad environment I would reply, "Any and all!". I feel that the beauty of this program is the diverse housing options and activities offered as well as the structured but varied classes/programs. I saw many students who had never traveled outside of their own state, let alone live independently for the first time. These students flourished and were among some of the best-adjusted and happy people I met. Other students like myself, who are independent and thrive on diversifying and pushing their personal boundaries also flourished. Every personality can survive and prosper in an environment as helpful and nurturing as DIS. If it wasn't for their well-designed program and organized staff, paired with the ScanDesign foundation's scholarship and fellowship leaders I could not have walked away from this year thinking it was the best of my life.