Personal information

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Major: Food Science  
Name of host university: University of Copenhagen (KU)  
Period/Time of Exchange: Spring ’17

Practical Advice

Visa  
To stay in Denmark longer than 90 days, you need to have a residence permit or have submitted your application for a residence permit. You can either go to an embassy in the states or do this while you are in Denmark. I decided to wait and while it worked out, it was extremely stressful and I would not recommend doing that. I actually never ended up receiving a residence permit because Immigration Services lost my application twice and by the time I left they hadn’t finished processing it. Once you have a residence permit, you can apply for a CPR (the Danish equivalent of A SSN). A CPR card assigns you a doctor and gives you access to their free health care, which is really nice!

Housing  
KU coordinates exchange housing through the Housing Foundation. A link is sent out to all exchange students which gives them a portal with different options and a time slot, much like Cornell. I liked in University Guest House, which is basically a dorm for exchange students. I was very happy with this, as I met students from all over, it was a great community and in city center. I paid about $900/month in rent and this included dinner Monday-Thursday and brunch on the weekends.

Arrival  
I was picked up at Kastrup Airport (the only airport in CPH) by my mentor, who had picked up my key from the Housing Foundation. I would HIGHLY recommend signing up for the mentor program, as the Housing Foundation is really far away from most dorms and it’s open at very limited hours (like most things in CPH). Therefore, it’s really helpful to have someone who will pick up your key and also to help you use public transportation and carry your luggage. I arrived January 2nd and did the pre-semester language course (a Danish class for 3.5 hours every day for the month of January). However, KU did not have an orientation until mid February, which I didn’t go to because I was away. I did end up seeing my mentor many times throughout the semester and she was a great resource. Some of my friends’ mentors never reached out to them though.

Academics

The University  
KU is split into several campuses that are scattered throughout the city. Each different campus represents a different faculty (faculty=college at Cornell), but it isn’t uncommon to have classes at different campuses. Some of the campuses are very urban while others have more green space, like Cornell. 

KU doesn’t have many extracurricular activities, or at least ones that exchange students can get involved in. However, the Faculty of Science mentors did hold a couple of events throughout the semester for exchange students. There are also some events for exchange students at Studenterhuset (Student House). Student House is a café/bar/activities space in the center of Copenhagen. It has pastry and drink discounts for any students in Copenhagen and a lot of space to study or chat with friends. On weekend nights there are often DJs and tables are moved for dancing. Some of my friends volunteered to bartend here, and for every hour they volunteered they got one drink voucher. Student House also has events like flea markets and salsa dancing.

Courses  
Academic life is VERY different at KU than at Cornell. The only class I enrolled in before I got to CPH was the Danish language class, since it started almost immediately. Enrollment was about a week or so before classes started. It’s very low stress and no one I knew had any issues with getting into classes that they needed. However, add/drop isn’t really a thing so it’s important to choose your classes carefully.

Most classes at KU have no graded activities except for the final. Finals may be a presentation, an
oral exam, or a written test. The grades are on a 12-point scale. I had two oral exams, two written exams, and one paper that I finished after I had left Denmark. With the exception of the language class, all of my exams were much easier than the ones I have had at Cornell. I took only Master’s level classes because (at least in the science faculty) they are the only ones in English. The class sizes were small and participation was heavily emphasized. Even though only the finals were graded, I had almost weekly presentations and group work, but this didn’t require much time out of class. The structure of classes is usually about half lecture and half discussion or breaking into groups. Classes are almost always a minimum of 3 hours and as many as 7 hours (with a one hour lunch break).

The culture of classes is also very different. Since you have no real assignments besides reading, you should expect that any assigned group work will be quite thorough in that any Danish group members will want to meet early and often. They usually do not like delegating work and want all of it to be done together, during a meeting. I found this really frustrating after a while since, compared to American study culture, it was time-consuming and inefficient. Some of my friends really enjoyed this aspect of the Danish education system.

### Difference between studying at Cornell and at your host university

In the Faculty of Science, they have blocks instead of semesters. I took only third block classes because the fourth block goes until July. To avoid taking too many classes in the third block and being done in April, KU offers Danish Culture Courses exclusively for exchange students who want to go home in May. These classes run February-early May and meet only once a week. Attendance is optional, but if you attend a certain number of classes you get an essay reduction. The final exam is a long essay due in June that can be done from home.

Lecturers are VERY approachable and really like students that make a rapport with them. However, they are often pretty unorganized compared to Cornell classes.

Overall, with the exception of the language course, I would say that Cornell students are very prepared for Master’s level classes at KU and academics were not the focal point of my exchange, as I didn’t spend much time on them.

### Life Abroad

#### Language

All Danes in Copenhagen speak perfect English. That being said, I and many of my exchange friends took a Danish language course through KU that ran through January. The course was every day for 3.5 hours. This was a really great way to meet other exchange students, but the rigor of the class should not be underestimated. Most of us thought it would be a joke but didn’t realize how difficult Danish is to learn and how hard the exam would be. There is nightly homework and the class is run through participation, so you really need to do the homework. There was an oral exam and written exam, both of them are passable if you put effort in but they do require studying (which isn’t always what you want to be doing for the first month you’re abroad). I basically never spoke in Danish after the class but some of my friends occasionally used it to order food. It’s helpful at places like the grocery store, as they will speak to you in Danish initially and if you are proficient enough you can just respond with the Danish equivalents of yes and no. Also, it can be helpful if you travel around Scandinavia, as Danish is very similar to Swedish and Norwegian (and these countries are less likely to be fluent in English or have signs/menus in English).

#### Health and Safety

I ALWAYS felt safe in Copenhagen. There are really few people asking for money on the streets and it’s very unusual to get pick-pocketed or anything like that. All of the public transportation is quiet, timely, and safe. Danes really keep to themselves and have a widespread culture of trust. In terms of health, if you have a CPR card you can go to the doctor for free and get discounted rates at the dentist or other medical services. I had to go to a dentist without a CPR and it was still really cheap compared to the US and it was really easy to schedule an appointment. I would suggest bringing cold medicine as it is only available in pharmacies in Denmark (called Apotek).
Overall exchange experience (anything you would like future exchange students to know about your study abroad semester)

At the end of my semester, I was so glad I chose to do it in Copenhagen. Especially after traveling to other places in Europe, I realized that Copenhagen is a great student city. It is incredibly safe, easy to navigate, a perfect size, and there is no language barrier. It’s also pretty easy to travel to the rest of Scandinavia. I honestly felt like I was living in some sort of strange utopia for most of the semester. I think the only true downside to Copenhagen is that is pretty expensive, but this was not really an issue as I made most of my meals and didn’t shop much. After almost all of my trips (except for those within Scandinavia), I found myself being so relieved to return to such a logical, orderly and quiet city.

Additional Tips for future students

Packing (What did you not bring that you wish you had? What items do you recommend not bringing?)

For those staying in Denmark January-May, I really recommend bringing mostly winter clothes and a few summer tops. It really wasn’t even warm when I left and I think I left the dorm without a jacket only one time. The only time I needed warm weather clothing was when traveling to southern Europe, but I still never needed shorts. Danish winter isn’t as cold temperature-wise as Ithaca, but it’s a bone-chilling cold that lasts forever. It’s also usually cloud and rainy. Because of this, I suggest bringing good waterproof boots and a rain jacket but snow boots aren’t necessary as it only snowed a few times. Because you will most likely be biking everywhere, make sure to bring good gloves, a hat, and something to wear over your face/neck. Also, Danes almost exclusively wear black and dark colors. Their style is very simple, so it’s easy to blend in.

Anything else that students should be aware when studying at your host location

BUY A BIKE!!!!!! I truly believe that you have not immersed yourself in Danish culture if you don’t ride a bike. Everyone bikes everywhere, it’s really safe thanks to huge bike lanes and traffic lights just for bikes. It’s the most efficient way to get around the city and the cheapest (the public transportation gets pricy). Within a few weeks, the only place I would not bike to was the airport. You can buy a used bike off one of the many facebook groups for 700 DKK (~$100) or rent one from a shop for the semester for only 100 DKK (~$15) more. I rented one and I would suggest doing this, as you don’t have to meet up with anyone or worry about selling it at the end of the semester and the shop you rent from will do any maintenance you need. Also, for when you do have to use public transportation get a rejsekort, which is a metro card that gives you discounted fare.