Personal information

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Name of host university: Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), Alnarp campus  
Period/Time of Exchange: Spring 2017

Practical Advice

Visa

If you’re a US citizen, you need a residency permit if you will be living in Sweden for an extended period of time. You apply online before leaving, but don’t receive the actual permit until your arrival in Sweden and will only need to show a proof of decision when entering Sweden. Look up all the information you’ll need for the application early on, and then once you’ve received the acceptance letter from the university, apply. My acceptance letter came quite late, so it was a good idea to have everything else sorted out before then. The Migration Agency doesn’t actually reach out to notify you of the decision - I had to call after a few weeks of applying to find out that it had been approved. Once in Sweden, I went to the nearest Migration Agency office for a photo and fingerprints and then received a card in the mail a week or so later.

Housing

For the Alnarp campus at SLU, housing is guaranteed for exchange students. You just have to indicate that you want housing and they will place you in one of the on-campus buildings. Rent was based on room size, and since I had one of the smallest rooms, it was relatively inexpensive.

Arrival

Arrival at the airport went smoothly. I flew into Copenhagen, as it is usually cheaper than flying to Malmö from the US. Plus, it costs about the same to get from either of the airports to the Malmö Central Station. The train from Denmark to Sweden was very well labeled and the tickets were easy to purchase. The student union arranges a day that they will drive you from Malmö Central Station to the Alnarp campus. I took advantage of this so I didn’t have to figure out the bus system right away or lug all my bags on the bus.

There is an orientation on an afternoon, a few days after classes start, for exchange students during which there was a basic introduction to the university and other helpful information. However, this was not particularly useful, as I already had to figure out most of this information on my own during the first few days. We were told that some students from the previous semester don’t leave until the day before our arrival, so it is difficult to schedule an orientation before classes start. However, if you go in the fall semester, orientation is the week before, so this wouldn’t be an issue.

Academics

The University

The Alnarp campus is very small compared to Cornell - only about 1000 students. It is in between Malmö, the third largest city in Sweden, and Lund, a decent sized university town. It’s about a 20 minute bus ride or 30 minute bike ride to both.

A student union puts on several events throughout the semester. This was the best way to meet the other international students, apart from those living in your building. There is a small membership fee, which is required to attend certain events, so I found it to be worth it.

Courses

On the application for the SLU, I chose my top two preferences for both class periods. Initially, there was some difficulty getting courses that would satisfy my major requirements for Cornell, but eventually we were able to sort it out. I took a landscape “Design Project” course with the topic of Urban Waters for the first
period (mid-January to mid-March) and “Dynamic Vegetation Design” for the second period (mid-March to early June). Classes were graded on a scale of 1-5, with 3 or higher considered as a passing grade. Due to the nature of design courses in general, these were primarily project based, receiving just one grade at the end of the semester.

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

The biggest difference is having only one course at a time. Compared to sometimes four or more courses each semester at Cornell, this was a nice alternative. Classes generally met from 9AM - 4PM each day, but that included work time, individually or in groups. I rarely stayed later than 5PM or on weekends to finish my work. This allowed me to invest myself completely into one course, but still find time to enjoy social events and explore the area of Sweden. However, the level of the courses was still quite high, and the different teaching styles and class dynamics made it enough of a challenge without being too difficult.

**Life Abroad**

**Language**

No language courses are offered by SLU. There is discussion of potentially starting a brief pre-semester course for a week or so to learn some basic Swedish. Although everyone speaks English and I had absolutely no problem communicating with people, I wish I had learned a little bit of Swedish to be able to cash out at the stores, pronounce signs, and such.

**Health and Safety**

I was not aware of any health resources on campus, and my family’s insurance only covered medical treatment at the hospital in Malmö. However, depending on your insurance, there may be more options apart from having to go to the hospital for even minor things. Luckily, I never had to use any of the health resources during my stay.

Alnarp as a campus is very safe. Some people I was living with had some issues with theft, but as long as you’re careful, lock your room, are aware of your belongings, you should be fine. The main streets in Malmö also feel very safe, a little less so if you venture into some of the outer neighborhoods, so just know where you are and avoid getting lost in one of those areas. But central Malmö and Lund where you’d spend most of your time felt very safe.

**Overall exchange experience**

At first, I was hesitant about going abroad, but I am so glad I took the step out of my comfort zone. I gained a lot from my time in Sweden – both in and out of the classroom. The course experiences have added new dimensions to my studies. Meeting people from all over the world and forming lasting relationships was a special part of my experience and has allowed me to develop new perspectives. The Swedish lifestyle also became something that will have a lasting impact. Coming from an on-the-go society, Sweden’s ability to slow down, take a break, and appreciate the simple pleasures in life is something that brought me a lot of happiness. I have come to realize how important this is – for mental health, productivity and well-being.

Overall, I found Sweden’s sustainable society, unhurried lifestyle and beautiful scenery to be an ideal semester away from Cornell.

**Additional Tips for future students**

**Packing**

It is a coastal area, so the weather in and around Alnarp was consistently cold and windy most of the semester. Be sure to pack warm and waterproof clothing, especially for biking and any excursions you may go on with your course. The weather started to get warmer in May, but I still only wore shorts a handful of times.

**Get a bike!**

The southern region of Sweden (Skåne) is very flat and super bike friendly. It is almost imperative that you buy a bike as soon as you can upon your arrival to Sweden. Especially since the Alnarp campus is outside of the city, you need a bike to get groceries, etc. and it is useful for saving on bus fees, which add up if you ride it consistently. A 5 minute bike ride brings you to a train station that gets you to Copenhagen and all around southern Sweden. I also used my bike to explore the region around the campus as well.
Alnarp Campus

The Alnarp campus is primarily landscape architecture and plant sciences students, so most other studies would be at a different SLU campus. I cannot speak to the specifics of the other campuses, but I’m sure a lot of the general information still applies. Alnarp is a beautiful, small rural campus in southern Sweden just outside of Malmö and a short train ride (about an hour) to Copenhagen. However, if you are looking to be immersed in a city experience abroad, this may not be the place to choose. Although close, it takes a bit of effort to get to and from the cities, and the only way to get back past midnight is by bike. That said, I truly enjoyed my time on the campus, and found it to be the perfect balance between a city and rural lifestyle.