Dan--SLU, Spring 2010

CALS Exchange Student Participant Report: SLU

Student: Dan, Agricultural Science Major

I decided to study abroad at the Swedish University of the Agricultural Sciences (SLU) in Uppsala, Sweden. My major at Cornell is Agricultural Sciences and I was able to further my degree progress for the major while in Sweden. I studied abroad for only the spring semester of 2010. I did keep a blog and you can find it at this address: http://blogs.cornell.edu/agsci/category/study-abroad-with-dan-d/

I think that you should not leave the Visa and/or passport applications to the last minute. These items are very important and worth planning out ahead of time for. Allow enough time on the visa for the full study period and then some because you may decide that you want to stay abroad longer the study period. Immigration in Sweden was quite easy to deal with.

As far as packing goes, do not bring too much because you will find that there is much more to bring back home than you took over. In this light, it is nice to bring items that you do not mind parting with at the end of your stay. You will get a lot of souvenirs and other items that that you will want to bring home and find that there is limited space.

The Internet was my main source of information for everything. I checked out my host university's website, was able to get the down low on pretty much anything. I received an international buddy at my host university and she took it upon herself to welcome me to Sweden at the train station. She helped me settle into the hostel that I stayed at for the first week of my stay before classes started. There was also a small orientation meeting for the international students that gave us some information on the university, Uppsala, and Sweden in general which was nice because it allowed all of the international students to meet. At the time we did not realize that these people were going to be the ones that we would hang out with the majority of our time. It tends to be the case that your closest friends when abroad are the other students studying abroad also.

The campus of my host university was small and centralized outside of the main city of Uppsala. Some students live and hang out there but a majority are in the city of Uppsala. I lived in the city and I would strongly suggest to anyone going to SLU at Uppsala to do the same. The campus is nice and set in a natural area but it tends to be a bit isolated as far as a lively social scene. The campus is very modern and up to date with the new technology. Classes are less rigorous than the ones at Cornell. I did not have any problems in Sweden with the language. I do not know Swedish but most all Swedes are amazing at the English language. I would recommend taking a course in Swedish beforehand to get a feel for it, but it is not a big deal either way. There are intensive courses offered in Sweden for learning Swedish.

I could not open a local bank account in Sweden because it is compulsory to be in Sweden at least a year to do so. I was still able to cash scholarship checks made out to me as part of the Cornell-SLU exchange agreement. I did not need to open up a local account would not suggest it unless it was really desirable.

My host university took care all of my housing stuff again as part of the exchange scholarship. I stayed in an apartment where a majority of residents were students and most of my international friends were also. I purchased my own food at a grocery store and prepared my own food as well. There is a restaurant on campus that is open for lunch but it is pretty expensive to eat there everyday. The public transit there is the bus system but I made out just fine with the rest of the students in Uppsala on my bike. The love bikes in Sweden and Uppsala and I do now also.

I called home via Skype. I bought a cell phone for local calls and it was a pay as you go plan. A suggestion on this would be to wait a little bit and see which carrier your friends over there are using and then buy the same carrier because it is often cheaper to contact phones of the same carrier. I never really used snail mail other than for postcards but it seemed pretty reliable (the postcards were received). I got to know a lot of local people from my host country through classes and parties mostly. There are a ton of clubs and extracurricular items offered and I jumped on a baseball team and had a great time. The main fun thing for local students to do is to go clubbing.

I bought my groceries mainly at a grocery store! There were many stores in Uppsala were I could find anything that I needed. The prices on items were a bit more expensive than in the US. Another good recommendation that I have is to immediately find all of the second hand shops around and look to get anything you can from these stores. I would not have wasted nearly as much money at IKEA had I done this.

I felt extremely safe in Sweden. The most dangerous thing was riding my bike on ice in the winter. There was a big hospital in town had I needed it (I didn't).

I tried to travel a lot and I did get some in around Europe. There are travel agencies but I did not use them too much but rather planned my trips with friends. The host university did plan a number of trips but I was not able to take advantage of any of them. A majority of my money was spent on traveling abroad.

I feel that I did get a good picture of the beautiful country of Sweden. I had one of the most memorable times of my life (I think) and I would gladly go back there and maybe learn the language and stay awhile. This experience has affected me greatly as now I am very hopeful that my profession would have me travel as much as possible. One of the best things I now have from my time abroad is a global network of friends that I hope to keep for life.