



2015-2016 Student Mobility/Exchange Program Returning Undergraduate Student Report

Student Name:

Host University: KADK

Host Country: Denmark

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Visual Communication

Semester: Winter

Date of Report: June 22, 2016

1. OVERALL EVALUATION

How would you rate your exchange experience overall?

Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 **Excellent**

Please explain your rating.

It was a fantastic and a rewarding experience overall. However, the specifications of the winter semester program at KADK did not match one's expectations. Specifically, the classes they offer in the winter have to do a lot with theory and design methodology, and very little actual design deliverables/projects. My judgement is very subjective of course and, perhaps, someone else would enjoy the program, but I, personally, found it a bit mundane and not all that relevant at this stage of my learning experience.

Why did you choose this host institution? What key factors or issues influenced your decision?

As a visual communicator I was always interested in and fascinated by Scandinavian style and design language. Denmark is a great place to explore European/Nordic trends in and approach to design.

Please share a few of your most positive experiences and a few of the biggest challenges you faced.

The Copenhagen atmosphere is absolutely amazing. There is so much to see, to explore and to learn about. The student ID provides one with opportunities to visit most of the key museums in and outside the city free of charge which, I would advise, one should take full advantage of. Being immersed into a European city life is a great learning experience in itself. The culture and level of visual communication you will be surrounded with on day-by-day basis is quite refreshing in it's refined and tasteful visual tone. Everything from advertising to books to interiors and architecture is a manifestation of a style and design language quite different from what one is used to seeing in Toronto (or anywhere else in the world for that matter).

The school environment/pace is much more relaxed as compared to one at OCADU which was also a nice change. Besides that, KADK school system/approach is very different from that of what we are used to at OCADU (which can also be a challenge at the same time). But overall, over the course of lectures/classes we got to meet a lot of significant and highly experienced professionals in the design field. So one gets to learn a lot from different people with numerous backgrounds which is a very enriching experience. KADK also provided students with quite a few opportunities to exhibit their work publicly; often times they collaborate with actual companies/clients to work on existing issues and to propose/find real solutions which puts one's work and efforts into a very real place of 'checking with reality'.

As to the challenges, being in a whole new environment and school/country system can be quite a difficulty (of course it all depends on one's attitude, I believe). Figuring things out in the very beginning is time consuming and takes a lot of energy (finding a place to stay, figuring out the courses etc.) But all of these are minor difficulties, Copenhagen is a relatively small city and it's quite easy to navigate. Danish education and expectations towards students are hard to figure out at first (or at all in my case). However, I personally would gain much more out of the learning at school if I would focus on being open to all that is new and learning as much as I can in the process. Instead, I was worried that I won't have anything to put into my portfolio, so I would do a double of what was required. Now looking back, I would do more exploring of the city and less agonizing over school. But once again, it all depends on one's priorities.

2. PREPARATION

Please describe your preparation for the exchange, including banking, travel documents and student visa application. In retrospect, would you have done anything differently?

My visa application took a relatively short time I received my documents in a week after I applied, although I heard that it takes about a month so it's always better to start the process ahead of time. International office is super helpful with facilitating all the 'figuring out' of the application procedure. Also, I am a Ukrainian citizen, so my process was very different then of those who are Canadian citizens/residents.

I never opened a bank account in Denmark. I used my Visa card for most of the payments. I also used PayPal for international transactions if I needed to. However, majority of my fellow students had bank accounts at Nordea Bank (I heard it's a 'student-friendly' bank but I don't know much about it other than that).

Are there any important items (e.g. art & design supplies, documents, specialty foods, health items) that a student should take to your host country?

I brought most of the art supplies with me from Canada, however, I didn't end up using them because of the specifications of the program. So if you are going for a winter semester I probably wouldn't worry about art supplies. The school has a small store which has all the supplies you might need. I'd maybe take one or two sketchbooks and a couple of colored pens+pencils, just the basics...

As to the clothing items, it's rainy and windy in Denmark especially in the winter. It might not be super cold, but the wind is strong plus it rains a lot, and if you are planning to bike to school (which like 98% of Danes do) you need the attire to protect you from such weather. (Danes say "there is no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing" ☺). So a nice water & wind proof jacket & shoes are a must.

You will receive your social insurance card upon arrival which will allow you to seek medical help

in any instance. Also there is OCADU's insurance coverage if you have one... Otherwise, I can't think of anything out of ordinary that I brought with me. I did have two suitcases luggage allowance so I just brought maximum of what I thought can be useful not to spend money on it in Denmark (toiletries & hygiene products, spices, general meds, cosmetics etc). Grocery prices are quite similar to those in Toronto. Most expensive (from what was relevant to me personally) is transportations cost and...coffee. If you are a coffee-drinker and are used to buying your coffee out at a coffee shop, bakery or a café, in Copenhagen be prepared to pay 7-10\$ per cup. So you might consider packing up your moka-pot.

3. ARRIVAL

Was anyone at the airport, train station, etc. to meet you? Did you experience any difficulties upon arrival?

I had someone picking me up. But even if you are to make it to your place of living on your own, figuring out Copenhagen transportation system is not that difficult. There is a metro right at the airport, it's going to take you to Nørreport station which is a central station, from there trains and busses will take you almost anywhere in the city. <http://www.rejseplanen.dk> is quite helpful with figuring out your journeys.

When should students plan to arrive at the host university? When did you arrive? Would you have benefited from arriving earlier?

I don't think you need to be there way before school starts, the academia is closed anyway. However, if you are able to figure out accommodation/transportation and any other practical things prior to beginning of school that would be quite beneficial of course. I arrived two days before school started and I was searching for a place to stay for maybe two weeks along with attending lectures. It's never easy but I had no other choice, if you can afford arriving a few weeks earlier it might make things easier for you when you start the school so that you don't have to juggle both: classes and apartment hunting.

Was there an orientation session offered at your host university? If yes, did you attend and what did you learn?

KADK sends you an email with all the relevant information about the orientation and such closer to the beginning of a semester. It is good to attend the session for they cover a lot of useful stuff that will help you settle in. This would be a great opportunity for you to ask all the questions. People in charge are super helpful and they are also available during office hours pretty much every day. You will also get a campus tour during your orientation and get to meet quite a few other fellow exchange students from all over Europe.

Is there a coordinating office for international students, including exchange students, at your host university? Is there a staff person you would recommend students approach with their questions?

David Edward Allington was the coordinator I personally have found super approachable, helpful and positive. He is fast to reply to correspondence and he is more than happy to answer all the questions or to make himself available for a quick consultation most of the time (if you need one).

4. ACCOMMODATION

Where did you live during your exchange? Were you happy with your accommodation?

I had a pretty tight budget, so I lived outside the city in the town nearby (Lyngby). Also, I wanted a private place with my own kitchen & bathroom which I wouldn't be able to afford in the city, but I could do it in Lyngby. The downside, is spending time and money on transportation so I think it's probably a better idea to spend a little bit more to stay closer to school and get a bike (which I would probably do if I could do it over knowing what I know now).

Did you have any difficulties arranging accommodation yourself? Did the host institution assist you in finding accommodation?

KADK is partnering up with a few host families offering accommodation (they will send you a link to the platform). So if you are happy with prices and offer, get on it right away for your only chance to get the room with KADK's help is only until the beginning of semester and then they close the portal (though the rooms will be gone even sooner). That is also the only assistance you will be getting from KADK when it comes to finding accommodation. The good thing is that these host families are totally safe (from what I know) for the school has been working with them for years and a lot of students who decided to stay with them were quite content. The rest of us were busy looking for a room via Facebook groups, Find Your Roommate, or Bolig Portal (which is a paid Danish site for accommodation search). I recommend that you look only at those options that offer rooms with CPR (social insurance number or a yellow card as they call it), this way you will get an official contract stating all the conditions which will insure safe financial transactions and just a safe stay for you with serious & trustworthy landlords to begin with.

5. STUDIES AT HOST INSTITUTION

To better understand the similarities and differences between academic studies at OCAD U and at your host university, please comment on the following:

Level of academic difficulty and challenge:

Overall it's less intense than OCADU. You take one course at a time which allows you to really focus on one thing and which also gives you more time to work on your assignments. Winter semester was also mostly group work and group projects which can make things either easier or harder depending on the group dynamic, your personal input and involvement and a million other factors...

Time spent in class (# of hours per week):

You are at school almost every day (vs at OCAD we attend only selected courses), but this system insures that your workload is evenly distributed and that students don't get stressed constantly but do their work consistently over the course of a program. It's hard to tell how many hours per week I was at school...but if you have lectures (which we did in the beginning of winter semester) you will be at school every day from 9am to 3pm with an hour long lunch break. When you switch to group work you decide in your collective when you come to school and how long you stay so you might not end up coming to school every day after all.

Time spent working on projects outside of class (# of hours per week):

Since all of the projects were group work all the work we did was in-school with the exception of instances where work was delegated to different people individually (again depending on a project & a group dynamic).

Studio-based work:

There was no studio work as such during the winter semester. We had drawing (visualisation) sessions almost every week throughout the semester (the attendance is advised but not mandatory) but that was all.

Written assignments:

I had two courses (1) Design Ethics and Sustainability and (2) Design Methods over the course of 4 months. Both had exams and an essay for the 2nd one. Over all there is quite a bit of writing involved, considering how much information you will be receiving and processing, but it's not anything out of ordinary or excessively hard in my opinion especially if your English is okay.

Interaction between students and professors:

The first course (Ethics and Sustainability) is mandatory for all 2nd year students, so it will be a lot of people attending the lectures with you. The course after that (Design Methods) is Visual Communication students only, so you will spend most of your time in the group of 20-25 people. However, instructors and lecturers are constantly changing, you will have a few mentors for each of the courses each responsible for separate projects.

6. SERVICES

Were there any extracurricular activities/events scheduled for exchange/international students at your host university (cultural visits, trips, workshops, etc.)? Which ones would you recommend?

Winter semester there was no activities initiated by school. Sometimes they arrange 3-4 days trips to near by countries but not this time.

What were the library and computer facilities like?

The library is fantastic, there are a vastness of great books& publications available for 30 days loans (renewable if not requested). There are also computers at the library but it's key that you bring your laptops with Adobe CC, for KADK does not provide students with software.

7. COST OF LIVING

How did you prepare yourself financially for your exchange? Did you pay for the experience entirely out of your own savings? Did you receive student or bank loans? Did you apply for / receive any financial awards (scholarships or bursaries)? Did you have help from parents / family / friends?

I have fundraised the money to cover visa expenses (it was about 850\$ so prepare yourself) via youcaring.com. Mainly my friends contributed. But the majority of the funding was due to the Mariah's fund award that I received through OCADU thanks to the generous donors... My family helped me pay the flight ticket. I also do some freelancing when I have time. Other than that I didn't have much of the extra savings so I had to figure out how to live on what I had.

In general, was the cost of living in your host country higher, lower, or similar to that in Canada? Please explain.

In general, it was higher, I spent a bit more for food, as well as for transportations which is extremely expensive in Denmark. If you rent in the city and near the school the cost or rent for room will be also higher then it is generally is in Toronto.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country:

Right now it is approximately 5DKK to 1CAD

Time spent in host country (month/year - month/year):

February 2016 – June 2016

Would you estimate that you spent more, less, or the same amount as an average, local student attending your host institution?

I am not entirely sure, but I think I spent less.

Please complete the following budget to give other students an idea of what they can expect to spend in the host country.

Basic Expenses in Canadian Dollars:

1. **Tuition and general fees (paid to OCAD U)** (I am an international student so my fees are quite different from those of domestic students) For 2.5 credits I spent about \$10,000
2. **School supplies:** \$50
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$600 /month x4 = \$2400
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$0 /month
 - B) **Telephone:** \$18 /month
 - C) **Cable:** \$0 /month
 - D) **Other (specify)** \$0 /month
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$120-200 /month x4 = \$600 (I was cooking at home most of the time)
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$0 /month = \$0 (brought all of there with me from Canada)
7. **Laundry:** \$0 /month = \$0 (was included in the rent)
8. **Transportation:** \$200 /month = \$800 That's because I lived outside the city. Ideally you buy a bike for a 100-200\$ and then sell it before you leave. Bike market turnaround in Copenhagen is amazing...
9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$0
10. **Travel health insurance:** \$0 (I chose not to pay for extra 3 months of OCADU insurance).
11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$0
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$700

13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** \$0

14. **Student visa:** \$850

15. **Other expenses (books and gifts):** \$100

Estimated Total Expenses: \$5.500 (excluding tuition cost & no extras such as travelling outside Denmark, going out or eating out and no excessive consumption of Danish pastry 😊 (which will be hard, for the pastry is really good indeed))

9. ADAPTING TO YOUR HOST COUNTRY

Did you experience any “culture shock” during your exchange? How did you deal with it? Do you have any advice for students on how to adapt to life in your host country?

Ukraine is the country of my origin and even though it is not exactly Europe, the pace of life and the lifestyle is a lot similar to that of European. So I personally had no adjustment period/culture shock whatsoever. It can be difficult finding new connections but that is something that I think does not exactly depend on a country/culture but rather on one’s attitude towards life & towards people.

Was there a lot of interaction between local students and exchange/international students? What is the best way to develop friendships with students from your host institution?

As I mentioned before, there is a lot of group work happening, so you won’t be able to avoid interacting with people even if you wanted to. I had a pleasant experience overall, but there were instances when I was the only one international students in a group and local folks forgot or found it too tiring to speak English all the time. In that case, you just need to remind them that you don’t speak their language and you would greatly appreciate if they remembered that 😊. I never had any major issues however, most of the people are very approachable and easy to talk to, and you also won’t be there by yourself (the semester I was there there were other 5 exchange students besides myself).

Did you have any unforeseen problems? Was there anything that you felt was strikingly different from what you expected? If so, is there a way that you could have prepared yourself?

There is a lot of bureaucracy in Denmark. So if you want to open a bank account or get a student discounted monthly pass be ready to go through complex processes and gather all these additional documents – things we wouldn’t be otherwise dealing with back in Canada.

Please email your report to Susan Kemp, Student Mobility/Exchange Coordinator, at skemp@ocadu.ca