

Review of my abroad semester at Via University College in Denmark

Before starting my semester abroad in Aarhus (Denmark) I took part in the Online abroad sessions the International Office is organizing. Denmark was not my first choice. I was focussing on going to New Zealand, but it turned out that not all the departures have a cooperating contract with our College in Darmstadt. In the beginning I was quite focussing on connecting my abroad semester with travelling around the country. The classy New Zealand abroad going seemed quite fancy. Anyways my intention changed after it didn't work out the way planned. Instead of focussing on the country and the surrounding in an adventures and travel perspective, I had a closer look at the programmes regarding my future profession and personal interests.

So, it had been the programme Head-Heart Hand that caught my intention. The content impressed me very much. HHH is a programme that highlights the way an individual can express themselves in an artistic or physical manner and combines this with the social work profession. After checking the website of Via university college I found feedback given from other international students who have already joined the programme and talked about it as well as the student life at Via in general. At that point I was in love with Via already. (Those who are reading this, if you check the video, and you are still not stunned. Do not worry, you will be! ;D). Via University college has more than enough to offer. It's an international school that offers a variety of interesting activity classes outside school. It also inhabits has a lot of facilities like a woodworkplace and a craft room where all students have access to. There are also great gym halls students can book after class, nice modern and cosy places to study and the greatest cafeteria I ever ate at. You also can-do drama or go to the creative room. From the first day I was the biggest Fan of Via university college, and I really haven't met anyone who would tell a different.

Talking about HHH. I am very much thankful for joining this programme. I was given a stack of teaching styles and Methods, focusing on actively participating and self-expression. Besides that, I was given and internalized the meaning of important values like a safe learning environment, cooperation, and trust. Not only regarding my social work profession, joining the programmes is an experience for life.

During the programme we were working on several group projects. Creating dances, making video portraits, designing books and games and a lot more. I can speak of a great relationship between students and teacher and the feeling we were given help whenever we asked for it. So that already created a great environment. Also, they are very much focussing on getting to know each other at the start and encouraging us to share and express ourselves. Overall, setting up a safe learning environment in the first place.

The programme is parted in three modules. The module about creative expressions is all about moving, elements of theatre and roleplay, dancing, and creating various kinds of exercising based on a theoretical manner. During this module we were given the basics. Theories and models about learning process, didactics on how to approach an Individual and how education and society are. It was an inspiring way of transferring theory into practice. I very much appreciated the "learning by doing" philosophy. It was slightly preparing us for our own role as social workers and teachers during our internship. The internship (Placement) is the second module. We were free to tell our preferences regarding the placement. We were

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able to choose between a kindergarten, a youth centre, and a school. During that time, we had the chance to observe Danish education system from different perspectives.

Talking about exams. For me personally I found it very pleasant the way the exams were set up. During the programme we were constantly working on a certain project. One week we had to create a dance, design a child book, make a video Portrait etc. Also, we had to write many personal reflections. This has not been easy for me at the start but the more I practise it the more it felt quite naturally and turned in to an automatic process. We also had to read a lot. There were a lot of materials given from the teacher. For the final exams we had presentations, activities to create, essays to write and a few oral exams. All of them took place in a pleasant setting and most of the time we were working in groups.

The second programme I joined was the so called "international class of teaching education," other than the HHH it was established more for primary and secondary teachers. So, the didactics and theoretical basics were more focussing teaching in education than on social work and pedagogy. Nevertheless, the modules I had had an immense value for me as well since social work is part of teaching and educating too. Just not the regular one we know from school. The modules I chose were perfect for what I am going for with my social work studies. One was physical education. Here we learned the importance of moving and movement. It's not only about the movement itself. In Denmark, the curriculum for physical education is different to the one in Germany defining school sports. It comes with a lot of social values you should gain from it. Cooperating, working in teams, dealing with losing, being a good winner, playing after fair game rules, including one another and so on. In the "Are you game" we learned how we embody knowledge and how it is a big advantage to work with that in terms of learning different subjects. Here we were focussing on learning a foreign language. The third module was called "Entrepreneurship and Internalization Part of that was two weeks placement at a boarding-, primary or Privat school. Therefore we had to observe how school is running. How the organisation was, how the pupils were interrogating etc. Based on that we developed an innovation framed in a group project. Our final exams were to produce ideas, argument them and produce an innovative solution.

So, to start this journey....

The application process is easy. I remember having an effective communication with the person responsible at the Via University in Aarhus as well as the international Office. Although there were technical complications sometimes (because of the digital OL mostly) There was always somebody to reach out and I really never had the feeling I am missing out something or could not reach out for help. Anyway, I just needed to fill out basic information (general data), hand in documents like CV, Certificate of enrolment your, current study file and write a motivation letter saying why I was choosing the programme I choose at the respective University. After gladly receiving the confirmation of joining the programme, the international Office at Via immediately sent a guide, giving advice/Information about what I need to consider and take care of before and while staying abroad in Denmark. So, from the beginning I felt very well prepared in terms of several questions like finding an insurance for example or applying for a social security number.

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Also, Via is helping abroad students to find in accommodation. I got a document where I had to fill in how I would like to live (how many people, with a shared bathroom/kitchen, how much I am able to pay for the rent, etc.). After filling in the sheet they sent one offer that fits my general conditions. I was able to reject the offer but then I would have to continue the research on my own. I would consider taking the accommodation help for the first start. After arriving its easier to look for something else in present when you are not comfortable with the chosen apartment. I was staying in Skjoldhøjkollegiet for my whole stay. Every room has a big window front and enhance a bed, a table, and a desk. It also includes WIFI (within the rent). To do laundry you have to pay about 10DKK/ per wash (about.1,30 Euro). I had my own room and bathroom and shared communal area as well as the kitchen with twelve other people. Living together includes a weakly turning cleaning shift. The caretakers will check every Tuesday morning and will fin the one who was responsible if it is not cleaned properly.

Moreover, Skjoldhøj is a suitable place to contact other international students as well as Danish students. Skjoldhøj reminded me of a little habiting student but also a lot of families and people joining the working life fulltime. The architecture is dreary part of which makes it feel cold sometimes. Skjoldhøjkollegiet has a small shop (open everyday until 9), a laundry room, a gym (costs extra), a sauna (included in the rent) even a kindergarten and a huge green. The bar is the main spot especially in the beginning of the semester. Also, its common that a lot of students especially those joining an Erasmus programme meet here at the Semester start. The people from the bar are students as well and try to set up events to bring the students together. Therefor they have gatherings like sing star night, table soccer battle, beerpong tournaments and so on. Around Skjoldhøj there is a "bazar vest" as well as "city vest," shopping centres with a fruit and vegetables market, discounters like Lidl, Normal (aka Drogerimarkt) and all you need basically. Skjoldhøj is in a suburb of Aarhus named Brabrand. Its about 20-25 minute away by bike and bus from Via University and the City centre.

Over my past abroad semester Aarhus has become a key place to me for my present life and future. Not only because of the experience via and the Danish teaching and pedagogy, I extended my stay because of it all. Aarhus is a beautiful place for explore and embrace a lot of things. The sea is next door, beautiful beaches along the way and a cozy old town city centre, where its nice to just walk through, have a chill at the canal crossing through or enjoying the night life within lots of clubs and bars around. Talking about food there is this huge Street Food place where nobody can pass at least once a week. It is worth for sure. Talking about money. The rumours are true. Denmark is expensive compared to other European countries. Good thing the cultural and artistic parts are mostly free for students. We got a lot of coupons from the university for going out to certain theatres, museums, and movies. Moreover, there are a lot of non-profit organisations around town setting up all kinds of events to get people together and work on something or just enjoy the time together. I joined a poetry class, went skating and met up with other internationals just for eating pancakes. So, if I wanted to do something and be with people there were a lot of options to find kindred spirits.

To sum up my abroad semester experience I can say that I am just thankful for it. I have seen so much and learned so much about myself and I was forced to leave my comfort zone which gave me the possibility to grow in many ways. Realizing my strength and using them,

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considering my weaknesses and accept and develop them. The journey did a great personal development and I now feel more aware about who I am and who I want to be. It had not been easy all the time for sure. I felt lonely sometimes and it was a knew challenge to either deal with certain feelings by yourself or share personal struggles with people I have not know back then. But I learned the value of taking the time for myself even if it can be challenging to be alone with my thoughts. The good and the unpleasant experience were all part and helped growth. I also acknowledged the value of sharing and the fact that we can support, teach, and learn so much from one another. The international exchange was a true blessing and I do not want to miss one part of it.

For those who are considering going, especially going to Aarhus; Do it!

I promise you will not regret it!! 😊