Aarhus Summer University  
Aarhus, Denmark  
July 1- August 10 (2 periods)

Preparation for exchange

When attending Summer University in Aarhus you will be taking one or two courses, and lasting about two weeks of lectures. However, with the courses that I took (which were in humanities), a couple of weeks before the first-in person lectures start, you had to complete 3-4 academic readings and submit an essay, all available through the blackboard online system (equivalent of Canvas). At the end of the course, the written essay exam was either compromised of assignments due throughout the course (one essay per week) or in my other course due one week after the end of the lecture period. SU Aarhus offers two periods like this one after another, so you can go and take around 10 credits in about 5 weeks. However, due to the courses having readings before the class start, taking two courses as I did means that there will be no gap in between the study periods, even if there is a gap in in-person lectures, making for a hectic semester.

Spending time on doing your research on which course(s) you want to take and how they fit your study plan here at SFU is useful, as the variety offered has both courses in disciplines that can count towards one’s major, but also a lot that are meant for cross-disciplinary and introductory courses that can work well as breadth requirements. The courses at Aarhus are for both domestic and exchange students, with some percentage of spaces reserved for exchange students. I got my first choices for both periods; the number of the exchange students in those classes was less than the allotted slot for international students, so I expect in most cases it should not be difficult to get into your first choice. I do not know how easy it would be to switch into another course after the course started. Apart from the courses being potentially full, by the time the course starts you would have already read over 100 pages and written your first essay.

For the summer university they have a quite easy system for setting you up in the dorm, or shared houses (I stayed in a dorm). I filled the request, stated my preference, and paid a fixed fee. At the end, when you leave you are expected to clean your room well, otherwise you will get charged a cleaning fee that is quite steep, and once during my stay period I was expected to clean the entire common area as part communal cleaning duties, also subject to fees upon incompletion. Many international student who were doing only one course found it easier to book solo or shared accommodation through Airbnb, but which should be booked well in advance due to costs and availability.

I have experience traveling and staying abroad longer, so preparing for the trip was not difficult for me. I bought an inexpensive one-way flight to Europe (Paris), stayed in the hostel for few days, moved to Copenhagen using one of the cheap local airlines and stayed there for few days, and only then I took a train to Aarhus. Before leaving Vancouver, I also bought another one-way
ticket home from London to Seattle, as the beginning of September/late August can be more expensive for travel, and I wanted to stay in Europe till the beginning of the Fall semester.

I recommend going to Europe at least one week before the classes start so you get a chance to get over the jet lag. The workload ramps up from the start: you spend up to six hours in the class every day and have a new reading every day (which can also be downloaded online earlier if you have time to pre-read). I got 5 credits for the work I did over 10 days, so it is intense and you need to be ready for it. However, for the final exam (in my courses, it was 10-16 page essay), can be redone 2 more times in case you fail the first time (this cannot be done though, in order to change a passing grade to a higher one).

During Exchange

There are no big surprises in the way Denmark operates compared to Canada, you can use credit cards and cash, but be prepared to spend a bit more on food. Dorms have shared a kitchen, but one of only maybe three of my neighbors who prepared my own breakfast and cooked something, most of the students it seems ate out (American fast food chains are very fashionable in Denmark). Local transport is fine, but I also used to walk a lot as I was spending so much time in the classroom. Tickets can be bought also on your mobile phone, a mobile pay app being popular in stores, but these require a functioning cell phone number to set up. Local sim cards are inexpensive, but I didn’t bother to procure one, although it might have made my life easier. You will get by with English very well, especially the younger generation is completely fluent.

Exams in both my courses were 100% of the grade, but you do not get marks for within the course components. In the courses I did not get any feedback from the instructor even as I wrote five essays in each course. It is hard to judge how you are doing in the course until you get your final exam mark at the end. Though I suspect that there is an informal consideration of attendance in evaluation, I mostly recommend attending classes because the lectures are very helpful and informative, also the attendance may be mandatory up to 75% for some courses. The quality of course materials was good, with both readings and lectures being valuable in content.

I spent about 3-6 hours in class in lectures and seminars, every day. In one course we had a field project that was on top of the class time. There are Danish students in the courses, taking the courses as part of their major (they use Summer University courses like we use SFU’s intersession courses). In some cases, having many Danish students in the class may create issues like in my Visual Anthropology class, where the project was to do research interviews with public. It was natural to do this in Danish, which left me out to some degree. In one class the students spoke English with each other for the benefit of the international students, but in another they spoke mostly Danish, which made it difficult to be a part of conversations.
In Aarhus, the social program primarily for international students is quite rich, you can sign up for different activities. I attended nearly all of them in the first term, as did most of the other exchange students, but the few that I attended in the second term were less lively, though I still recommend it as a great way to meet people.

Reflection after Exchange

The main challenge for me was exhaustion. My exchange started July 1st, so I took an intersession course at SFU just before, which did not allow much time before the assignment for my first Aarhus course was due. Then the gap between courses, even though I travelled outside of Denmark, was again taken up by more reading for my course in the second block. The main difficulty in my classes was the lack of feedback given, especially considering the different format of evaluation, making it a particular challenge for the international student minority (1/6 of students) in the class. In retrospect, taking both courses was more work than I expected, but considering the amount of credits I believe it was worth it. However, if you want to have more of a relaxed time and travel around, I would recommend taking only one course, as taking two does feel like a full load of courses for the about six week period.
Photos

Aros Art Museum