

## 010909 Pinwheel

First of all, let me just say that despite classes starting last week, I am still loving it here. I started out the week with my first class, multivariate statistics. The class was about as exciting as the name suggests or as a math class can be. Within the first five minutes of the lecture, the professor had lost not only me, but the other foreign students. There must be a prerequisite class which we all missed. I had wanted to take the class because I feel that I am weak in statistics and I wanted to be able to better apply them to experimental data. However, the class appears to be theoretical statistics and I decided that I really did not need that much punishment this semester. I inquired with another foreign student about other possible classes to take. It was the best thing that I could have done.

She recommended a course titled: Wind Turbine Technology and Aerodynamics which I had on Thursday. The first class was awesome, not only because the professor is very cool (he brought in enough coffee and tea for the entire class), but because the subject matter is very exciting. Denmark became a hotbed for wind turbines (WT) design and construction back during the oil embargo woes of the 70's. At that time, local tradesmen and workmen got together to build local windmills to provide energy for the community. The first designs were not pretty, but they worked as the community banded together to find new, renewable sources for energy. The first kilowatt WT was designed and constructed by students from DTU and another Danish university. That type of grassroots enthusiasm is amazing. Could you imagine people in your local community in the US deciding that they had enough with the cost and pollution of oil and going out to solve the problem?

The design of WTs has come a long way since then and the commitment that Denmark has shown towards this source of energy has remained strong. Denmark has pledged to build enough WT to supply 50% of the power needs of the entire country. The government did not do this because of the price of oil since the country now has its own oil reserves. They have done it out of a commitment to a clean, renewable energy source. In fact, the city of Copenhagen is ringed by WT along the coast. Future WT construction is being slated for off-shore farms where rows of WT will be built several kilometers from the shore. The location makes construction more difficult, but it avoids covering the countryside with WTs. And the Danes export the technology to other countries all over the world. In fact, the number three export from Denmark is wind turbines (I assume that pickled fish and beer are number one and two, respectively. :) )

DTU is actually now offering a masters degree in WT technology. My friend Santiago from Argentina is in the class with me and he will be the first student to earn the degree. I am really looking forward to class.

My other classes include Partial Differential Equations, Sound and Vibration and an introduction to acoustics. DTU has just changed to a new system where classes are scheduled in 4 hour blocks. The frequency of the class meeting depends on how much the course is worth with the 10 point classes meeting twice a week for a total of 8 hours of classes. All of the professors have started off the class by saying that the system is

new and that they are not sure how they will teach the class yet. Most are combining the lecture time with problem sets or labs. For example, my Differential Equations class meets from 8 - 12 and then from 1 - 5 on Wednesday. The professor seems to recognize that he will bore us all to tears if he lectured all day. So, each four hour section is split into about 2 hours of lectures followed by 2 hours of problem sets. The professor reserved the entire floor of the building which includes a student cafe and computer labs so that we can get out of the lecture hall and spread out during the non-lecture portions of the day. We can get coffee or check email during class since the professor recognizes that students like to have some sort of life. Only my statistics class had lectures for 4 hours straight.

All of the classes that I am in are in English, but some of the handouts are in Danish. In fact, I have been told that as the International Masters Degree program at DTU grows in popularity, more and more of the classes will be in English. I have asked a few Danish students how they feel about all of this and most explain that it is good practice for their English and that they like to meet the foreign students. I have it so very lucky that my first language is English. I have seen some of the other foreign students after the second class of the day who are just in a daze after trying to keep up in English which is not their first language. Likewise, my Danish teacher speaks in English when she is not speaking in Danish. Could you imagine learning French from a teacher who could only speak a 2nd language which was not your own, such as German. You really have to give the other foreign students a lot of credit. What is funny though is to run into friends late in the evening or after a night on the town when their English is just totally lost from either exhaustion or after a few øl (beer).

Being in the classes is kind of odd because the Danish students do not appear to take notes. I have been in classes where either I am the only one taking notes or I am one of two people from the US who are doing so. I have asked others about this and they have had similar experiences. I am not sure what I am missing, but being the only one taking notes is a bit unsettling. The students are also used to having just one big exam at the end of the class. The professors are now adding projects to the classes that will usually be about 25% of the grade. It has been curious to watch the professors tell the students the new grading format and the following it up by asking if the students are ok with it (remember from my last email that the students have a say in the way that the class will be taught.)

We were given a new teacher for our Danish class this week due to the change in class time from mornings to after our classes are over in the evening. The first thing that she said was that she was surprised by how ugly the buildings at DTU appear. The campus was designed during the 60's when the modern look of brick and glass was in. What is odd about the buildings is that there is not a single drinking fountain on campus. Actually, they are absent from all of the public buildings that I have been inside of. So, you just carry around your water bottle with you to your classes. What is also odd is the bathrooms. After you are done washing your hands, you turn around to face a wall of doors. One is the exit, the others lead to toilets. I now can recognize which door is the exit, but for the first day or two, I thought that I was leaving the bathroom only to be

faced by a toilet.

On Monday, I became the proud owner of a Danish bicycle. Tove and I went into Copenhagen to meet Tove's cousin who knows a man who buys stolen bikes from the police and then sells them. I bought the bike for Kr 500 which was a very good deal. The only drawback was that the seat post was too short, but we were pretty sure that we could buy a longer one. But, this was not to be easy since the seat post would cost a lot and might not help in the length. So, I am now the proud owner of two bikes here in Denmark. I bought a new bike because finding another used bike that would fit my long legs proved to be a real pain. The new bike is great. It is the Danish design with a black matte finish, tires that are black and yellow and both the fenders chain guard in battleship gray. The fenders are a must due to the rain (it has rained all weekend) since the bike is my primary transportation, rain or shine. The bike has four gears and a disc brake in the back which is so much better than the "pedal backwards" brakes that most bikes here have. The bike is solid which is nice, but every cobble stone that I go over with my hard, touring tires is transmitted up into the saddle. Ouch. Otherwise, I feel like something right out of the Sound of Music. The good deal is that I have already found another student who wants to buy my first bike, which was easy to get rid of. Plus, I get the tax back from the new bike when I leave the country and I can sell the bike for a nice sum once my studies are over.

Speaking of taxes, I was a bit off when I spoke about the higher prices of goods here in Denmark compared to those in the US. I am now paying more attention to prices because like most of the foreign students, I am finding myself well over budget. Prices for food in the grocery store are actually 10 to 25 percent more than in the US, depending on what you are buying and where. For example, lunch on Saturday for Nina and myself at a little cafe was over \$20 for two sandwiches a coke and a coffee (the sandwiches were good, though). Part of the reason is that every item has already had the 25% Value Added Tax added to the price. Yipes. Once you have 50% of your salary taken by the government, you would think that you could at least get a break at the food store. I discovered this week that the income tax does unfortunately also include my fellowship money which is taxed somewhere between 40 to 60%. Ouch.

Have a great week!

Jeff

---

---

 [Previous](#) | [Next](#)  | [Return to Main Page](#)

---

---

Copyright © 2001 Jeffrey Mahn. All rights reserved. This or any other written materials from this web site may not be used in part or in whole without the prior permission from Jeffrey Mahn.