

 010924 I'm looking forward to the fjords

I know that you probably expected this email to be full of stories of the fjords of Norway. However, we ran into an obstacle that caused us to postpone our trip for a week. Last Wednesday, Santiago and I discovered that we have a Danish test this upcoming Monday to certify that we can now speak beginner Danish. If we are to have any time at all in Bergen, Norway, we will not return to Copenhagen until after the time that the test will start. So, the descriptions of Norway will just have to wait for a week. The leaves were just beginning to turn in Norway about a week ago, so hopefully we will be catching them at their prime. Micah, one of my friends on the trip has a digital camera, so hopefully I will be able to include some pictures for you in the next email.

There are a lot of random things that I want to talk about in this email that I have noticed over the past month. Yes, I have already been here for over a month which is hard to believe. I remember that after my fifth week in China, I thought that I was a real tough guy for being there that long. I laugh about it now.

University

There are so many little things that are different at school that what I am used to from my experiences in the US. First of all, I have been corrected by my professors when I have addressed them as “professor” when asking a question. Instead, the students and the professors are on a first name basis here which is really difficult to get used to. I mean, I never even called my masters thesis advisor by his first name back at Washington University. But, it is part of a new system that I am rapidly coming to enjoy. I actually like the new, four hour class structure and the professors are experimenting with different ways to use the time. I have already spoken about my Difficult Equation class where there is a cafe and computer lab for the students to use. As it turns out, the professor was the one who designed the layout for the eight hour long Wednesday classes. He told me that several other buildings will now be modified to give the students wider access to materials such as Matlab, email and coffee that make the long classes more enjoyable. Plus, most of my classes have only about 2 hours of lectures followed by problem sets.

The Danish method is group work and so during the problem portion of the class, the students break up into large groups or work by themselves if they would rather. I have found good groups in each of my classes to work with. I have seen a lot of what I am learning before during my past studies, but presented in different ways. The classes at DTU seem to be generally geared towards practical applications rather than towards the purely theoretical for the sake of theory. Even my math class has included new techniques that are taught with physical applications and have been immediately useful in my acoustics classes.

Working on the problem sets in class is great because if you hit a wall, the professor is there to help you through it. This actually happens a lot because with the new class system has come a new teaching theory. It has been explained to me as “throw the

students into the deep water to see if they can swim.” So, the problem sets and the material are quite tricky, but I am learning a lot and it is a good feeling to be able to figure them out without help. And at the end of the class, the problem sets are mostly done so the only homework that I have is reading and finishing up the details of the problems. It is so different from Washington University where we were given huge problem sets that took maybe 8 to 12 hours to finish, depending on the class and the level.

But, there is more to the class. The classes are also emphasizing group projects which are beginning to take up more of my time as the semester progresses. For one class, the project was lab work followed by a report. For another class, we had to figure out the velocity of the wind disturbed by a wind turbine in a wind tunnel (not a trivial exercise due to the affect of the wind tunnel walls).

Two of my classes are in big, well lit lecture halls with stadium seating and multiple blackboards that the professor can raise or lower. Most rooms have computers for the teacher as well as video and overhead display. But to clean the blackboards, the Danes do not use erasers. Instead they use big, wet sponges (every classroom has a sink) so that all of the chalk is removed. The classrooms are all smoke free, but smoking is permitted in the hallways which is difficult to get used to. Smoking is pretty much permitted in most public buildings. The Danes are otherwise health conscience as is evident by the number of gyms around. But, smoking is something that they just don't want to give up. The other drawback is that the buildings and classes are VERY well heated which will be great as it grows colder, but was a bit much when I first arrived.

Food

One Danish food that I really love is the rye bread. Set all of your preconceived notions of what rye bread should be aside. The wimpy rye bread in the US is like comparing a Yugo to a Lotus. The rye bread here is a dark brown and the loaves weigh several pounds each. There are whole pieces of rye and other grains in the bread which I imagine have got to make it very healthy. The bread is moist, but firm and biting into a piece is kind of like the consistency of biting into a chewy granola bar. A traditional Danish dish is to eat open faced sandwiches of meat and vegetables on the heavy bread.

The bread that I eat in the sandwiches that I bring to lunch every day is store bought. But, there are numerous bakeries around town that offer amazing looking creations. Last Saturday, I met some friends for coffee and I bought this loaf of bread that was loaded with cinnamon and frosting. The bread was 14 Kr. whereas the coffee was 22 (more than three dollars a cup!). Perhaps the abundance of baked goodies explains the numerous gyms and the reliance on the bicycle.

Design

There is a large, central parking lot at my university that runs down the middle of the campus. But, it is a parking lot unlike any I have ever seen in the US. First of all, it is lined with trees as is the rest of the campus. Secondly, there isn't any asphalt. Instead, the lot is a field of grass with hedges to break up the lot into smaller sections. The cars are supported by a concrete grid that is like a checkerboard with the side of each square about 5cm in length. You can think of the red squares as the concrete and the black squares as soil where the grass can grow. The hedges add a nice touch, that the whole area is actually quite nice rather than a gash of asphalt through the campus. The only drawback that I can see is that the parking lots need to be mowed once a week. The idea of grass parking lots is used quite a lot in this area, including the parking lots at the building where I live.

More Danish Fun

So, as I mentioned, I have an exam on Monday. Danish is becoming easier to read, but I am still generally illiterate which still makes the grocery shopping fun. The Danish alphabet includes the same letters as English, but they are pronounced differently. For example, the letter "h" is pronounced as "hoe". So, when I spell out my last name I must say, "m a hoe n". Other letters include zed, double voh, ee and oo. Plus Danish is not pronounced as it is spelt. For example, "Do you (plural) want something to eat?" is written as: Skal I have noget at spise? However, it is pronounced: Ska ee ha nool at spisah. Which letters are pronounced and which are not is something that must just be learned on a per word basis until I get a better grasp on the language.

Mobile

One last note. I have finally broken down and gotten a mobile so that my friends here can get in touch with me. Plus these days, I also thought that I really should be reachable from the US. Now there are probably only 7 people left in the entire country without mobile phones (even little kids have mobiles). The phones here really are quite nice. All of the networks are digital and instant messaging and WAP on the phones are standard as are caller id and voicemail. I am giving you my number with several very important points. Firstly, Denmark is 6 hours ahead of the east coast of the US. Secondly and most importantly, I don't pay a fee to answer your call but the phone companies in the US will tack on an additional \$.20 per minute on top of whatever they charge you to call Denmark. The additional fee is to access the mobile network here in Denmark. Therefore, I do not expect any telephone calls unless you absolutely have to reach me. Email and snail mail are much better.

I have been here for a month and I still can not get over how lucky I am to be here. I am really happy to have the chance to be at such a good university with such a neat, international environment. I love being a student here. These feelings may wane over time, but I certainly hope not.

Have a great week,

Jeff

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