

Neuroscience and Denmark

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Denmark became an option to study abroad just in time for when I started applying. I remember at Neuroscience Declaration Day fall semester of 2015 when Dr.D was at the podium and telling us the classes offered at DIS. I did not pay much attention to it, as I was more interested in New Zealand, where everyone else went. I went straight for New Zealand, and a couple of weeks after, learned that it was canceled from a lack of people signing up. Frantic, I started applying to anywhere else that seemed interesting: Australia, New Zealand through ISEP, and Greece. Never did I consider Denmark; I learned that only three people were going to be accepted through LFC, so I gave up my chances, thinking that a lot of people were going to try. That was not the case, as Ashley Sinclair contacted me saying that there was one more spot open. Seeing that this was cheaper than ISEP and did have courses that easily transferred to my Neuroscience major, I went for it and crossed my fingers. In February, I got my acceptance letter and prepared myself to fly to Europe, where I have never been before. Up until that flight, I changed my major to Psychology and made Neuroscience as a minor. This was concerning, as it took a lot of time to deliberate on this change, and the classes I signed up for at DIS had neuroscience courses that would've transferred over as credits that were now somewhat useless. I went along with it, and accepted that my classes were finalized; I believed that taking these neuroscience classes were kind of a waste since I was no longer a major.

I have never been so wrong in my life.

I won't go into the details the classes I took, but I will say that DIS was not a waste of time, and was a life changing experience, as cliché as it sounds. I can say that Denmark is a beautiful country with beautiful people. I found it to be a welcoming society that is easy to live in. Not only did I make friends with fellow American students, but I made connections with people from all over Europe. The connections I made throughout Europe are still maintained through Facebook, which gives us the opportunity to stay in touch and hang out again if I am ever around the area again. I even ended up starting a relationship with a Dane. But, as much as this experience changed me as a person, the courses I took at DIS completely changed my perspectives and made me think with an even more open mind. Lake Forest College made me more open as a person, but DIS made me start exploring and enjoy taking risks.

At DIS, I took five courses to count towards LFC's four credits: Psychopharmacology, Neuroscience of Religion and Atheism, Developmental Disorders, Who's Watching: Surveillance, Art, & Culture, and Textile Design in Scandinavia. I appreciate the time I spent at DIS primarily because I was able to take classes that explored all three of my disciplines. For this article, I will discuss Psychopharmacology and Neuroscience of Religion and Atheism. However, I will say that all of these classes greatly influenced my education and my perspective of these subjects, and continue to be in the back of my mind to this day.

Psychopharmacology was my core class, meaning I was a neuroscience student at DIS and did my study tours through this class. This was the same as the other three LFC students with me: Paul Jones '18 and Emma Levine '18. I did not know what to expect; I only knew about psychopharmacology at LFC through some friends that have taken it. I only expected psychopharmacology to be about drugs. Again, I was wrong. We did learn about drugs and the details of mechanisms and components, but we also learned it through different disciplines too: socially, politically, and personally. Our professor, Jesper, was completely open to talking about personal experiences, and had plenty of narratives to discuss with the class that were relevant to what we were learning about. From his experience with ADHD as a postdoc in pharmaceutical sciences, he gave real life situations, as well as multiple studies to bring up in class. Not only did we learn from a textbook, but we knew how these drugs affected people, and how society reacts to the knowledge they know. We dove even farther into the realm of psychopharmacology as the classes went on; the study tours in Aarhus, Denmark, Odense, Denmark, and Munich, Germany, gave us opportunities to listen and talk to experts, from the professor that was responsible for the largest brain bank in the world

(9,479 brains in Aarhus University Hospital, Risskov) to people running an economy-profit operation, offering people with mental illness jobs to re-enter into the mainstream labor market (Diakonia, Munich, Germany). Classroom settings were interactive, and allowed us to explore ongoing research and Europe's view of psychology and drugs.

Neuroscience of Religion and Atheism was unlike any other class I've ever taken. For one, I have never taken a religion course in my life, and to combine this concept with a subject I know fairly well was completely mind blowing. Not only did I continue to learn aspects of the brain and mentality of humans, but I gained so much more knowledge about religion and how it impacts humans on both an individual and societal level. We also went on field trips for this class, which gave us further insight into religion/atheism in the context of real life, and reflecting philosophically on how it impacts the mind. Our two professors included a clinical psychologist and a philosopher. Each of them gave interesting insights on religion from different academic perspectives.

I could go on and on about my experience in Denmark, and how much it changed my life, to the point that I am currently looking for employment there, but my overall statement is this: studying abroad, even through a study that I wasn't actively involved in anymore, was not a waste of my time, but only an experience that I can confidently say changed my perception. I will continue to explore the realm of the brain and fuel my fascination with it. I will just do it with more curiosity than ever.

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