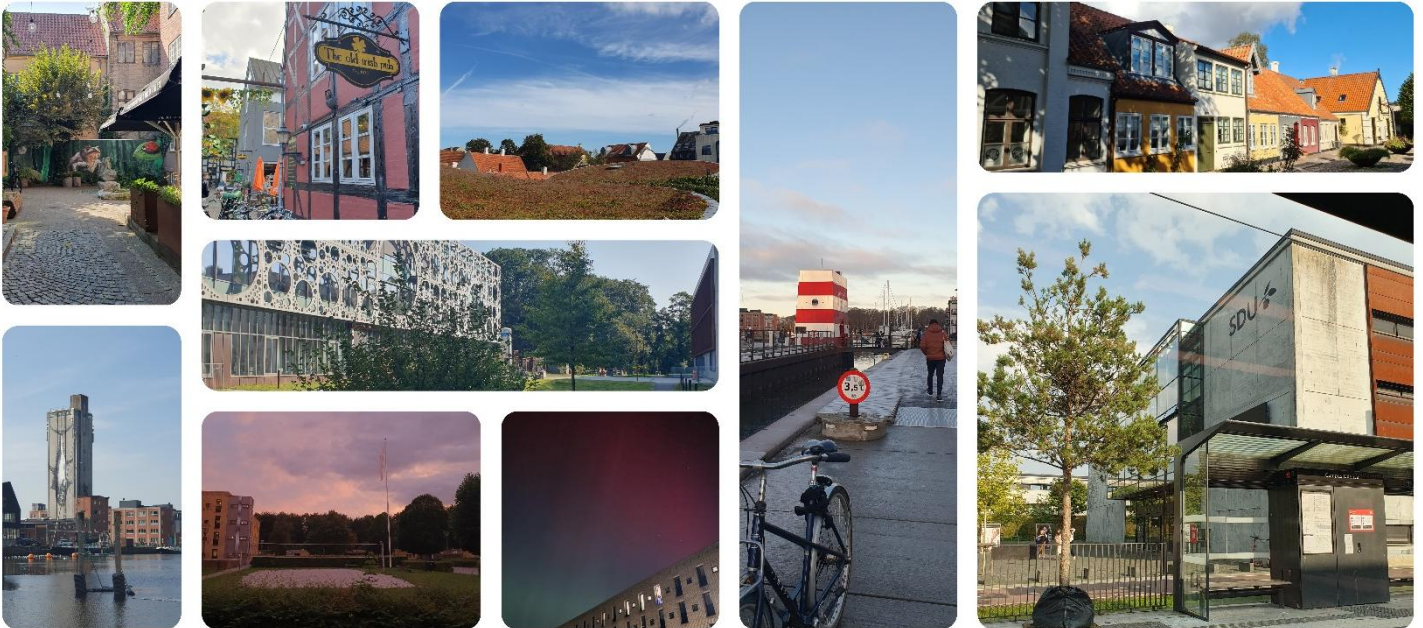


STAP Experience Report

Semester Abroad



Partner University: Syddansk Universitet (SDU) – University of Southern Denmark

Country: Denmark

Academic Year: 2024/2025

Term: Fall Semester (01st of September 2024 to 31st of January 2025)

Name: [REDACTED]

Degree Program: Bachelor of Science in Management, Economics, and Social Sciences

List of completed courses at SDU:

- Business History
- Globalization, Organizations, and the State
- Principles of Economic Behavior
- Project Management

University of Southern Denmark (SDU)

First, I would like to talk about SDU and my time studying there. In my opinion, SDU is great! It is built in an industrial style, which some people might dislike because it can feel a little cold, but it reminded my friends and me of the “Divergent”-series in a good way and I felt good going there to study. The campus has a lot of plants both inside and outside to break up the dark colors and rough structures of the building. They use a lot of glass, even glass ceilings, and lights everywhere to make the space feel lighter and cozier. All in all, I could tell that they consult the students regarding their needs and preferences and invest a lot in the campus, e.g. a new hospital and medical wing, their own tram stops (3 to be exact), a big athletic field and gym, a swimming pool (free of charge for students), a big library with many spaces to study, and additionally many study rooms. SDU is quite big, so I walked around a lot to get from one class to the next, but to make navigation easier, they have a convenient app that shows you where the rooms are and how to get there (it’s called SDU Maps). They also have bike parking everywhere and offer bike repairs in their own shop on campus. Speaking of transportation, in case you have a car, they also have big parking spaces where I’m sure there is always a free spot. The university is very digital, almost everything is done on your computer, including exams, and they have very good IT support. Lastly, regarding food options: there are vending machines everywhere. Also, SDU has multiple cafeterias and bistros that have good quality food but are rather pricy. Their opening times are quite short compared to the university being open 24/7 (including the library, which was great during the exam period).

Completed Courses and Special Requirements at SDU

Now, I would like to go into detail about studying at SDU. I took four courses at SDU which were all held in English. I could have taken Danish courses as well, but I don’t speak Danish nearly well enough to be able to follow it in a university context. A special requirement that I was required to follow was to take courses worth 30 ECTS (=36 ECTS in Cologne), which sounds a lot, but it was fine, since they offer multiple 10 (12) ECTS courses. In my experience, the 10 (12) ECTS courses were not much more difficult than the 5 (6) ECTS courses, they only had a higher workload. Three things that I wish I would have known in advance are: 1. Denmark doesn’t use our grading system (1.0, 1.3, 1.7, etc.) – they use a 7-point grading scale (12, 10, 7, 4, 02, 00, -2) and your grades will be converted into “our” grades once you are back at UoC; 2. Like I said above, everything is done digitally, even the exams. They require you to download a certain screen recording program in order to avoid cheating. Also, many exams were open book and you could use anything you wanted (including notes, slides, etc. as long as it was previously downloaded), and 3. SDU has a very relaxed AI policy, which meant that unless specified otherwise, I was allowed to use AI for research purposes and also copy parts of it into my texts, as long as I cited correctly. The four courses I took at SDU were the following:

Business History: It is a 10 (12) ECTS course and I had a 2 hours 45 minutes lecture once a week (including 30 minutes of break throughout). The exam was comprised of 4 written assignments during the semester, each based on a research paper, and a final exam at the end, which was open book, and I got possible exam questions in advance. The lectures were about the history of business in general with a more detailed look on some of the businesses throughout history (e.g. the East India Company). For me, this class was interesting, and the professor was well informed and helpful. The workload seemed appropriate for the ECTS value, and the content was an interesting mix of history and economics. All in all, I would recommend the course!

Globalization, Organizations, and the State: It is also a 10 (12) ECTS course and part of the 1. Semester of one of SDU's bachelor programs (MMA). I had a 1 hour 45 minutes lecture once a week (including 15 minutes of break throughout) and an additional exercise that was equally long. The final exam was a closed book, written exam about the contents of the lectures, but we got the exam questions in advance to be able to prepare accordingly. The lectures were about the EU, the different eras of globalization, organizations and institutions, etc. We had to read multiple articles every week, so all in all, I would recommend the course, but only if you are interested in the topics I mentioned.

Principles of Economic Behavior: It is a 5 (6) ECTS course and part of the 1. Semester of one of SDU's bachelor programs (MMA). I had a 1 hour 45 minutes lecture once a week (including 15 minutes of break throughout) and an additional 45-minutes long exercise. The exam was comprised of two pass/fail group assignments during the semester about contents of the exercises and a final exam that was an open book, written exam about the contents of the lectures. The lectures were about economic principles (think Macroeconomics) and we had to read multiple chapters every week. The professor could not explain the concepts particularly well and there were few slides provided. But the exercises were very good and helpful. All in all, I would only recommend the course to people who are interested in and already familiar with the topics I mentioned.

Project Management: It is also a 5 (6) ECTS and I had a 1 hour 45 minutes lecture once a week (including 15 minutes of break throughout). The final exam was a written group report that we had to prepare over the course of the semester. The lectures were about the contents of the report (e.g. how to plan, execute, and finalize a project; financing of a project; using planning programs; etc.). We had to read multiple chapters every week, and the report was a lot of work, both during the semester and in the final stages during the winter holidays. All in all, I would recommend the course, but only if you are interested in the topic, as you will be spending many hours on it. Still, I believe it is a good course to learn the basics of project management, which can be helpful anywhere, and also how to function in a group with strangers.

Preparation for the Semester Abroad

Next, I want to talk about how I prepared for my semester abroad. Before even starting the planning process, I looked at my options (my semester abroad was a mandatory part of my degree (MES)) and made a list of what was important to me (e.g. student housing, university rankings, course selection, host country and how to get there, etc.). Then, based on my list I decided on my first, second, and third choice and I am very happy that I got my first choice, Denmark. At first, I was honestly very overwhelmed by the number of things that I needed to do after getting accepted. What helped me the most was creating very detailed to-do-lists with due dates and additional information on how to do the task, where to find the needed materials (if any), and where to submit it (if applicable). Important things to remember were of course all application and Erasmus related documents, insurance, accommodation requirements, course selection, etc. Regarding insurance, I looked for an adequate one that covered all my possible needs while living abroad, so I didn't need to worry about that while I was abroad. I also frequently texted my UoC and Erasmus coordinators to confirm my progress and ask for help if I did not know how to proceed. They were always very helpful and super nice and there was no issue that could not be solved – what I want to say is don't be afraid to ask for help. The same goes for talking to peers. Just talk to others that are also planning their semester abroad, they might have some ideas that you didn't think about. Another thing I did was to save some money.

A semester abroad tends to be more expensive than your “normal” life, and especially Denmark is expensive. Now, looking back, saving money was a very good decision, since I didn’t need to worry too much about it during my stay in Odense and was able to make the most out of my time there. That also makes it easier to meet people and have fun experiences: being able to say yes to everything and stepping out of the comfort zone! Shortly before starting my semester abroad, I booked a train ticket from Cologne to Odense, packed my bags with everything I could possibly need (don’t pack too much, you can (and probably will) always buy stuff that you need), and met up with many of my friends and my family one last time to say goodbye.

Life in Odense (Denmark)

Finally, I will talk about life in Denmark, specifically Odense. As I have said before, everything is more expensive in Denmark. Once I accepted that it got easier to spend 7€ on a Cider when we went out. Beer is definitely the alcohol of choice (comparable to Germany), but if you don’t like that (like me), Cider is a good alternative. It’s often more expensive, but almost all bars and clubs have it. Odense is a rather small city compared to Cologne, but it is among the biggest cities in Denmark. For me, life there felt less rushed, and the city gave off calmer, quieter vibes. There were a lot of cozy cafés, cute streets, and greener areas like parks, giving an impression of “hygge” (Danish for cozy), which is taken very seriously in Denmark, especially in the wintertime. I grew to be a huge fan of hygge: being cozy, having a warm cup of tea (or whatever you prefer) and just unwinding in your warm, light room, while it is cold, rainy, and dark outside. That was sadly also a reality of life in Denmark: sometimes it felt like I didn’t see the sun for days, it rained a lot and was overall mostly gloomy. But in between the sun would come out which was lovely. And my friends and I still went out to explore almost every day, no weather could stop us from having a great time!

Speaking of exploring, since Odense is a smaller city, I could get everywhere with my bike. I rented a bike from Swapfiets, which was really cheap with the student discount, and I used it almost every single day. I can highly recommend investing in a bike and using it often, but the public transport is also fine, and not too expensive. The ticket for people under 26 cost 10 kroner for 1.5 hours – less than in Cologne. Also, bikes can be taken on the one tram line and on the buses free of charge. The tram also goes over the university campus, so if you live in the city center, this would be very convenient to use, since SDU is located a bit outside of the city on a big field. For me, it felt like the public transport was much more reliable regarding the timetable, but also less frequent than in Cologne, especially at night. In Odense, there is a lot you can do. Some events are organized by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) that aim at connecting international students, showing them around, and familiarizing them with Danish culture. SDU itself also hosted some events, like the Semesterstartsfesten (a festival for SDU’s students with some of Denmark’s biggest singers) or the Annual University Celebration (an evening where we all dressed up really nicely and the whole campus turned into a giant party with multiple bands and show acts). Partying with all the Internationals was always super fun. Our go-to-spots were Butcher’s, the Fridaybar at SDU (yes, the uni has its own bar!), the Old Irish Pub (with live music), Proud Mary’s, and Bodegaen. At Bodegaen, there is a beer flat for 90 kroner for 4 hours on Tuesday evening, so usually everyone was there. Shopping can also be nicely done. They have the “normal” chains, a lot of Scandinavian fashion, but also very cute and small local shops, as well as vintage and second-hand stores. Especially Reshopit had a great selection. Odense also has a few art galleries. Regarding eating and drinking, for cozy café vibes we usually went to Café Sølle or Café Unika, and for “real” food I loved going to an old factory with a permanent food market inside (Storm’s Pakhus), which was very very

great, but also expensive. If you're ever there, remember to ask for a student discount for your drinks ;) Odense also has a few very good Asian restaurants to offer, as well as one of the best Pitas I have ever had!

As far as outdoor activities go, there is a big park called Munke Mose, which is very sweet for strolling around or having a picnic, and there is the harbor with a swimming pool that is open year-round and free of charge. We both went in September when it was still warm and sunny, but we also went in December and January, when the water temperature was around 5 degrees Celsius. It took a lot of willpower to do the cold plunge, but it was one of my highlights, especially because they have a sauna that's also free of charge. Other activities include going to concerts and performances in the Odeon or the Concert Hus, and going to museums like the Time Museum, where you can learn about the history of Odense, and the H.C. Andersen Museum, which contains facts about his many stories and has a very interesting architecture. Actually, he is the most famous person from Odense, and you will find references to him throughout the entire city.

Another very important point about living in Odense is accommodation. I lived in the student dorm H.C. Ørstedskollegiet, and it was the best decision I have made. In the beginning, I was really scared about how living in a dorm and sharing a kitchen with many strangers would be, and when I first entered the building, the hallway did not look promising. But relatively quickly, I learned to appreciate the dorm: I had my own room and bathroom, shared a kitchen with mostly amazing people who I am happy to call friends now, and met many great people from other kitchens as well. Our friend group regularly met for dinners in one of the kitchens, where we ate our meals together, chatted, and played card games. The common dinners are one of my highlights from living in the dorm and my stay abroad in general! The dorm is great for socializing, not only because of the kitchens, but also because it has its own bar ("Huset") which hosted parties and activities like craft nights throughout the semester. My friends and I grew really fond of the Huset and even went there on New Year's which was great fun. One honorable mention goes out to one evening, where my friends and I went to the Huset, but were all really tired, so we decided to leave earlier than planned, and then walked out to see the Northern Lights over our dorm! That experience was crazy, and I was so excited to see them. It's relatively rare to see them in Denmark, so I'm really happy that we got so lucky! Regarding life in Denmark, it is important to know that Denmark is a rather small country and thus, many Danish cities can be reached from Odense by train for a day trip. Those could be Aarhus (it's pretty and has many shops), Aalborg, Nyborg (cute little coastal town), Copenhagen (great for a day trip, also fun for partying), and so much more. Some German cities are also relatively close, e.g. Hamburg. I travelled to Norway in my autumn break (one week in October) and it was really easy to get from Odense to Copenhagen to go to the airport. The train ride was around 1.5 hours and relatively cheap.

All in all, Odense was a great place to live, and SDU a great place to study. I would always choose it again, although I am certain that it was the people I met there who made it truly special beyond compare.