

## **Rotary Ambassorial Scholarship – Final Report**

*Eric von Wettberg*

*Host District:* 1470

*Sponsor district:* 7150

*Host Institution:* The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, Copenhagen, Denmark.

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*Current Position:* Naturalist Intern, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Sherburne, New York.

### ***I. Course of Study and Degrees received***

I performed research examining the effects of crop spatial pattern and sowing density on weed performance. I did not enroll in courses or take a degree.

### ***II. Suitability of institution for study or training***

The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural Institution was an appropriate location for my research project. There were adequate facilities for field experiments and greenhouse studies. The staff was helpful and mostly able to converse in English. Once I learned Danish, the staff was very helpful.

### ***III. Adequacy of award funds***

The Ambassorial scholarship provided adequate funds to complete my research project. In addition, with proper planning and saving, I had sufficient funds to travel extensively in Denmark and Europe. The scholarship left me with funds equivalent to those received by Danish university students from the Danish government.

### ***IV. Housing and eating arrangements***

I had excellent housing arrangements, and think that my housing experience was one of the most enjoyable aspects of my scholarship. I lived in Egmont Kollegiet, a dormitory with self-catering for students from any university in Copenhagen. I shared a kitchen with 19 Danish students, and frequently ate with them. I did all of my own shopping and cooking. Living with Danish students made learning the Danish language possible, and immersed me in Danish culture.

My housing arrangements were made by the Fulbright Commission. I was fortunate to have been a Fulbright scholar in Denmark prior to being an Ambassorial scholar. The Fulbright Commission has a contract with Egmont Kollegiet to place their students there. Housing is very tight for students in Copenhagen, and I was fortunate to have access to this. Other scholars may experience great difficulties in finding housing in Copenhagen.

Danish food can be a challenge for North Americans. Danes eat more meat than many North Americans, and do not understand vegetarians. Danes do not do the cross-over with their utensils, and find American table manners strange.

### ***V. Influence of your language ability on the effectiveness of your role as an ambassador of goodwill***

Learning Danish greatly improved my experience. Although English is a mandatory subject in school in Denmark, and most young Danes speak English very well, Danes interact with each other in Danish. Because Danes do speak English well, I had few difficulties in my first few months. Yet, I found that making an effort to speak some Danish made Danes respect me more. Many native English speakers do not bother to learn Danish when living in Denmark, so that those who do are considered fairly exceptional.

Speaking Danish made completing my research project much easier. Some of the staff at my university did not speak English. Being able to converse and give instructions in Danish was very useful. Furthermore, speaking

Danish allowed me to participate in events from which I would have otherwise been excluded. Most importantly, since I lived with 19 Danes, I was always surrounded by Danish conversation. Until I understood Danish, I was excluded from conversations that did not involve me. Eventually I was able to be a watchman at the Roskilde festival, a large music festival held outside Copenhagen every summer.

It took me at least six months to be conversant in Danish. Since I had a year and half, the effort was worth it. For many of the American Fulbright scholars I knew, learning Danish was not a good investment of time because they were leaving before they could learn Danish. Because Danes speak English so well and so few people speak Danish, many may not consider it worthwhile. I still recommend it to scholars because it can open many doors.

#### **VI. *Reception by people in my study country***

Danes do not simply hate people from the United States the way many other peoples of the world do. When I lived in Greece, I experienced considerable resentment because of my nationality. Most Danes find American culture and politics to be strange, absurd, and frequently shortsighted or excessively conservative, but are willing to accept that individual Americans are occasionally intelligent and decent people. Danes are also annoyed by the fact that many Americans can not differentiate between Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

Despite their reservations about Americans, Danes in general have an inordinate fondness for American culture. Many Danes love American movies, sayings, and material culture. Danes, like some other Western Europeans, can occasionally be found trashing American lifestyle and complaining about American cultural imperialism while wearing bluejeans and eating a cheeseburger.

Danes were pleasantly surprised that I could find Denmark on a map and name several famous Danes. I was received more fondly because of my basic familiarity with Denmark. Frequently when I met Danes, they would be hesitant, assuming that like many Americans I would confuse Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands. This hesitancy would usually evaporate once they realized they had not the slightest idea where upstate New York is in relation to other parts of the US. I think my presence was a great learning experience for myself and everyone I met.

#### **VII *Guidance and assistance received from Rotary counselors***

I have had what I consider to be good relationships with my Rotarian advisors, but I think I have made few demands upon them. Because I had already been a Fulbright scholar, I did not need orientation to Danish culture when I began my Ambassorial scholarship in Denmark. Fulbright had arranged for an extensive orientation when I first arrived in Denmark, and arranged housing for me. My advisors were useful resources for dealing with Rotary, and for some other issues like finding a dentist. But, I do not feel that I needed them as much as other scholars may.

I found that the scholar orientation I attended before departure in Philadelphia was very useful. It was a pleasant introduction to Rotary, the expectations of the scholarship, and the other scholars from the Northeastern US. Since most of the other scholars were going to Latin America, it was less useful for orientation to Denmark.

I found it a bit disappointing that I have had at least two, if not three, contact people at Foundation Headquarters in Evanston, IL. It would be nice to have some continuity there.

#### **VIII. *Rotary Clubs, district conferences, and other events attended***

I regularly attended meetings of the Valby-Copenhagen club, and was a member of the Copenhagen City Rotaract Club. I also visited meetings of the Frederikberg, Copenhagen North, and Copenhagen South Rotaract clubs. I attended the European Rotaract Conference in Copenhagen in April of 2000, which was also the national Rotaract conference and the district Rotary conference. I was present at a international rotaract visit to the island of Hven, in the Oresund channel between Denmark and Sweden in August, 2000.

#### **IX. *Other civic, professional or community activities***

I was active in the Danish chapter of the International Association of Agricultural Students. This student group is not represented in the US. One of my goals is to bring it to the US to nurture international contacts in agriculture. Through this group I attended agricultural student conferences in Minsk, Belarus, and Nova Gorica, Slovenia.

I was also active in First Contact, the association for foreign students at the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University. This group, composed primarily of Danish students, arranges social events and field trips for new foreign students at the university. This group was a great way to meet both Danes and other foreign students from all over the world.

Professionally, I was actively engaged in research. My research in the laboratory of Dr. Jacob Weiner concerned the effects of the density and spatial arrangement of cereal crops on weed performance, and the basic mechanisms of plant competition. I performed ten experiments spanning three outdoor field seasons and made use of the university's greenhouse facilities. We found a 60% reduction in weed biomass from conventional cropping practices by increasing cropping density and using a hyperdispersed planting pattern instead of conventional rows.

#### **X. *Other countries visited***

I visited Belarus and Slovenia while attending agricultural student conferences in these countries. I visited universities in Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium where I was familiar with faculty members engaged in research similar to my own. I gave an academic seminar to faculty at Wagenigen, an agricultural university in the Netherlands. While I was in Germany I was able to meet another branch of the Wettberg family and visit Wettbergen, a small town outside Hannover named after some of my family.

I had the opportunity to visit friends in the Czech republic, Austria, Italy, Norway, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands during vacations or on business trips. I also took a holiday in Sweden and Norway to see the midnight sun.

#### **XI. *Radio and television appearances and published articles***

I wrote articles for the university student magazine and for the international magazine of the International Association of Agricultural Students. Currently I am working on jointly publishing four articles reporting on my research. I may also write a general interest article on my experience for an American magazine. I was not given an opportunity to appear on television or radio.

#### **XII. *My impact as a Rotary scholar on my host country, Rotary club, and district***

I think my primary impact on my host country, club and district was to foster cultural exchange. Those who knew me know a little bit more about the US and Americans. Even if not every experience was positive, they may understand Americans a bit better.

#### **XIII. *Speaking engagements, including your ambassadorial accomplishments since returning home***

I spoke twice at my host Rotary club, Valby-Kobenhavn (March 23<sup>rd</sup>, December 4<sup>th</sup>). I also represented the Ambassadorial Scholar program at the Rotaract European Conference (April 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>). I spoke about my research at the Flakkeberg Research Station, Flakkeberg, Denmark (April 25<sup>th</sup>), the Foulum Research Station, Viborg, Denmark (December 7<sup>th</sup>), and Wagenigen University, Wagenigen, the Netherlands (December 11<sup>th</sup>). In addition to this, I represented the program and the US at the International Association of Agricultural Students Baltic-Nordic meeting, Minsk, Belarus, (March 9<sup>th</sup>) and European Directors meeting, Nova Gorica, Slovenia (December 31<sup>st</sup>).

Since returning home, I have spoken to the Hamilton Rotary club (January 22<sup>nd</sup>). I am scheduled to speak at the Eastwood Rotary club in March. I have made arrangements to begin to accept other speaking engagements.

I am currently interning at an environmental education center of the State of New York. My duties involve teaching basic ecology, giving natural history talks to community groups, and writing natural history interest features. Through my duties at the center, I have made the front page of the local newspaper. In the fall I will begin a graduate program in Ecology and Evolution.

In addition to my current employment, I have become active in the Southern Madison County Heritage Trust. This newly formed community group is aiming to preserve farmland by buying development rights. Through my duties with the environmental education center and in cooperation with the Hamilton rotary, I am writing a natural history guide for a wetland preserve in the center of the village of Hamilton. I am also planning to become involved in the Hamilton Garden club and with SUNY Morrisville, a local university.

#### **XIV. *How I plan to continue to contribute to international understanding***

I plan to remain active in Rotarct in the coming years. In Central New York there are few clubs, but there are clubs in the cities where I am considering graduate study. I am looking forward to the comraderie of the organization. When I am settled in graduate school and old enough to be eligible for Group Study Exchange, I plan to apply to participate in a GSE.

I also plan to establish a chapter of the International Association of Agricultural Students in the United States. It is a shame that American agricultural students do not participate in more international projects and events. Starting this organization may internationalize the experience of some American agricultural students.

I will also continue to share with my friends and associates some of the experiences and knowledge I have accumulated during my scholarship period.

#### **XV. *Observations and suggestions regarding the Rotary Foundation Scholarships program.***

I had some difficulty arranging talks in Denmark. I did not feel comfortable asking to speak to clubs. I thought my advisors would do more to arrange talks. I was willing to give more talks than I did. In the US, my advisors seem to have been a bit more proactive in arranging speaking engagements. I still feel to some extent under-utilized, although this may of course be due to my own limitations as a speaker.

I would have liked some more continuity in contact with Evanstown. I had at least two, if not three, separate contacts at Headquarters.

Despite these two criticisms, I think the Ambassorial program is a fantastic program. Scholars have considerable flexibility to pursue their interests and contribute to Rotary and international understanding as they are best able.

#### **XVI. *Suggestions for future scholars***

I think scholars heading to Denmark should make an effort to learn Danish quickly. It is a difficult language that few people speak, but it is useful in Denmark even if one does not speak it well.

The Immigration Services in Denmark are much more circumspect about taking students from the developing world than the developed world. Scholars from the developing world should take care of visa arrangements long in advance. Persons from the developed world will have few problems with visas to Denmark, as long as they plan to leave Denmark once the scholarship period is over. Police and health services take a similar double standard to foreigners.

Housing is very tight in Copenhagen. Plan long in advance, and try to get someone in Denmark to make arrangements for you. Most universities can arrange housing, but they need advanced warning. Do not expect great housing or location, and be open-minded. Danish toilets are incredibly small, and are frequently combined with a shower. Do not let this be a concern.

Buy a bicycle. Copenhagen, and most of Denmark, is best traveled on two wheels with one's own locomotive power. Denmark is very flat, and there are bicycle paths everywhere. Do not buy a very expensive bicycle in Copenhagen, as bicycles are easily stolen. Do not buy a bike that is too cheap either, as maintaining it will be a problem.

The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University is a small agricultural school. It does not have expertise or facilities for everything. Some programs are not very strong, while others are fantastic. Currently, the ecology program is a bit backwards, particularly in botany. Few professors in botany (my host department) were actively engaged in research or able to speak English well. For some students this may be a concern. If the quality of

research or education is of prime concern, choose your academic advisor and department carefully. The level of English, and quality of programs can vary considerably.

Be very proactive in getting speaking engagements. It is easy for clubs to get interesting speakers in Copenhagen because it is a capital, and scholars are not considered the most exciting speakers. Advertise yourself.

Join Rotaract. In Denmark, as in much of Europe, Rotaract is much stronger than it is in the US. The clubs are great resources and contacts. In Copenhagen make an effort to visit all four clubs, as they have very different characters.

Expect rain. It rains in Denmark regardless of the season. People do not let the rain bother them. People of all ages will bicycle in any weather.

Expect the winter to be dark, and the summer to be light. Days are short in Denmark in the winter, and most people are depressed. The summer is fabulous, because the night is very short and everyone is happy. Try to travel south in the winter.

Spend some time with other foreign students, but not all of your time. Copenhagen attracts many foreign students, because it is possible to study in Denmark in English. There is great foreign student social life in Copenhagen, and it is nice to meet people from all over the world. But, try to meet Danes. Living with Danes is the best way to do this. Rotaract and other groups are also good ways to meet Danes.