IT UNIVERSITY TRAVEL REPORT

Host University: The New School (Parsons School of Design)
Study program at ITU: DDK (Digital Design and Communication)
Study program abroad: Design and Technology (MFA)
Exchange period: Fall 2015 – Spring 2016
Status: Visiting student
Courses studied abroad: Major Studio 1, Creativity & Computation Lab + Lec, Media Design, Media Practices: Design Principles, Design Innovation and Leadership, Monoprint and Urban Interaction Design.

YOUR STAY ABROAD

What was it like to study at Parsons (including choice of courses, academic level, social life at campus)?

I spent two semesters at Parsons in New York City. It was amazing and highly recommendable! Parsons is recognized as one of the best design schools in the world, so my expectations were high but all were fulfilled.

I was a visiting student in the Design and Technology program (DT) and took most of my first semester classes with DT first years. If you're in DT, you're allowed to register for classes in a couple of other Parsons and New School programs but my main affiliation was with the students and teachers of DT.

DT is an incredible program. Teachers and students are very talented and there's a great feeling of unity within the program. The New School has a high diversity and high rate of international students, so you'll meet people from all over the world.

If I had to describe DT with one term, it would be “creative coding within an art perspective”. DT gives you the freedom to focus on what you find exciting but also gives you the tools to solve the tasks you want to solve. Depending on what courses you sign up for, there's a lot of coding (basic web, Processing, Arduino, Python, JavaScript, openFrameworks) but if you're a visiting student you're free to sign up for the DT courses you find interesting. I would recommend to spend as much time as possible on DT courses as they are of high quality and give you the opportunity to dig into the
creative coding aspect.

The way of teaching is quite different from what we experience at ITU. Most courses are taught in a studio format which means there's usually 10-15 students in each section. The classes are quite intense and in most classes, you're presenting every week. The work load is more spread out throughout the semester and the exam period is not as tough as at ITU. Depending on the class, you're graded on more than just your final project (attendance, ongoing projects, readings, discussions, smaller hand ins and so on). It can be tough in the beginning but you quickly get used to it. For me, it made me feel more engaged throughout the semester.

**What was your initial motivation for going abroad and did your stay meet your expectations?**

Honestly, my initial motivation was to spend a semester in New York City and I didn't care so much about the specific school or program. I applied for the NYIT exchange program through ITU but wasn't accepted. Instead, I applied for a freemover stay at Parsons and NYIT and was accepted at both. In the end, I decided to study at Parsons because of its reputation. Initially, I was only supposed to stay one semester, but after only a few weeks in the city, I decided to try to extend my stay.

**Please describe what you got out of your stay, both personally and academically, and how do you expect it to contribute to your further studies?**

Going abroad is a great opportunity to broaden one's horizon. Meeting people from all over the world while studying in a creative international environment has provided me with a lot of experiences and insights I could not have obtained at ITU.

**ARRANGING YOUR STAY**

**Please give a short description of the process of arranging your stay**

Going abroad, especially to the States, especially at Parsons and especially as a freemover is hard work! The best advice I received from a former student, who did the same as me, was "no matter the work you put in before you go, it's all worth it in the end" – and he was not lying. I'll try to list the process and main steps I went through:

1) Get in contact with the visiting student advisor for DT as soon as possible. The application process for visiting students is different than for regular graduates, so ask around to find out when you must apply, how you should do it and what documents you must submit. My application deadline was May 1st and I received my admission letter on June 16th. Please note that deadlines might change every year for visiting students.

2) Most US schools require a specific English test score, so check the requirements for DT and sign up for the TOEFL test as soon as possible. It's offered at CBS quite often.

3) Surprisingly enough, what I spend most time on was getting pre-approvals from ITU. It is NOT easy getting courses approved – especially mandatory courses. I received
pre-approvals for the second part of my specialization, a couple of electives and Digital Innovation. I tried to get Digital Rhetoric approved, but without luck. SAP will not elaborate on their rejection letters. Usually they tell you to provide more documentation or account for the similarities between the course at ITU and the one at Parsons. Since many of the courses in the ITU course database doesn't have elaborate descriptions, it can be difficult to know what you're looking for. When I worked on my pre-approvals for the Spring term, I had to contact all teachers at Parsons to receive the full syllabus (in some cases the description provided through the New School course database is not enough).

4) **Apply for grants** as soon as possible. I made the mistake to think that you must have your admission letter before you can apply for any grants, and that's not the case for all of them (you should just submit it as soon as you have it). Make a list of the grants you want to apply for and spend a couple of hours every week writing and submitting applications.

5) When you want to study in the US, you must prove in a **bank statement** that you have the money to fund your stay. When I applied for NYIT I had to provide the bank statement together with my application. At Parsons, you don't have to provide it unless you're accepted but you do have to provide it before they can send you your I-20 (the document you need to apply for a F1 visa at the embassy). Getting started early on collecting the necessary documentation is not a bad idea.

6) Start working on **your portfolio**. Both NYIT and Parsons require that you submit it together with your application.

**What resources did you find helpful in planning your stay and which people did you use (if any)?**

When you're a freemover, ITU can't do much to help you (if anything). I talked to a few students who had been to Parsons and NYIT and they were super helpful! I also talked to the Students Advisors at ITU when I ran into trouble with my pre-approvals.

Please feel free to email me too if you have any questions.

**How did you arrange practicalities such as accommodation?**

I was lucky and got accepted to the Bikuben Foundation student housing on Upper West Side. Read more about the house: [http://www.bikubenfonden.dk/kollegium-i-new-york](http://www.bikubenfonden.dk/kollegium-i-new-york)

**EXPENSES AND FINANCING**

**Please comment on expenses connected to your stay abroad**

Studying at Parsons is NOT cheap. Tuition depends on your program. DT (Parsons in general) is one of the most expensive programs at the New School. If you apply for the SU Scholarship for Study Abroad, you can get approx. a third of the tuition covered. In general, there's a lot of fees when your applying to study abroad (e.g. application fee, visa fee). When you arrive in New York, things are not any cheaper. Cost of living is high
and if you’re in DT you’re expected to buy a few items too (I spent quite a lot on my Arduino and print materials for Monoprint).

I did not save enough money or receive enough funding to cover all my expenses, but I feel that the debt I have now is little to pay, considered how much I enjoyed my year in New York.

**Did you apply for scholarships and would you recommend any ones in particular?**

I applied for around 40-45 grants but I missed a lot of deadlines since I thought I needed my admission letter before I could apply. Applying for grants is hard work too and it seems quite random at times. My best advice is that when you get a rejection letter, check out if you can reapply right away. For instance, I got a rejection letter and reapplied 4 days later – and got the grant the second time. The people reading the applications don't always have time to read through everything, so apply for all relevant grants you can find.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER STUDENTS**

1) Start early on everything!

2) All the above has been focused on Parsons and not on New York itself. If I had to write about the city and why it’s my favorite place in the world, this documents would turn into a novel. JUST GO!

Kind regards,
Stine Møller Andersen
smoe@itu.dk