

FRANKLY SPEAKING

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FREE, AS IN BEER

Denmark's America

Aaron Greiner
Contributor

As I sat in the Student-erhuset (the Danish student center) on January 20th, watching the inauguration of Donald Trump, it was silent. While I heard conversations in English here and there, the crowd was mostly Danish. All around me they stared straight ahead as the commentators spoke, hanging on to every detail. I had been in Denmark for only a week, but it was already clear that I was no further from U.S. politics than I was back in Massachusetts. It all seemed so close and yet foreign at the same time.

A few weeks later, after dinner with a Danish family, I got the question I had been warned was coming. "So, what do you think about the new president?" We sat with our coffee and discussed the ins and outs of the American election system, the political climate, and the future of the U.S. After an hour, I sheepishly asked, "So, how do elections work in Denmark?" While these two Danes had been talking about the most complex details of the entire American political system, I

hadn't the slight idea about how any of that worked in Denmark. More recently, I spoke with some of the Danes I live with in my kollegium (Danish student housing). They spoke with the all the confidence of informed citizens, but also with a understanding that it was a one way street. What happened in the U.S. had a large effect on their lives, but there was little they could do to affect it.

It feels like a strange time to study abroad. When I wake up each morning, I see a list of news notifications on my phone about what happened in Washington while I was sleeping. I too start to feel like the Danes. I read the news and listen to the radio but then I walk outside and it all seems so foreign. I get an email that says "Call your senator" at least once a day but I shake it off, thinking, "I can't call, I don't have an international plan" or, "Postage to the States is real expensive." Even so, what happens in the U.S. is impossible to ignore. I have never watched a Danish prime minister inauguration. Even while living here, I have heard little discussion of Danish politics. And yet, every day the front

page of the Danish newspaper is something to do with the U.S.

Last weekend I went to the Science March in Copenhagen. I couldn't help but find it strange that this march, inspired by marches being held around the U.S., was happening so far away from where it's impact was suppose to be felt. Countless people held signs and listened to speeches as if they were on the mall in DC. I flew across an ocean and, even here, there were people who were committed to American politics that didn't even have a say. More committed, I'm ashamed to admit, than I have been at times.

Studying abroad at a time like this has been strange and even frustrating at times. But living in outside the U.S. has given me a new view of American politics. What happens in the U.S. does not stay in the U.S. People all around the world are watching and waiting. If a Dane can make a sign and march in the cold to send the U.S. a message from across the Atlantic, as someone that has actual power to make change, I better do a heck of a lot more than just call my senator.

SERV Activity Updates

Justin Kunimune

Contributor

The Daily Table: Emily Yeh

Daily Table is a non-profit organization that makes affordable and healthy food available to people with low incomes. A group from Olin volunteers at Daily Table every Saturday (time TBD). If you're interested, keep an eye out for an email to Carpe with more information!

Big Brothers Big Sisters College Campus Program: Justin Kunimune

Big Brothers Big Sisters has continued with its biweekly outings. As we approach the end of the semester, we prepare to say goodbye for our Littles for the summer.

Charles River Center: Emma Price

The Charles River Center is a non-profit organization based in Needham that works to improve the lives of people with developmental disabilities and help support their families. They have a variety of different programs for people of all ages, all with really fun activities (like zumba and yoga)!!

E-Disco: Micaela Chiang, Daniel Daughterly, Lauren Pudvan, Nicole Schubert

We have continued our monthly lessons at Schofield Elementary school. We hosted the 6th graders from Dana Hall and had them design for mythical creatures. We will be having students in the area come to Olin on April 29th to build and launch Bottle Rockets.

IgniteCS: Casey Alvarado, Emily Lepert, Brenna Manning, Vicky McDermott, Sophia Nielsen, Andrew Pan

We are hosting computer science workshops on Saturdays at nearby middle schools. Last semester we hosted two workshops at Dedham Middle School and Monsignor Haddad Middle School. This semester, we hosted another workshop at Pollard Middle School in Needham, and will also be returning to the Dedham Middle School. We are always looking for volunteers to help out at our workshops and for new members to join our curriculum design team!

The Food Project: Aaron Greiner, Gaby Clarke

The Food Project engages youth and works on food justice issues through running 70 acres of farm in the Greater Boston area and the North Shore. They work on advocacy, youth development, and much more. Their farms, which are largely run by youth and volunteers, produce food that is sold at affordable prices at places like farmers markets. They have volunteer opportunities at all of their farms throughout the week.

Massachusetts Correctional Institution (MCI) Framingham: Ashley Funk

MCI Framingham is the Massachusetts Department of Correction's institution for incarcerated women. They have a number of opportunities for volunteers, though getting approved as a volunteer takes persistence and patience (lots of background checks and paperwork). Currently, I am volunteering in the greenhouses and providing support for the gardening program where the women grow plants to sell to the prison staff.

Why Should YOU Volunteer for Frankly Speaking?

- Has been proven to increase likelihood of having something to procrastinate on
- Looks good on a resume showing employers you're an engineer who can *write*
- Folding lots of sheets of paper in half is actually very therapeutic
- Your friends will think you're really cool
- The Editor in Chief is graduating in one year and if no one takes over this newspaper it will die

Engineer of Social Benefit

Kelsey Breseman

Contributor

Caroline Condon graduated from Olin College of Engineering in 2013. She took ADE for her Capstone and joined Engineers without Borders Canada after graduation. They connected her with Voto Mobile in Ghana. For the last two years she has lived and worked in Bamako, the capital of Mali, at a company called MyAgro. I interviewed her over video chat, where she used her office Wifi on a quiet weekday.

What do you work on?

The company that I work for sells seeds and fertilizer to smallholder farmers.

I work on agricultural tools. Our core products are seeds and fertilizer, but we're also developing a tools portfolio, that I run.

What's an example of a tool in your portfolio?

One of the tools is a planting machine, it's called a "semoir", which means "thing that plants" in French.

It's got a slanted disc that scoops up the seeds and drops them out one at a time. And then, it has fertilizer that's stored in a separate box. It puts a little bit of fertilizer next to every single seed ("microdosing"). It's a lot more effective than spreading fertilizer all over the field.

How does the pricing work for a social benefit prod-

uct?

We're selling them at cost, at about \$300 USD, to a population whose income is \$1-1.50 per day. I would say that this product's customer is the richer set of our clients— who are still, on a global scale, poor.

It's by far the most expensive of our products. We're focusing on reducing our manufacturing cost now, to make it accessible to everyone.

The demand is high at this price. But even if we filled the demand, there would still be a large chunk of farmers not using a semoir and microdosing. Our ultimate goal is to sell our semoir at the same price as non-microdosing planters.

Farmers work hard. they deserve good tools. It's my privilege to be able to try to build those.

What's an interesting project you worked on?

They sent me on a trip to China, to do the quality control visit at the factory. Our goal was to get a better idea of what parts are expensive, so that we could design them out.

They knew we had concerns about the cost. But sometimes they'd come back with suggestions that would make zero sense if you'd seen the machine in action. For example, they asked if we could make the holes bigger in the seed scoop. Then they could use a cheaper drill. But if they're bigger,

more seeds will fall into them. Their fundamental property is how large they are. They didn't get it.

We found a plot near their building, and planted some soybeans with one of the tests, so they could see it in action.

A lot of why I went to China was relationship building. I brought a bunch of pictures of our farmers using it, which made them excited. That's something I should have realized ahead of time—we had never sent them any video or anything.

They didn't realize who was buying these machines from us. They thought we were selling them to the UN or something, who was giving them away for free. They hadn't realized, oh, you're selling them to farmers? No wonder you care so much about price!

How did you start working in social benefit?

Right after graduation, I moved to Ghana with the Canadian Engineers Without Borders.

In the development world, there's been a lot of movement in the last couple of years to use phones. Voto Mobile's first partner was a maternal health organization in northern Ghana. When women came into the clinic for prenatal care, they could sign up for text messages of health advice.

But they did a bunch of interviews, and they found out that 80% of the women

couldn't read the messages. The local language in this area is hard to write; you can't get the right characters on a phone. So the texts were in English. Some women were having their kids read them when they got home from school.

Voto started by creating a platform for voice recordings rather than texts.

Why did you move to Mali?

I was not doing technical work, because I have no computer background. I decided I didn't want to be away from engineering for

so long. I was looking online, on Idealist.

MyAgro, where I work now, had this shipment of semoirs coming in on a boat from China. They had no one to put them together. So I came to do that. I had no connection with them, didn't know any thing about Mali, didn't speak any French. But I ended up staying.

Can you tell me about living in Mali?

Living here feels ordinary, at this point.

Bamaco is the safest city I've ever lived in, anywhere

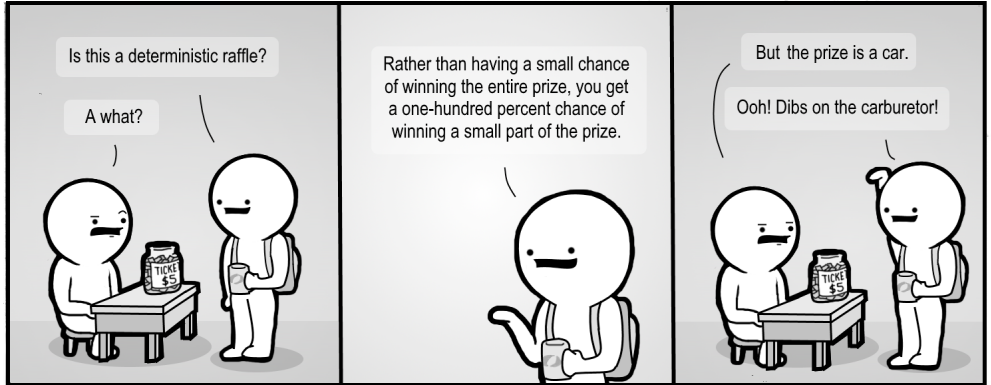
in the world. It's very laid back, petty crime is very uncommon. Walking through the markets, no one has ever tried to pickpocket me.

People sit out on the streets until very, very late at night. That's where a lot of common life takes place. They play checkers, and they make tea. So I could walk home at midnight from a bar, and pass all my neighbors.

Mali is great. It's been a real privilege to me to be able to move around and live in different places. I'd highly recommend it to anyone who has the chance.

"Imposter Syndrome"

Jeremy Ryan
Contributor



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