

Danish Studies in America

By GENE G. GAGE

»As you will see . . . Danish and Denmark are *not* being neglected . . .«¹.

This statement, written by a high Embassy official, summarizes the attitude of the official Danish representation in Washington, D. C., towards Danish Studies in America.

In marked contrast, it is the belief of the present writer and many of his American colleagues that the study of Danish language, literature, history, government, society and culture is grossly underrepresented in the United States. This is true even in comparison to that of the other small European countries, and within the Scandinavian studies departments as well. This belief will be substantiated by the data presented below.

In the autumn of 1970, there were 250 students enrolled in Danish language courses in American colleges and universities. During the same period, 934 studied Norwegian and 1156 were enrolled in Swedish courses. Twenty-one persons were involved in the teaching of specifically Danish courses, 56 taught specifically Swedish courses, and 46 were involved in specifically Norwegian instruction.

Specifically Danish courses were taught at 14 universities and two colleges while Norwegian was taught at 18 universities and four colleges and Swedish at 28 universities and five colleges. Only a handful of institutions offer reasonably complete programs of Danish language and literature: University of California, Berkeley; University of California at Los Angeles; University of Minnesota, University of Washington, and University of Wisconsin. At the moment, Harvard offers some Danish courses, but notably, the Universities of Texas and Chicago, which have otherwise fine programs of Scandinavian studies, do not offer Danish. Only one college – Dana – in Blair, Nebraska, has anything approaching a Danish »program«, and that is largely due to the perseverance and sacrifice of one man . . . Prof. Norman Bansen.

The situation is even less favorable within the social sciences. It

is more difficult to analyze the statistics in these disciplines, as there are no courses taught along purely »national« lines, such as Danish history, or Swedish government, or Finnish politics. Hence, there can be no comparisons of the number of courses taught or number of students enrolled. It is, however, possible to ascertain the research interests of the historians and social scientists, and a comparison of these is instructive.

Of the 168 social scientists presently at work in the United States who can be considered »Scandinavianists«, only 14 claim Denmark as their specialty. The figures for the other countries are: 24 for Norway, 33 for Finland and 50 for Sweden. Considering these statistics, which indicate that only 8 % of the social scientists interested in Scandinavia are primarily interested in Denmark, it is not unreasonable to state that Danish social studies too are under-represented in this country.

The Methodology

This article is one of several that have resulted from an extensive survey undertaken during the academic year 1970–71. Two articles and two directories based upon this survey have appeared in the American journal *Scandinavian Studies*, one article in *The American-Scandinavian Review*, and one in *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Studies*². The primary goal of the research was to identify the human and material resources available in the U.S. for the study of Scandinavia, and to publish the findings.

First, a questionnaire was sent to 75 American scholars, asking them what information should be included in the survey. Every one of these preliminary questionnaires was returned, and on the basis of the information provided, two more questionnaires were designed and mailed. One of the questionnaires was sent to the chairmen of some sixty departments of Scandinavian studies and departments of Germanic languages and literatures. The other was distributed to nearly five hundred individual scholars whose names were gotten from previous surveys of this nature, bibliographies, and indices.

As these questionnaires were returned, it was possible to identify scores of additional scholars with a substantial interest in Scandinavia, and these also received questionnaires, and the process was re-

peated for several months, until nearly a thousand people had been contacted.

The author also visited the 19 colleges and universities offering the most comprehensive programs of Scandinavian studies, and conducted 142 personal interviews with faculty, graduate students, librarians, etc. In addition, extensive discussions and voluminous correspondence with about twenty scholars have provided countless bits of information and considerable insight.

Even in the series of articles in *Scandinavian Studies*, only a small portion of the data collected was presented, and it would be futile to attempt to present all the data concerning Danish studies in this brief survey.

TABLE I

The Teaching of Danish Language and Literature in America, 1970-71
Q = academic quarter. S = academic semester. In the American system there are generally either two semesters or three quarters during the academic year, which extends, in most cases, from mid-September through May.

1. *University of California, Berkeley*

Elementary Danish	3Q
Intermediate Danish	3Q
Advanced Danish	3Q
Several general Scandinavian literature courses, including Danish writers.	

Faculty:

Associate Prof. Børge Gedsø Madsen, Ph. D.
Associate Patricia L. Conroy, M.A.

2. *University of California, Los Angeles*

Elementary Danish	3Q
Intermediate Danish	3Q
Several literature courses including Danish writers.	

Faculty:

Assistant Prof. James Massengale, M.A.

3. *Harvard University*

Introduction to Danish Language and Literature	1S
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Faculty:

Instructor Peter Henriksen, Ph.D. candidate

4. *University of Illinois*

Beginning Danish	2S
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Faculty:

Prof. P. M. Mitchell, Ph. D.

5. *Indiana University*

Intensive Danish	2S
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Elementary Danish	2S
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History of Danish Literature	1S
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Growth and Structure of the Danish Language	1S
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Faculty:

Prof. Foster Blaisdell, Ph.D.

Teaching Assistant Jytte Heine

6. *University of Kansas*

First year Danish	2S
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Second year Danish	2S
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Faculty:

Assistant Prof. Donald K. Watkins, Ph.D.

7. *University of Kentucky*

Introduction to Danish	2S
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Danish Literature	1S
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Faculty:

Assistant Prof. John Greenway, Ph. D.

8. *University of Massachusetts*

Accelerated Elementary Danish	2S
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Faculty:

Instructor Frank Hugus, M.A.

9. *University of Minnesota*

Beginning Danish	3Q
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Intermediate Danish	3Q
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Danish Composition	1Q
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Danish Prose	1Q
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Danish Poetry	1Q
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Several literature courses including Danish writers.

Faculty:

Instructor William Bomash, M.A.

10. *New York University*

Danish I	1S
Danish II	1S
Danish III	1S

Faculty:

Instructor Elin A. Thomasson

11. *Tufts University*

First year Danish	2S
Second year Danish	2S

Faculty:

Instructor Helle Alpert, cand. mag.

12. *Washington University*

Introduction to Danish	2S
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Faculty:

Lecturer Georg M. Dolis, Ph.D.

13. *University of Wisconsin*

Beginning Danish	2S
Intermediate Danish	2S
Advanced Danish	2S
Masterpieces of Danish Literature	2S
Several literature courses including Danish writers	

Faculty:

Associate Prof. Niels Ingwersen, cand. mag.

Specialist Annelise Frickleton, B.A.

14. *University of Washington*

Beginning Danish	3Q
Introduction to Danish Literature	3Q
Conversational Danish	3Q
Modern Danish Literature	3Q
History of Danish Literature	1Q
Several literature courses including Danish writers.	

Faculty:

Prof. Sverre Arestad, Ph. D.

Lecturer Roger Stevenson, M.A.

15. *Bowdoin College*

First year Danish

2S

Faculty:

Associate Prof. Robert Nunn, Ph. D.

Tutor Jutte Monke, B. A.

16. *Dana College*

Elementary Danish

2S

Intermediate Danish

2S

Two literature courses including Danish writers.

Faculty:

Prof. Norman Bansen, M.A.

Instructor Bodil Johnson, M.A.

TABLE II

American Social Scientists Whose Primary Interest is Denmark

A. Historians

1. William H. Bomash, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Minnesota.
Interested in Danish reformation history.
2. John Robert Christianson, Luther College.
Interested in 16th Century Denmark. Teaches Scandinavian history courses.
3. Sidney L. Cohen, Louisiana State University.
Interested in medieval Danish history. Teaches Scandinavian history courses.
4. Carol Gold, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Wisconsin.
Interested in 19th Century Denmark. Teaches Scandinavian history at Minnesota.
5. H. P. Krosby, S.U.N.Y., Albany.
Writing a book on modern Danish history.
6. Joseph Loftin, Ph. D. Candidate, Louisiana State University.
Interested in 19th Century Denmark.
7. Victor E. Thoren, Indiana University.
Interested in Tycho Brahe.
8. Jerry Livingston Voorhis, California State Polytechnical College.
Interested in 20th Century Denmark.

B. Political Scientists

1. Henry J. Abraham, University of Pennsylvania.
Interested in Danish ombudsman.
2. Eric Einhorn, University of Massachusetts.
Primary interest in Danish politics.
3. John Logus, Princeton University.
Primary interest in Danish politics.
4. Kenneth Miller, Rutgers University.
Wrote a book on Danish government and politics.

C. Economists

1. Albert A. Blum, Michigan State University.
Interested in Danish unions.
2. Walter Galenson, C.U.N.Y.
Interested in Danish labor relations.

The Data

Tables I–IV represent a basic description of the present status of Danish studies, and an outline of its growth during the past quarter-century. It is hoped that the tables are self-explanatory, but some amplification and explanation may be in order.

Of prime importance is the fact that the data presented in Table I is for the 1970–71 academic year only. And where enrollment figures are presented, they refer *only* to the fall semester of the year indicated. It is possible that the use of enrollment figures for only one semester gives a misleading impression, but it is doubtful. Surveys have been made by other organizations and individuals⁸, and all of them substantiate the data presented here. For example, the United States Office of Education publishes *Foreign Language Registration in Institutions of Higher Education* at regular intervals. The 1960 report listed enrollments for the year at: Danish – 78; Norwegian – 722; and Swedish – 622. The same publication for 1969 reported Danish enrollments at 146, Norwegian at 1,103, and Swedish at 1,101.

Another factor to bear in mind is that this study is concerned primarily with *specifically* Danish courses. Obviously, Danish literature is considered in some courses covering Scandinavian literature, and Danish history is studied alongside Finnish history in the appropriate classes. But, considering the data presented in the tables, it is obvious that there are fewer students studying Danish, fewer Danish courses taught, and fewer scholars interested in Danish topics.

This situation puzzled the present writer and a number of colleagues, and an attempt was made to find out why Danish studies is so underdeveloped in comparison with Swedish and Norwegian. A survey of those who consider themselves to be Danish specialists revealed several surprising opinions. Although more than twenty factors were given by at least one of the respondents, seven were listed repeatedly:

1. There is less scholarly exchange between the U.S. and Denmark than there is between the U.S. and other Nordic countries.
2. Danish scholars (meaning those living and working in Denmark) are not published in academic journals in the major European languages to the same extent as their Nordic colleagues.
3. The rapid assimilation of Danish immigrants into the mainstream of American life did not provide the same opportunities for the creation of »Danish« colleges as did the Norwegian and Swedish experience, which resulted in many small, but essentially Norwegian or Swedish Lutheran, schools in the Midwest and Northwest.
4. There is not a decent Danish language textbook available for use in American institutions of higher education. Similarly, high-quality translations of Danish literature are not available in sufficient quantity.
5. Denmark is simply not as popular as Sweden's welfare state or Finland's unique geo-political situation.
6. It is difficult to obtain the data necessary for historical, political, economic and social research in Denmark.
7. Denmark's cultural information service in this country is not as effective as that of Norway, and particularly, Sweden.

When the President of The American-Scandinavian Foundation was informed of the results of this preliminary research, he communicated the findings to the Danish Embassy and to a number of prominent Danish-Americans, together with an offer to help improve the Danish studies situation by whatever means available to The Foundation. While favorable response was received from several quarters, including some in Copenhagen, the Danish Embassy rejected the report as incomplete, misinformed, and unobjective⁴.

Although virtually everything in the report had been submitted in written form, and could be easily substantiated, yet another inquiry into the state of Danish studies was undertaken, this one very specific, and directed to the points mentioned in the original, informal report on Danish studies. Enrollment figures for Danish courses over a several year period was requested, and listings of the Danish courses actually taught (as opposed to listed in college catalogues) were compiled. This latest survey, completed in May, 1972, merely confirmed the earlier results, but it has made possible the amplification of the seven points listed above.

A cursory glance at the faculty lists of the major Scandinavian departments for recent years reveals that Danish scholars are conspicuous by their absence. For example, at the University of Wisconsin which hosts at least one guest lecturer from abroad, and usually two each year, there have been, since 1965, no visiting Danes, but a number of Swedes and Norwegians, and two Finns.

During the 1971-72 academic year, in the general area of Scandinavian studies, there were at least six visiting Swedes, three Finns, two Norwegians, and two Danes – Søren Baggesen and Erik Damgaard – in the United States. Even that year was somewhat of an exception, as there have been few Danes serving as visiting lectures within the Scandinavian studies anywhere in the United States in recent years. Since 1967, the present writer can think of only eight prominent Danish scholars in the area of Danish studies who have lectured in America: Elias Bredsdorf, Vagn Steen, Tage Kaarstad, Erik Dal, Iver Kjær, and the two above-mentioned recent visitors.

While the present writer is personally familiar only with journals covering history and the social sciences, and by actual count has determined that articles by Danes are very rare indeed, his colleagues in literature and linguistics have reported a similar situation in the journals of those disciplines. An outstanding exception is the journal *Scandinavica* which has done a fine job of presenting Danish literature to the English-speaking scholarly world. Although not particularly academic, *The American-Scandinavian Review* has been scrupulously fair in its allotment of space to Danish culture.

The immigrant factor has been studied by several scholars and requires no further elucidation here. It is sufficient to point out that in 1970 there were only 10 students studying Danish at Dana College (the last of the Danish Lutheran schools) while St. Olaf College (one of the several Norwegian schools) reported nearly 300 enrolled in Norwegian classes, and Augustana College reported more than 200 studying Swedish.

The statement that Denmark simply is not popular among scholars appears to be true, but the reasons for this probably lie in the six other factors listed. Anyone who travels to Copenhagen knows that the country, or at least the city, is popular among American tourists and hippies.

Surprisingly, the apparent fact that it is more difficult to obtain certain research data in Denmark than in the other Nordic countries

appeared on virtually every questionnaire returned by social scientists. In fact, several scholars (all with non-Scandinavian names) stated that they would have preferred to work in Denmark, but the paucity of resources there forced them into Swedish- or Norwegian-oriented research.

The lack of good textbook was listed as a key factor by all of the linguistic and literary scholars, and by a substantial portion of the social scientists as well. Comments ranged from: »The textbook situation is certainly deplorable . . .« to » . . . we need a good textbook of Danish,« to, » . . . and . . . are in use here; something more lively and comparable to the German or French texts now available, would certainly be welcome.«

The assertion that Denmark's cultural representation was not as strong as might be hoped came as a bit of a surprise, and upon being queried specifically on this point, several scholars pointed out that some of the other Nordic information services are very active within the American academic community, while Denmark's apparently is not. They also implied that while the Danes were always willing to help when asked, the Swedes (an unwelcome but inevitable comparison) had regular programs of providing cultural information — whether or not it was requested.

Of course, the responsibility for this situation lies not so much in Washington as it does in Copenhagen. The matter is primarily one of finances, and it is obvious that two men cannot accomplish as much as two dozen. It was disconcerting, however, to have The American-Scandinavian Foundation's attempts to help rejected by the Embassy⁵. No satisfactory explanation for that unfortunate development has been forthcoming.

TABLE III

A. Enrollments in Danish Language and Literature Courses, 1946-70.

Year	1946	1950	1954	1957	1960	1963	1966	1970
Danish Enrollments								
College	43	45	31	27	39	32	17	15
University	0	14	11	28	71	105	130	235
Total	43	59	42	55	110	137	147	250
Norwegian Total	1254	1039	903	867	1190	1352	1172	934
Swedish Total	1223	835	681	740	952	971	1208	1156

TABLE III

B. Enrollments in Danish Language and Literature Courses, 1946-70

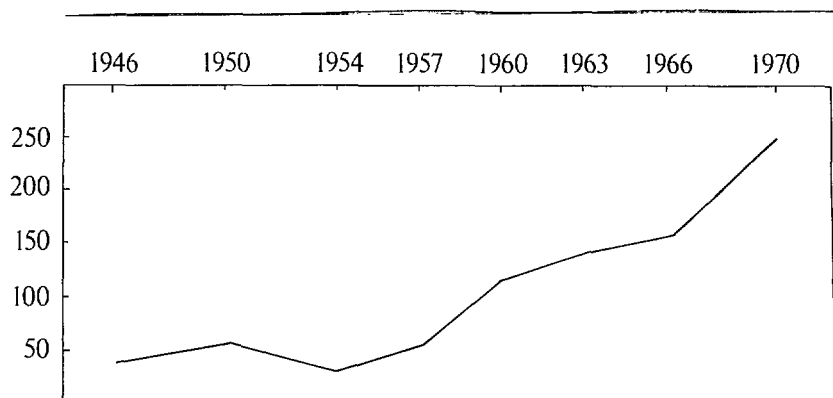


TABLE IV

Number of Institutions Offering Danish Courses

Year	1946	1950	1954	1957	1960	1963	1966	1970
Number of Institutions	7	8	12	11	8	10	11	16

Conclusions and Recommendations

The obvious conclusion is that Danish studies does not occupy the position it deserves. And regardless of the reasons for this situation, something must be done about it.

One person who saw the need was Valdemar Hempel, a Danish-born editor and publisher, who has acted in an extremely constructive fashion. He approached The American-Scandinavian Foundation in May, 1968, offering his services to improve the Danish studies si-

tuation. After a series of discussions, The Foundation's President, C. Peter Strong, established a »Danish Studies Committee of ASF« to investigate the problem. On that Committee were Mr. Hempel, Carlo Christensen, Cultural Counselor of the Royal Danish Embassy, and the present writer. The result of the investigation was the recommendation that a Chair of Danish Studies be established at one of the universities offering programs in Scandinavian studies. A proposal was prepared with the assistance of Prof. Niels Ingwersen, Prof. H. P. Krosby, and the late Prof. John Wuorinen, all of whom were closely associated with The Foundation.

At that point, ASF Chairman Hans Christian Sonne (a native of Denmark) and H. E. Torben Rønne, Ambassador of Denmark, were approached and their support obtained. To summarize, a fund-raising campaign was undertaken in Denmark and the United States by Messrs. Sonne and Rønne, and by June, 1970, their goal had been reached, and the Chair had been awarded to the University of Washington⁶.

Dr. Niels Kofoed became the first scholar to occupy the Chair in September, 1971, and he has succeeded in establishing a number of new Danish courses in his first year. In addition, one can now earn an undergraduate »major« in Danish at Washington, and four such »majors« were reported for the academic year 1971-72.

Lest the impression be given that Danish instruction is new to the University of Washington, it should be related that: »Courses have been offered in Danish since (the) department was founded in 1909. Until last fall (1971) these courses were taught either by professors of Swedish or Norwegian or by graduate students from Denmark . . .«

Another private initiative that has had a beneficial effect upon Danish studies in America is the George C. Marshall Memorial Fund in Denmark. This fund, »established in 1967 in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the Marshall Plan and wholly supported by voluntary contributions from the Danish business community, offers a number of awards for young Americans to study in Denmark . . .«

Among those Americans who have received Marshall Fellowships are a number of young people who are, or soon will be, teaching Danish studies in this country, and the recently received announcement that the program will be continued for another five years comes as

good news indeed. J. V. Thygesen of Privatbanken and K. M. Ahlman-Ohlsen of Danmark-Amerika Fondet deserve special recognition for their work on this effort.

The American-Scandinavian Foundation has maintained its commitment to Danish studies, and concrete evidence of this has recently been given in the form of reserving a substantial portion of the Estate of the late Carl Peter Jensen for the development of Danish language teaching materials. Initially this will include a new first-year textbook with a disposable workbook and tapes pre-recorded in Denmark. The materials will be prepared by a team of native speaking Danes working with Americans who have learned Danish as a foreign language. All members of the team, which is headed by Prof. Niels Ingwersen of the University of Wisconsin, have had experience teaching Danish in American institutions.

The Foundation is also attempting to raise enough money to support a program whereby American colleges and universities would receive on a rotating basis, the services of visiting Danish scholars. In the opinion of many experts in the field of international exchange, it is usually more efficient and effective to »import« professors than to »export« students. A similar program of scholarly exchange with Sweden, in existence six years, has produced gratifying and sometimes unexpected results.

Another project which ASF is considering is the establishment of some kind of endowed program of publishing English translations of Danish literature. Not even ASF, which has published Danish literature since 1911,

»has entirely fulfilled its obligation in this regard. The publishers who have undertaken to publish Danish literature in translation have done almost nothing about presenting Danish culture to the American public, because they publish only expensive, hard-cover editions. They have done a disservice to the academic community . . . The choice of Danish books available for use in the numerous and well-attended classes in Scandinavian literature, some of which include Danish, is extremely limited, since very few paperbacks are on the market.«⁷

While this is primarily an »American« problem, perhaps one of the major Danish publishers would be willing to work with an American

publishing house to alleviate this situation. (One has only to visit a book shop in Copenhagen to know that it is possible to publish high-quality paperback books in small editions.)⁸

The Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study is yet another organization concerned about Danish studies. The Society, which is the American academic organization of the discipline, is small, and its resources are limited, but if sufficient funding can be found, it would be willing to devote an entire issue of its journal *Scandinavian Studies* to Danish literature or to a specific Danish literary figure or topic. The Danish government could render invaluable assistance by subsidizing such a special edition.

The need is great and the possibilities are endless, but the space here is limited. Simply let it be recorded that many Americans and Danes alike believe that it is high time that Denmark becomes as well-known for her writers, artists and society as she has been for her ham, beer and pornography.

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NOTES

- (1) This statement was contained in a letter from the Royal Danish Embassy to The American-Scandinavian Foundation, dated October 22, 1971. – (2) »Scandinavian Studies in America: The Languages and Literatures,« *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 3, 1971, pp. 251–77. »Scandinavian Studies in America: The Social Sciences,« *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 4, 1971, pp. 414–36. »Scandinavian Studies in America: A Directory of Scholars, Part I,« *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 1972, pp. 87–129. »Scandinavian Studies in America: A Directory of Scholars, Part II,« *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 1972, pp. 232–64. »The Teaching of Old Norse-Icelandic in the United States,« *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Studies, 1970*, Munksgaard, Copenhagen, 1971, pp. 7–18. »Scandinavian Studies in America,« *The American-Scandinavian Review*, Vol. LX, No. 2, Summer, 1972, pp. 153–57. – (3) See also articles by Hedin Bronner and Gösta Franzen in *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 7; Vol. 23, No. 4; Vol. 27, No. 4; Vol. 30, No. 4; Vol. 33, No. 4; Vol. 36, No. 4; and Vol. 39, No. 4. – (4) The letter cited in number 1 above. – (5) Ibid. – (6) It must be stated that H. E. Torben Rønne understood the problem and worked diligently to improve the situation during his tenure as Ambassador in Washington. – (7) From an interview with Prof. Niels Ingwersen, May 6, 1972. – (8) Several scholars, including Prof. Ingwersen, noted with appreciation P. M. Mitchell's *History of Danish Literature*, recently revised and distributed by ASF, and the new anthology of Danish literature prepared by Professors Billekov-Jansen and Mitchell.