

THE *Current*

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[Shelly Leachman](#)

Members of Danish Parliament Visit UCSB to Learn About Campus Housing

Encountering a handful of elected national leaders in a UC Santa Barbara residence hall is a decidedly infrequent event. More rare still: when those leaders are from a foreign country.

Yet there they were on Wednesday, eight members of Danish Parliament, touring Santa Rosa and San Nicolas dorm rooms, marveling at De La Guerra dining commons, and quizzing campus staff about all things student housing -- from their sustainability strategy to their means of mitigating long lines for shared bathrooms.

The delegation from Folketinget, as Denmark's legislative assembly is commonly known, comprise the parliament's Housing and Urban Affairs Committee, which is looking to launch a first-ever university housing program. Historically, higher education in Denmark has been entirely publicly financed. In fact, students are paid a monthly stipend to go to college. What they are not offered, however, is housing -- a reality that the Scandinavian nation is aiming to change to meet the growing demand of an increasingly large student population.

"Many students are moving from rural areas to Copenhagen in order to go to university. That puts a lot of pressure on housing and we cannot meet the demand," said Mette Reissman, the committee's chairperson. "We also know for a fact that

many students are dropping out their freshman year because they would like to live together like your students are living together. We are looking to you guys for inspiration. How can we design housing and connect it to campus areas, to the university, to the buildings where they are receiving lectures?

"We need to think out of the box," she added, "and redesign the way of going to university in Denmark."

Enter UCSB.

"The UC system is thought of very highly, and people look to us to be an example particularly for those who are growing their university systems," said Wilfred Brown, executive director of UCSB's Department of Housing & Residential Services. "UC Santa Barbara has a great program, and we're very accommodating. So when we got this inquiry from the Danish government, which is about to embark on this full-scale process to build residences that will work in conjunction with their universities, we were happy to oblige."

"They are looking to learn from universities that have had some level of success with housing, and I think they saw us as being pretty successful," Brown added. "It's been fascinating just comparing cultures and systems, and I think we've been able to share some of our knowledge."

The Danish contingent arrived at UCSB after seeing UCLA, Pepperdine, and USC, and was heading next to Santa Clara, Berkeley, and Stanford. Reismann, the committee chair, herself toured universities in Korea this past spring, and will visit Tokyo next month -- all part of the research phase for their multifaceted undertaking.

"We are interested not only in buildings but also in atmosphere, in competitive environment," Reismann said. "We're speaking to students to see how they are experiencing their entire period of study. Many parameters have to be balanced when you're starting from scratch as we have to."

"We all agree that what is so positive about Santa Barbara is the spirit and the kindness and the inclusive mindset that you are working by here, which is so important," she remarked. "This hospitality that we feel, that we have been greeted with, is enormous. Down to the tiniest detail -- barbecue outdoor areas, social engagements -- you are meeting people's demands and differences. Also the

location – you are right on the Pacific Ocean. How beautiful can one place be?"

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† Top image: Wilfred Brown, right, executive director of housing & residential services at UCSB, gives the Danish visitors a tour of a model room in Santa Rosa Hall.

Credit: George Foulsham

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