

# **TEACHING SABBATICAL – FINAL REPORT**

**FALL 2015**

**Christina E. Erneling**

**Professor of Psychology**

**School of Social Work**

**Lund University**

**Department of Applied Psychology**

**New York University**

## **1. Introduction**

My appointment as a Visiting Professor at the Department of Applied Psychology in the Steinhart School of Culture, Education and Human Development at New York University (NYU) lasted from September 2015 until mid-January 2016. The department is located in Kimball Hall, close to the Washington Square area in southern Manhattan on the main campus of NYU.

In this report I will first give a short presentation of NYU, the Steinhart School and the Department of Applied Psychology and compare it to Lund University and my home Faculty of Social Science and the School of Social Work.

I will then present the preparation for my visit as well as my tasks, activities and responsibilities during the semester. I will also mention a number of important matters learned and finally present a short action plan, pointing out some further differences and similarities between NYU and Lund University along the way.

In addition to teaching, the main objectives of my teaching sabbatical were to investigate two main areas, the evaluation of PhD programs and NYU's commitment to public service. My placement at the Department of Applied Psychology gave me ample opportunities to pursue these.

## **2. A short presentation and comparison between New York University and Lund University.**

New York University (NYU) was founded in 1831. It is the largest private university in the United States, and one of ten universities in New York City (NYC). Its main Campus is located in southern Manhattan, but there are NYU campuses in Brooklyn as well as in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai. With 19.000 employees (of which approximately 7000 are teachers) it is one of NYC's largest employers. It is a teaching and research university with almost 50.000 students, 21 faculties or schools representing all disciplines including humanities, social sciences, performing arts, engineering, the sciences and medicine. NYU has a large number of international students (12.000) and provides many opportunities for its students to study abroad at its overseas campuses and study centers.

Lund University, a much older university, was founded in 1666. Its main campus is located in Lund, but there are campuses in Malmö as well as in Helsingborg. It is one of the largest employers in Lund with 7.680 employees, including 5000 teaching staff. It is also a teaching and research university with 42.000 students, eight faculties and more than 13 research centers and institutes and 5400 international students.

Lund University is a public university with no student fees, whereas NYU's fees for full-time students are approximately 45.000 USD/academic year. However, many students receive financial aid and tuition for PhD students is waved.

The Steinhart School of Culture, Education and Human Development is different from my home Faculty of Social Science in that it includes the performing arts as well as some health science departments.

The Department of Applied Psychology, which hosted me during my teaching sabbatical, focuses on research and teaching of clinical psychology, with an emphasis of developmental psychology and social justice. It has close to 700 students, including 70 PhD students.

The School of Social Work at Lund offers a professional social work degree as well as MA and PhD degrees. It has 1200 students, of which 20-25 are PhD students.

In conclusion, there were enough similarities as well as interesting differences between NYU and Lund University to make my time as a STINT fellow worthwhile and interesting.

### **3. Preparation and planning.**

Immediately after I was selected for the Teaching Sabbatical Program I got in touch with my academic and administrative contact persons at NYU presenting my credentials, expectations and myself.

I immediately established a very good working relation with my academic contact, Professor LaRue Allen, Chair of the Department of Applied Psychology. We quickly exchanged various ideas on email and agreed to discuss these in more detail during my planning visit.

Unfortunately, it took much longer time to get in touch with my administrative contacts, requiring quite a few e-mails and phone calls, but everything was finally in place for my planning visit, February 27 to March 9<sup>th</sup>.

Celia Goldsmith, Operations Administrator at the Department, was very helpful and professional in this from the very beginning, arranging meetings both with Prof. LaRue Allen and many others, and has continued to be so throughout my stay.

During the planning visit, Prof. Allen and I came to a general agreement as to my tasks and responsibilities. We agreed that I would co-teach a course as well as participate in the development and planning of a so-called Training Clinic.

During this week, all paperwork relating to my (as well as my husband's) status as Visiting Scholar was finalized as well.

In addition to discussing my teaching and visa application, the priority was to arrange for an apartment as close as possible to NYU's Washington Square Campus. I have a mobility as well as a vision disability, and am thus unable to travel by bus or subway, making it necessary to live close to the university.

Unfortunately, the university does not offer on-campus housing for visiting scholars, but provides lists of off-campus housing and some general advice. Given the high cost and scarcity of housing in Manhattan, one of the largest challenges is to find a suitable apartment. Through an earlier research contact at NYU I was lucky to be able to rent a one-bedroom apartment very close to the Department of Applied Psychology.

Given these experiences, I strongly urge future STINT fellows to start the search for housing as early as possible and use any contact/networks for this purpose.

It is also important to establish early email contact with both academic and administrative persons.

My husband and I arrived in NYC in the middle of August, giving us two weeks to get adjusted before the semester started in September.

#### **4. Activities, tasks and responsibilities during the semester at NYU, including some lessons learned.**

At Lund University I teach psychology at both an undergraduate and a PhD level. This, together with my research interest in cognitive and language development, made the Department of Applied Psychology a good match and afforded opportunities to pursue the objectives mentioned in the introduction.

During my stay I had access to a shared office, library privileges and normal faculty support like printing, mailing etc.

### **Co-teaching**

As mentioned, I was co-teaching a semester-long PhD course with the department chair, Prof. Larue Allen, called Culture, Context and Psychology. The course had 19 first-year PhD and MA students with different disciplinary and cultural backgrounds. Prof. Allen and I taught most sessions together. The aim of the course was

“In depth examination of cultural and contextual factors and how these factors relate to every aspect of psychological theory, practice and research. Major theories, assessment approaches, clinical practice and research in psychology will be critiqued by investigating universalistic principles, behavior and experience as it occurs across cultures and contexts and is influenced by culture and context, as well as issues such as oppression, racism, sexism, social class and value differences.”

The students were expected to take active part in lectures/seminars and write three research papers. Pedagogically as well as in the use of educational technologies the course was similar to courses I am teaching in Sweden.

An important difference however is the fact that NYU graduate students enroll in five parallel courses/semester and are graded on a different and much more differentiated scale. An additional interesting difference is that the majority of the students come from other universities and departments, thus having diverse backgrounds; prior knowledge in psychology varies a lot and some lack it completely. In addition to this being a pedagogical challenge, it is, as I see it, an asset, making discussions with students very interesting and fruitful.

Another difference is that the course included traditional textbooks as well as several novels, something that is quite unusual in Sweden.

### **Psychological Training Clinic**

During the semester I had the opportunity to follow work on developing a so-called Psychological Training Clinic, an interesting example of the department's commitment to public service.

The proposed clinic is envisioned as interdisciplinary and is a joint enterprise with the Department of Communicative Science and Disorders as well as the NYU School of Medicine.

The aim is that it should be operational in the fall of 2016 to provide training for first and second-year PhD- as well as MA students to apply classroom learning to clinical cases drawn from the community. Supervised by core/tenured as well as adjunct faculty the students will for example conduct intakes, assessments, interviews, counseling and psychotherapy sessions in areas like career and vocational training, learning disabilities, family relationships and group therapy.

In addition, the clinic offers the opportunity for students to develop and initiate clinical research projects as well as providing opportunities for faculty research, for example to obtain pilot data to support grant proposals.

Most importantly the clinic will allow the department and its faculty to build new and generative ties with the surrounding community.

We do not have something like this in Social Work in Sweden, but it would be interesting, I believe, to start discussions on how to implement something similar together with relevant departments.

### **PhD programs and their evaluation.**

Throughout the semester I also met with administrators and PhD program directors to inform myself about the basic ideas and guidelines governing the evaluations of PhD programs.

The Department of Applied Psychology accepts 3-4 PhD students out of 400 applicants every year and currently has 70 students, who are evaluated every year according to internal evaluation standards. Roughly every 4<sup>th</sup> year all programs are evaluated externally by, in most cases, the New York State Accreditation Agency, based on the department's self-evaluations.

The internal criteria for this kind of evaluation, in a modified form, could be useful in my Swedish home department of Social Work.

### **Conference participation.**

I had the opportunity to participate in a conference arranged for NYC teachers, another example of NYU's commitment to public service. The three-day long conference *1<sup>st</sup> Annual New York City Conference on School Innovation*, November 9-11, 2015 brought together academic faculty and schoolteachers, mixing academic presentations with school visits. During the last day of the conference I was asked to make a presentation of my ideas on education, presented in my book *Discursive Education* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).



The conference was interesting and provided me with ideas for a similar conference in Social Work, involving Social Work researchers at Lund University, Campus Helsingborg as well as social workers from the City of Helsingborg and surrounding municipalities.

### **Participation in weekly department seminars.**

I participated in the department's weekly seminar series and familiarized myself with the research activities of a number of visiting faculty, members of the department and PhD students.

### **The Silver School of Social Work.**

I spent an afternoon in the Silver School of Social Work to get an idea of similarities and differences in Social Work teaching and research at NYU and Lund.

The Silver School of Social Work was founded in 1960 and has 300 undergraduate and 1200 Masters of Social Work (MSW) students. It specializes in clinical social work and has a large number of international students, many from China. Unlike Swedish Social Work Schools the School does not offer a professional undergraduate degree of Social Work, but a professional MSW, a part-time MA of Social Work; and a PhD program. It collaborates with several colleges in New York State and has many overseas opportunities for its students, in for example Germany, France and Brazil. During the fall of 2015 a Social Work program was established at NYU Shanghai Campus.

An interesting feature of NYU's international work is that it does not encourage traditional exchanges of students and faculty, but creates its own Study Centers run by its own faculty in countries of interest. The people I met with were thus not interested in any faculty and/or student exchanges with the School of Social Work in Lund.

### **Research and Research meetings.**

In addition to my teaching and other activities in the Department of Applied Psychology, I was able to meet with scholars and discuss my current research project. For example, I had several meetings with Prof. Cynthia McCallister of the Department of Teaching and Learning.

### **Library information sessions.**

NYU has an impressive library with easy access to the books as well as 38 specialist librarians, who are able to provide discipline-specific help both to faculty and students. I attended one information sessions with PhD students from my course.

I was impressed by the library holdings and especially with the idea of specialist librarians, which we do not, but should, have in Sweden; an idea I would like to pursue.

## **5. Action plan**

Here I will present a number of ideas based on my experiences, keeping institutional differences and their specific histories in mind, as well as the well-established fact that institutional change is often slow and difficult.

I intend to discuss them with the Dean of the Faculty of Social Science, the Chair of the Social Work Department and various course directors.

To my department in Lund I have already suggested a new MA and PhD course in cross-cultural psychology with the working title *Society, Culture and the Individual*. The proposed course is based on the course I have co-taught at NYU, but modified to meet the specific Swedish context, especially in the light of the serious problems created by the recent large influx of refugees. It should also be open to social workers in the field.

Inspired by my teaching at NYU, I also plan to include more cross-cultural psychological content in several of the undergraduate courses I regularly teach in Lund.

Another idea I would like to introduce is the use of novels as part of required reading material.

I think the practice of taking different courses at the same time throughout a semester is very fruitful intellectually and would create more open-minded students and researchers. An idea, which, unfortunately, would be difficult to implement.

Also, I think it would be fruitful to accept MA and PhD students with backgrounds in different disciplines, even if this might create some initial practical difficulties.

In a similar way, many courses in the humanities and the social sciences would be much more intellectually interesting and demanding by being truly interdisciplinary.

I found the academic content and administration of PhD programs as well as internal evaluation criteria and procedures of the Department of Applied Psychology interesting, relevant and well worth pursuing in the School of Social Work.

Initially I had hoped to establish contact with the Silver School of Social Work in order to investigate possibilities for student and faculty exchanges, but as mentioned above, NYU, unfortunately, does not encourage such international activities.

I found the idea of the so-called Training Clinic interesting. Although it cannot be directly transferred to Sweden and Social Work education, some of the guiding ideas should be of great interest to anyone involved in practicum courses, as well as those collaborating with various social agencies and municipalities.

In a similar way to the school conference I attended, many more seminars and conferences should be addressed to and attended by both theoreticians and practitioners. Presently, we are, to my mind, way too “departmentalized” and would benefit by cooperating with colleagues with different backgrounds and institutional backings.

Finally, I think it is very useful for teaching as well as research to have librarians with academic training in a specific discipline.

## **6. Thanks**

I am grateful to Lund University for nominating me to the Teaching Sabbatical Program and for STINT for recommending me to New York University and for supporting my husband's and my stay there. I am also grateful for New York University and the Department of Applied Psychology for hosting me.

Special thanks goes to my husband, Alf Bång, without whose assistance, company and encouragement, my stay at NYU would not have been possible. It had also been had been much less rewarding.