

Teaching Sabbatical – Final report

I would first and foremost like to take this opportunity to thank The Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education, STINT, for giving me the opportunity to be a part of an interesting teaching environment during the fall of 2015. I would also like to thank the School of Communications at Ohio State University, and in particular associate professor Erik Nisbet, for having me as their guest. My stay in Columbus has given me plenty of insights into US academic life and important teaching experiences. At the same time, as I will outline later on, my months on a teaching sabbatical has also enhanced my understanding of the political, economic and cultural context of the United States of America.

Preparation and planning

The preparation for my stay at Ohio State University (OSU) started in earnest when I had finished my teaching obligations for the fall semester in the middle of January 2015. I contacted both my academic contact person, assistant professor Erik Nisbet, and my administrative contact person, Alan Hampton, by e-mail. Both of them were quick to answer and were really helpful. Erik presented me with suggestions on how to arrange my teaching for the coming fall and also informed me of the possibility to attend seminars and workshops at the University Center for the Advancement of Teaching (UCAT). Alan made sure my appointment as a visiting scholar was processed and also arranged for my visa. Both of them were also helpful regarding housing during my stay in Columbus.

The next step in planning for the teaching sabbatical was the workshop at STINT in early February 2015. The workshop was an important part of my preparations firstly because the information we got from STINT personnel and from representatives of Swedish universities. Secondly it was important to meet both new and former STINT fellows. The former STINT fellow at OSU, Erika Alm, gave me plenty of valuable advice regarding both the university and

the city of Columbus. It was also through her tip I found the apartment that my partner and I rented in the Short North area. She gave me the name and e-mail address of Linda Fowler who answered me quickly and offered an apartment that suited us perfectly.

In early March I had a Skype meeting with Erik Nisbet. The purpose of this meeting was to finalize the planning ahead of my visit in Columbus four weeks later. It also gave Erik the possibility to take care of the verification of my English that was necessary for the visa application. This meeting also gave me an opportunity to learn more about Columbus and the university.

In the beginning of April 2015 my partner and I went on a planning trip to Columbus and stayed six days. During this visit we had time to take a look at the apartment we were going to rent and to learn more about the city. I also had plenty of time to get to know the School of Communication. I had meetings with Erik to decide what role I would have during the fall semester. We decided that we would team-teach classes as a mutual learning experience. The course I was to become a Co-Instructor on was Communication 2331 Strategic Communication Principles. During the meetings we also started planning for a new hybrid online class that is scheduled for the spring of 2016. Erik also informed me of what I should read to be prepared for my teaching in strategic communication. I was assigned an office at the department to use during fall semester. Erik also took me on a presentation tour at the School of Communication and introduced me to a lot of interesting people. This introduction was of great importance later in the fall.

I was really pleased with the setup for my teaching. Especially when I got back home to Umeå and had time to meet up with another former STINT fellow. She had also been at OSU but at another department and was a little bit disappointed with the interaction with other teachers. During her stay she had full responsibility for one course and never had any real help from the person that was supposed to be the instructor. I immediately felt sure I would not be put in a

similar situation.

Tasks and responsibilities

We arrived in Columbus in early August to have plenty of time to get installed and make preparations for the start of the semester. After Erik had returned from a conference in the middle of the month we sat down with the final draft of the autumn syllabus for Communication 2331. This included the Lecture/Reading/Exam Schedule where we put to print which days I would be sitting in while Erik was teaching and which days I would take care of the lecture. I also got the opportunity to decide the theme for a couple of lectures later on in the semester in line with my own research and teaching profile. Furthermore we discussed the exams and the expected learning outcomes of the course. Communication 2331 Strategic Communication Principles gives the students an introduction to the general field of strategic communication from a business perspective. After the course the students are supposed to have gained a “broad overview of the strategic communication and advertising industries, basic practices, and associated social and ethical issues”.

My role on the course was as a Co-Instructor. In reality it meant I had office hours every Thursday but more importantly that I would take care of a third of all lectures in front of the 243 students registered on the course. Besides Erik and I, there were two teaching assistants helping out with the marking of student exams. One of the teaching assistants was also attending all lectures, which was a huge asset for me on the occasions Erik was abroad. That gave me an opportunity to get direct feedback on my teaching even on these occasions. During the autumn Erik, the TA:s and I also had a couple of meetings on how to create a new hybrid online class for the spring semester. This provided me with some insights into how they are trying to incorporate online instruction into their pedagogy at OSU.

Activities during the semester

When I had settled in Columbus one of the decisions I made was to try to get as much out of my stay at OSU as possible. I didn't want to take on too many responsibilities until I was sure about how much time the already planned tasks would take. Therefore I contacted a couple of the teachers to get their permission to attend their classes during the semester. Firstly I asked Erik Nisbet if I could auscultate in his Science communication class. Secondly I contacted assistant professor Nicole Kraft and got her permission to sit in on her journalism lectures. Finally my idea was to get an insight in the ambitious introduction course for graduate students. Professor David Ewoldsen had no problem with allowing me to attend the lectures he had twice a week on Contemporary Communication Theory. I'm quite pleased with my decision to auscultate because I learned a lot both regarding pedagogy and subject matters. The latter included aspects of the subject that I haven't worked with for some time, if at all. Another good aspect of this set up was that it enabled me to adjust my participation in these classes out of consideration to my obligations as a Co-Instructor on Strategic Communication Principles. My interest in the graduate program was based on it having been ranked third in a US comparison.

Furthermore I attended the weekly graduate student seminar to get a further experience on how the School of Communication tries to accommodate this group to academic life. I was quite interested to see how much focus these seminars had on practical details like why they should volunteer as organizers on conferences, how to approach senior researchers and when they should or shouldn't accept to do a peer review. I was also quite pleased to note that seminars included lectures on teaching and pedagogy. Thanks to one of the graduate students I was also invited to the Ohio State Communication, Opinion, and Political Studies Group (COPS). This group, consisting of faculty members and graduate students interested in political communication and public opinion, had seminars every fortnight. The COPS seminars were scheduled as short presentations of on-going research projects followed by a discussion and gave me a great overview of the area. Once during my stay I also tried to attend a faculty meeting but was told to leave because they had to discuss sensitive staff issues.

Both Erik Nisbet and former STINT fellows at OSU had advised me to take part in workshops organized by the University Center for the Advancement of Teaching (UCAT). This turned out to be a really good piece of advise. I attended at least one seminar every month and found them all very informative, especially one called Active Learning Strategies for the Classroom. We got to try different ways to move classes away from standard lectures toward a more active, student-centred experience.

Another useful tip I got from Erik Nisbet was to attend seminars at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies. The mission of the center is to advance the understanding of national security in a global context. They try to achieve this by bringing together scholars, government officials, and business leaders from around the world to discuss the latest research in national and international security affairs. As a foreigner these seminars gave me a lot of interesting knowledge about international politics and at the same time about the US view on current events.

Important lessons

A major benefit in an international exchange like the teaching sabbatical I would argue lies in the opportunity to be inspired by the pedagogy from our fellow university teachers in other countries. For me this for example resulted in new creative ideas on how to use video clips during lectures and also a plan on how to create a hybrid online class. Furthermore I realized the benefits of the impressive resources the teachers in journalism had at their disposal. I was able to see the newsroom and the television studio where the journalism students, under supervision from their teachers, produce both the college newspaper *The Lantern* and the news, sports and weather broadcasts of *Lantern TV*. The use of iPads to augment journalistic training and to accelerate and enhance student learning was another aspect that I will bring home to my teaching in our journalism courses. The journalism teacher I came in contact with during my stay at OSU have even published an article in *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* (Kraft & Seely, 2015) about their work with iPads and journalistically focused apps. My auscultation in the introduction

course for the graduate students made me impressed by the way they were able to get an overview over the major strands of communication theory. In my view the overview of the field was rather important while some of the students, as it is in Sweden, came from other parts of the academic field. I was also fascinated by the focus on media psychology and persuasion, a field in which they are much stronger compared to any media and communication department. During my stay I have built a small but important network of teachers at OSU. This is something I hope will be an advantage for my plans to further enhance and expand the courses that are offered in English at my home department.

My teaching sabbatical in the US have also given me time to identify important similarities and differences between our two countries in general. I would argue that this is an important and sometimes understated aspect of the internationalization of teaching and research. The German Council of Science and Humanities (2010) have noted how differences between national contexts are a more daunting challenge in humanities and social sciences compared to science and medicine. They underline the cultural and political dimension of academic exchange and the possibility of intellectually creative meetings it facilitates. I would strongly agree in this line of thinking but would extend it further and point out the importance of living in another national context for a while. My stay in Columbus has for example given me new insights regarding political communication differences when it comes to values and attitudes. I have furthermore realized how hard it is to explain particular aspects of Swedish marketing, political and government communications. This made it possibly to challenge the students as well as my own prejudices. It has even created the basis for a couple of interesting research proposals regarding political communication.

Comparison between the foreign and the home institutions (in Sweden)

One of my first observations after the introduction of Communication 2331 was how similar the students seemed when I compared them with my students at Umeå University. Especially the questions in our Q&A session seemed to circle around the same issues as back home. The group

was significantly larger than equivalent classes at my home department (243 compared to 80-90) but when it came to prior knowledge, interests and reasons behind taking the class they seemed quite similar. I was a little bit surprised to see that the relation between teacher and students also seemed similar to my home department. I had expected it to be more strict and formal but was rather pleased when I noticed it was relaxed and easy going.

It was quite obvious to me that research and education goes hand in hand in a more developed way compared to my home department. One thing that quite surprised me was the way the School of Communication arranges Communication Research Experience (C-REP). The students are encouraged to participate in experiments or surveys for extra credit toward their final grade. The idea is to expose them to the topics, goals, methods, and ethical issues of communication research. Through the participation in C-REP a student might earn up to three percent credit. From my point of view this system has some advantages. The students get directly involved in the research and at the same time research projects have a good addition of people taking part in surveys and laboratory work. I can see some drawbacks with the system though. Some of the students might only volunteer because of the extra credits, which in turn may lead to a lack of enthusiasm in filling in surveys and take part in experiments. One more aspect is that many of the studies end up being made in a population that, to a disproportionate part, is made up by students. When I compare this to my own department in Sweden I would argue that we actually could do more to involve students in research although maybe not through a system like C-REP. I'm more inclined to propose that the students' term papers to a larger extent might be written as a part of an on-going research project. I saw examples of this at the School of communication regarding master thesis.

I could see a quite substantial interest in pedagogy at OSU. I noticed it at the introduction for new graduate students but also in my discussions with teachers at the department. They had attended courses, seminars and workshops at UCAT and also tried to implement things they had learned in their own teaching. Besides all the above-mentioned activities there was also The Office of Distance Education and eLearning, something that shows how OSU views online learning as a

critical component for the future of the university. This unit works mainly to provide strategic oversight in the development of distance education programs and support faculty in the use of technology.

I was quite impressed by all the different ways the university tries to develop the competence of the teachers. I was furthermore interested in the way the lectures weren't lasting longer than 55 minutes compared to two times 45 minutes back home. It made me think that we actually should look into this and maybe have more and shorter lectures. The use of Teaching Assistants (TAs) is something that is different compared to my department back home in Sweden. From what I've seen at OSU it looks like a good way of introducing graduate students to teaching. For me as a guest professor it was a great support to have a TA sitting in on my lectures. It was great to get a helping hand when I had problems getting the sound to work in a video clip. Even more important was the possibility to get direct feedback after each lecture.

The grading policies and assignments on Communication 2331 were very different from the construction on similar courses at my home department. It had a distinct quantitative framework in a way I'm not used to. The course consisted of four in-class exams made up by 50 multiple-choice questions each. They accounted for 25 percent each but the lowest grade out of the four was dropped, which meant that these accounted for 75 percent of the overall grade for the students. There were five Carmen quizzes totalling 10 percent of the students' grades. Finally three short writing assignments were worth five percent of the grade each. I can see how this quantitative setup gives the students a pretty good transparency in the grading process. At the same time this setup might be a little bit rigid and might also promote specific forms of exams, but I guess this also comes out of having over 200 students taking the course. At Umeå University we have smaller classes and a larger variety when it comes to examination. We have larger writing assignments and problem based learning but also classic in-class exams.

I was really impressed by the technology available in the journalism class I attended. The above-mentioned use of iPads was quite inspiring and the television studio was very impressive. They

used this studio in an interesting way and I got some ideas with me back home. A problem at my home department lies in the huge cost for technological equipment. As I understood it the well-developed alumni system at OSU is one of the reasons behind the abundance of media technology resources at the department. This is another example of an area that I will look into after my arrival back in Sweden, although there are different conditions and traditions when it comes to alumni donations. I was quite inspired by the weekly broadcasts setup by the journalism students. For me it seems like a great way to learn more about broadcasting in a way that is quite similar to the conditions they will experience if they work in broadcasting. My plan is to see if the journalism students at Umeå University can work in a similar way with weekly broadcasts that are put up on screens throughout campus and streamed from the homepage. This is a really good way enhance the extent to which the educational program conform to labour market needs.

The curriculum and courses offered at OSU is quite different from the ones that offered at Umeå University. The number of courses at the School of Communication is around ten times more compared to my home department. At OSU you can find a range of highly specialized courses like for example Computer Interface and Human Identity, Language, Culture & Communication in Latino Health and Media and Terrorism. I perceive this as a significant strength and I wish we had a larger number of specialized courses in media and communication studies at Umeå University. But there are two main reasons behind this difference in courses offered. Firstly there is a huge difference in the size and the amount of students at the two departments. Secondly my home department has developed towards more of educational programs instead of shorter courses. I can see the economic reasons behind the latter but sometimes I wish we had a larger offering of short courses that might attract students studying for majors in other academic fields.

Action plan - topics to address and if possible introduce in Sweden

One of the most important things I bring back home after my stay at OSU is a new energy. To see how they work at another university and also being a part of that work has inspired me to try some new things in my teaching. Among other things I would like to get my students more active

in their own learning. I hope to accomplish this by the way of deploying some of the active learning strategies we worked with during a UCAT seminar. These strategies include Flipped Classroom, Concept Maps and Gallery Walks. The Humanities Building at Umeå University has just been refurbished to accommodate different ways of teaching so I think there is a lot to be done in this area. Inspired by Erik Nisbet I also plan to introduce the use of more video clips in creative ways during my lectures. They represent a good way to give the students examples of the subjects I'm addressing but the clips might also to break up the lectures and even bring down some laughs. In journalism class I will look into possibilities to achieve funding for a newsroom. That would be the basis of a system in which the students produce weekly news broadcasts for the university. Finally I will also try to bring more of my own research into classes I teach and also try to get some students involved in my research projects. This might be achieved by giving them related subjects to explore in their term papers.

When it comes to changes in my home department I have some new ideas that would be interesting to try. The first one is to see if we can change from two-hour lectures to one-hour lectures. I sometime feel that the students have a lapse in concentration during our long lectures. Maybe we could try to more lectures and shorter ones instead. I'm also interested in trying to develop hybrid online courses in which the students see short video clips I made instead of me holding a lecture thereby leaving more time for seminars. One thing I hope we can do is to have more courses created by and for a specific teacher. I think more intimate knowledge of the specific subjects covered on a course would enhance the teaching. There might though be a problem if this teacher leaves abruptly or get sick. There is also a need of more courses in English at my department. We have two at the moment but my plan is to take part in the development of at least one more.

During the coming year my plan is to hold a lecture and/or a workshop at Umeå centre for university pedagogy (UPL) about my impressions of the teaching in the US university system. Furthermore I look forward to cooperate with the two STINT fellows from Umeå that are staying in the US during the fall of 2016. I hope this will give me an opportunity to inspire others to

develop their pedagogical skills but also to apply for STINT fellowships in the future.

During my stay in the US I started to think a lot about the sabbatical system. At many of the universities in Sweden, including my own, teachers have 20% of their tenure to enhance different skills. A lot of this time is spent on preparing for grant applications but for some teachers it almost disappears in a hectic schedule. An idea might be to change this system towards having a sabbatical every fifth semester. It might also be good idea to transfer some funds from different research councils to the universities so less time might be spend writing applications.

My stay at OSU has hugely inspired me and I really see the importance of internationalization. With this as a backdrop I'm really pleased to have been invited to a workshop arranged by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (RJ) on May the 23rd and 24th. This workshop will focus on internationalization and how it can be utilized as a strategic goal for research and research funding.

Jesper Enbom

Assistant professor

Department of Culture and Media Studies

Umeå University