

Excellence in Teaching – Final report

Report from a semester at New York University

As part of STINTs “Excellence in teaching” (Teaching sabbatical) program I had the opportunity to be a visiting scholar at NYU Steinhardt during the fall semester of 2013. NYU Steinhardt is one of the eighteen different schools at New York University (NYU). I was assigned to the Department of Nutrition, Food studies, and Public Health where I co-taught “Diseased Gut”, a course on the pathophysiology and management of gastrointestinal and liver diseases. My mentor and co-teacher was Professor Mary Platek. I am very grateful to Linköping University for nominating me to the Excellence in Teaching program and to STINT for accepting our application.

My home institution is the Faculty of Health Sciences which is one of three faculties within Linköping University. I work part time as a physician specialized in Gastroenterology and Hepatology and part time as a researcher and teacher at our medical school.

Introduction to NYU

NYU was founded in 1831 and is now one of the largest private universities in the United States. There are 40,000 students enrolled attending 18 schools and colleges at five major centers in Manhattan and in cities in Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America. In the 2014 edition of Best College ranking NYU was ranked as the 32nd University in the United States and several individual schools are ranked at the very top. There are more than 3100 full-time members of the faculty. The main campus area is intertwined with the lively Greenwich Village neighborhood of lower Manhattan.

The student body is truly diverse with students coming from every state in the US and from 133 foreign countries. Each student pay a tuition that for 2013-14 was 44 848 dollars (~300 000 SEK). Students are guaranteed housing in residence halls throughout Manhattan, and there are more than 25 fraternities and sorority chapters, and numerous other student organizations on campus.

The department of Nutrition, Food Studies and Public Health, <http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/nutrition/>, where I worked, is part of NYU Steinhardt which includes 11 academic departments in the areas of education and applied psychology, the arts, communications, and health. The department offers courses on the undergraduate, masters, and doctoral level, as well as internships in Dietetics, Food Studies, and Public Health.

Preparation and planning

Shortly after I had been selected for the “Excellence in Teaching (Teaching Sabbatical)” program I was contacted by Professor Krishnendu Ray who is chair of the Department of Nutrition, Food Studies,

and Public Health. Since there are a lot of administrative things that need to be handled before moving to the US I was connected with the administrative personal at the Office of Global Services, <http://www.nyu.edu/about/leadership-university-administration/office-of-the-president/office-of-the-provost/university-life/office-of-studentaffairs/office-of-global-services.html> as well as my tutor, Professor Mary Platek. New York University host many international faculty each semester and has therefore well written instructions for dealing with most practical things such as the visa application. Unfortunately the university does not assist you with the most difficult aspect of moving to New York, finding a place to live.

A planning trip was scheduled as early as possible during the spring semester. Before the trip Mary Platek and I discussed, through e-mail, suitable courses for me to co-teach. The suggestion from Professor Platek was to teach "Diseased Gut" which was a perfect match for a gastroenterologist.

During the first week in April, my family and I travelled to New York to prepare for our stay during the fall semester. Travelling together with me was my wife and our two daughters (eight and four years old). Therefore this was an important trip especially for the children. Unfortunately we had not found a place to live at the time of our trip so we were unable to visit schools or day care. Finding a place to live in New York is not easy and NYU did not help in any way.

The Office of Faculty Housing at NYU has an e-mail list for faculty member that want to sublet their apartments. The list is administered by Toka Pritchett (tpritchett@nyu.edu). Most apartments administered through the list were small and only available for a few weeks. Our initial plan was to find an apartment in Manhattan but we would have had to settle with a small apartment not suitable for two children with no opportunity to have visitors. We used both www.craigslist.org and www.sublet.com and finally found an apartment in Brooklyn.

Activities during the semester

My main activity during the semester was to co-teach "Diseased Gut" a course on pathophysiology and management of gastrointestinal diseases. At the end of the course the students completed a report on nutritional assessment in a specific clinical situation. The first part of the course was planned for a series of traditional lectures and the second half was planned as a journal club. At the journal club each student chose a research paper that was sent to all participants and discussed in class.

Instead of giving traditional lectures I chose to use case method where I prepared and presented a real case from my practice. The focus during the lectures was to have a discussion together with the students on pathophysiology and nutritional management of the presented patient. For each session I provided an interesting article that could help us in the management of the patient. When discussing the paper we tried to integrate discussions on research methodology focusing on strengths and weaknesses in the presented papers.

Besides co-teaching "Diseased Gut" I had the opportunity to give guest lectures in several other classes during the semester both on the undergraduate and graduate level. I also visited classes given by other faculty at the institution. One class that was particularly interesting was a cooking class for medical students. Clinical associate professor Lisa Sasson runs the course together with a

professional chef. The aim was to teach medical students to prepare and cook proper food so that they are better equipped to counsel patients on nutrition.

During the semester I tried to participate in activities offered by The NYU center for the advancement of teaching. In one of the seminars that I attended, reward winning teachers described their teaching styles. One of the professors described how he uses student blogs as a way to create a student centered learning environment. Each student was instructed to keep a blog on the topic of the course and update the blog weekly. For his lectures he read the blogs and used the material in the blogs as the material discussed in class.

During the semester I also had the opportunity to visit the ICAHN School of medicine at Mount Sinai which was especially interesting since I teach at the medical school back home. The visit to the ICAHN School of medicine is described in more detail below.

Important lessons

During my five months at NYU I had many great experiences and was exposed to a teaching environment that in many ways were different compared with the one at my home institution. There are many things at NYU that we could learn from, at the same time changing environment also makes you realize what you appreciate back home.

At NYU teachers are held accountable in a more direct way. Especially teachers on tenure track were regularly assessed by members of the faculty and the student evaluations were a natural part of the package that was put together in time of review. Poor teaching was not accepted.

At my home institution we have very long courses and the course director is not the principal teacher during the course. Even though I appreciate the general idea with long courses with integration of topics, in our curriculum the teacher sometimes becomes anonymous. The close interaction between teachers with expertise in their field and students was a positive experience at NYU. At the same time, my experience from NYU was that even though each course gave true depth sometimes the more complex scenarios where you have to integrate concepts from more than one discipline were lacking.

When it comes to the general discussion on teaching methods and curricular planning I believe that my home institution is well ahead since we've had a fully implemented problem based curriculum from the very start. Since our curriculum integrates topics it is vital that pre-clinical teachers and physicians work together creating an on-going discussion on pedagogy. Even though this discussion is not always easy and not without strong emotions, in the end it is vital for the development of the teaching environment.

Relation between research and education

Even though NYU Steinhardt takes pride in providing good education, at the core they value research. If you have excellence in research you can be somewhat lacking in teaching skills, but you cannot compensate for poor research by being an excellent teacher. That said, the lower limit of acceptable teaching is higher at NYU than at my home institution, and this is assessed regularly both by students and faculty.

Relation between students and teachers

It is hard for me to compare the students I met at NYU with the students I normally teach in our medical school. The comparison would have been easier if I had taught medical students in New York as well. In general there were no big differences. I had to adjust my teaching since the students at NYU did not have same depth in knowledge on some of the medical topics such as anatomy, immunology, and pathophysiology.

The students that took my class which was run as an advanced seminar all worked clinically as dietitians and therefore had more clinical experience than the medical students in Linköping. They were all very eager to learn but there was a large difference between students in their knowledge on basic research principles. The students appreciated that I used case methodology during my lectures and there were no problem getting them active. Even though they were very formal in addressing the teachers, always Professor Ekstedt, they were not afraid to ask questions and to discuss different topics.

Visit to Icahn School of medicine at Mount Sinai

In Linköping I mainly teach our medical students, and therefore I wanted to visit a medical school. By wonderful assistance from Prof Scott Friedman, who is a personal friend to one of my research associates, I was able to visit the Icahn School of medicine at Mount Sinai and meet with several of the faculty, including the Dean for Medical Education Prof David Mueller. Each year Mount Sinai admits 140 medical students, which is about half the number of medical students that is admitted to the medical school in Linköping.

Prof David Mueller was very generous and shared his experience from leading a prestigious and innovative medical school at an institution widely recognized for top class medical research. Mount Sinai is an innovative medical school where it is possible to change existing structure and develop new progressive courses in the curriculum which was acknowledged by all faculty members that I met. For creating this atmosphere Prof David Mueller highlighted three important areas; the infrastructure within the institution, including the budget, the team of leaders managing the program, and support for the leadership from the institution.

At Mount Sinai, the leadership of the medical school belongs to the Department of Medical Education, and the Chair of the Department (Prof David Mueller) is at the same level in the internal hierarchy as the other department chairs. In this way the leadership is in control of the programs finances. Therefore, within their budget, they are able to priorities from the need of the medical school without competing with other interests throughout the institution.

The reputation and rank of a medical school is vital in being able to recruit the most talented and motivated students which could become the teachers and researchers of the future. To pursue this goal Prof David Mueller has assembled a team of dedicated educators that lead the development of the medical program. The majority is physicians and they have great interest in medical education. To be able to recruit and foster good educators they have created metrics for promotion on the different domains of competencies; research, teaching, and clinical. It is possible to become full professor if you have outstanding teaching experiences or if you are an outstanding clinical without first class research.

At Mount Sinai, I visited two interesting programs that are of particular interest for the medical school in Linköping, the Longitudinal clinical experience and The East Harlem Health Outreach Partnership.

The longitudinal clinical experience pairs students with a chronically ill patient within the first weeks of training and the student is connected with the patient during their first two years:

<http://icahn.mssm.edu/education/medical-education/about-us/community/caring-for-the-chronically-ill>

The East Harlem Health Outreach Partnership is a student run free clinic for the uninsured of east harlem:

<http://icahn.mssm.edu/education/medical-education/about-us/community/outreach-partnership>

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

My five months at NYU has given me many experiences that will help me in my future role as an educator at the medical school in Linköping. The most important being the need for evaluation and feed-back for teachers. When it comes to teaching methodology I am a bit disappointed with what I was exposed to, this is probably due to my home faculty which has been very innovative over the years. At the same time my time at NYU gave me an unusual reference point since it is uncommon for teachers to visit another institution in their role as educators.

After my stay at NYU I have, probably as a consequence of my teaching sabbatical, been invited to be a member of the board for Didacticum which is a newly formed (reformed) center for the advancement of teaching at Linköping University. As a board member as well as in my role as a leader of the theme group for gastroenterology I will promote the need for individual feed-back to teachers, from students as well as other faculty. I will also promote programs for individual coaching.

I also think that we could learn from the tenure process in which teaching evaluation is a natural part. Since we do not have the same tenure process in Sweden I believe that we should create metrics for teaching skills as well as research experience in our promotion processes.

My connection with the Department of Nutrition, Food studies, and public health will continue. We have recently been awarded a grant of 500 000 SEK for one of the faculty from NYU to do a six month sabbatical in our institution in Linköping.

Once again I want to express my gratitude to Linköping University and STINT for giving me this experience that will influence my life as faculty member for many years to come.