

# STINT Final Report: Teaching Sabbatical 2015

Haverford College, Department of Psychology

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*STINT: Think Haverford*

*Philly, books, duck pond, students*

*See, teach, learn, return.*

I glanced at an email notification on December 18th and saw that it was from STINT (The Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education). A bit anxious, I opened the email, and “YES!” I had been awarded one of the 13 stipends in the STINT Teaching Sabbatical program. Haverford College would be my host for the fall semester. Dr. Benjamin Le (Dept. Chair in Psychology) and Ms. Ellen Schultheis with the Provost Office were my assigned contacts at Haverford. It was time to make plans and find out more about Haverford.

Haverford College is located just outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It is a small selective liberal arts college of approximately 1,200 full-time students. Haverford is situated on an open 216-acre campus, which also includes an arboretum and a lively duck pond. The architecture and landscape provide pleasant physical surroundings for the students and faculty.

Haverford College is also one of the partners in a tri-college (tri-co) consortium. Bryn Mawr and Swarthmore Colleges are the other two colleges and are similar in size to Haverford. The consortium allows students to take courses at any of the three colleges. Students can also take courses at the University of Pennsylvania. The tri-co arrangement is a fantastic resource for the students and allows a diverse offering of courses. Spending a teaching sabbatical at Haverford allowed me to establish contacts with teachers and researchers from Bryn Mawr and the University of Pennsylvania. I was invited to attend research seminars at UPenn, which is well known, among other areas, for its leading research in decision-making and cognitive science.



Students choose Haverford for its consistently high national ratings for Liberal Arts Colleges. Ninety-five percent of the students come from the top 10% of their graduating high school classes. Students know that they will receive a quality liberal arts education that will allow them to compete for positions in graduate schools and other professional academic careers. Haverford College offers students a strong intellectual community together with other students and dedicated faculty. The community setting is strengthened by the fact that 61% of the faculty members live on campus, and 98% of students live on campus.

Haverford's reputation for providing opportunities to become engaged in social justice issues is also an important aspect for students. Faculty members are also encouraged to take part in and engage students in issues of social justice and community involvement. The student faculty ratio is 9:1, which makes for small class sizes and seminar-based teaching for the higher-level courses.

Haverford College has Quaker origins but is non-sectarian. There is a strong emphasis on community among the students and faculty members. Among the students, the Honor Code is particularly important. The students are responsible for maintaining and developing the Honor Code among current and incoming students. Trust, Concern and Respect are the key qualities that reflect the values of the student community and the attitude that the faculty have towards the students. No tests or exams are proctored. Students are expected to abide by commitment to the Honor Code, which creates a unique community-based learning experience for the students.

These and other aspects of Haverford created high expectations and excitement in planning to be a part of the Haverford community.

## **Preparation and Planning**

As a first step, I had a Skype meeting with Dr. Le about living and teaching at Haverford. We discussed a list of possible courses that I could teach based on my previous courses as well as the needs of the Psychology Department at Haverford. We also decided when to meet during my planning visit in April.

Prior to my planning visit in April, Dr. Le and I agreed that a course on the psychology of judgment and decision-making would fit the needs and interests of the psychology department well. I looked forward to further developing this course and adapting it to the student population at Haverford. The semesters at Haverford are 16 weeks long vs. 20 for Swedish universities. I learned also that students at Haverford could be expected to read between 80 and 100 pages a week. I wrote a short course description to be submitted for faculty approval, which it was. My course was then available for students to choose for their fall semester courses. The remainder of time to the beginning of the semester was used to create a complete syllabus.

### ***Housing and meeting my hosts***

Early on, I had contact with Ms. Ellen Schultheis and Ms. Susan Penn about housing. Haverford College values faculty-student interaction and therefore owns and maintains a number of faculty housing units. Initially, there were no such units available for visiting faculty. Prior to my planning visit however, I was offered the possibility of subletting a furnished on-campus faculty apartment from a professor who was away for the year on sabbatical. The apartment was on the bottom floor of what is known on campus as the “Quiet House.” Perfect! The other floors were reserved for students. This was an ideal situation for my wife and me. My wife would accompany me for a large part of my teaching sabbatical.

In April, we traveled to Haverford College to work out any remaining practical details about my stay and to discuss my course. Dr. Le had also planned a nice evening dinner at a local restaurant so that we could meet the other faculty members and a new tenure-track faculty member who would

also start her position in the fall. This was a great way to meet everyone. The relatively small size of the Psychology Department was conducive to this kind of meeting where we could all get together. My wife and I were also able to view the faculty apartment and meet the professor



who lived there. It was perfect for our needs, and we signed the contract. The planning trip was a perfect opportunity to get most details settled before arriving in August. Everyone I met was very helpful and welcoming. I was treated like a new member of the faculty. The next step was to finish preparing the course in decision-making.

### **Tasks and responsibilities**

#### ***The Course***

In May, I was informed that 10 students had signed up for my course, which was an upper-level psychology course, for which a seminar-based teaching model would be well suited. I was also informed that at the beginning of each semester the first week was a “shopping week” when students visited a number of different courses that they originally signed up for and then decided which ones they would participate in for the rest of the semester. This

meant that students had typically signed up for more courses than they would actually take. At the beginning of the second week, there were seven students committed to taking my course. This number of students for an upper level seminar course is common.

There seemed to be little team teaching in the psychology department at Haverford. Despite this, there was a strong sense of community and effort to work together to provide the students with a first-rate education in psychology. It was also the case that the faculty members could hold guest lectures in the classes of their colleagues. The department meetings were also a productive forum for discussing shared pedagogical issues and requirements for knowledge progression within psychology. I also discussed my course syllabus and pedagogical plans with Dr. Le and my office partner Dr. Jake Kurczek, who had a background in the neuroscience of decision-making.

I was particularly concerned about how much reading and assignments were considered normal for an upper-level seminar course. Together with the other faculty, we agreed that 1,500 pages of assigned reading and original research articles for the individual essays was a reasonable load for the students. In addition to the reading assignments, students completed the following assignments: a presentation (leading seminar discussion) of one of the weekly reading assignments, 10 weekly reflective essays of 3-4 written pages (double-spaced), a midterm paper of 10-12 pages and a final term paper of 12-14 pages. This turned out to be on the heavy side of course work. It was also a lot of grading. (If I had more courses to teach, I would reduce the load or change the extent to which I commented on the essays and papers.) The final course grades were then based on the total sum of collected points (100 point maximum) for the assignments. I specified the learning outcomes for the course. Grades were issued and communicated in relation to the grading criteria for each assignment. I used the following grading scale:

Grade	Points	Grade	Points
A / 4.0	94-100	C+ / 2.3	77-79.99
A- / 3.7	90-93.99	C / 2.0	73-76.99
B+ / 3.3	87-89.99	C- / 1.7	70-72.99
B / 3.0	83-86.99	D+ / 1.3	67-69.99
B- / 2.7	80-82.99	D / 1.0	60-66.99
		F / 0.0	59.99 and below

### ***Course pedagogy: A Variation on the Flipped Classroom***

Learning in the classroom can be influenced by the social context of the learning environment in addition to the need for students to demonstrate their individual levels of learning and knowledge. If a small group of students learns to appreciate about how their learning can be facilitated by belonging to a group, they may also be inclined to care about building group relationships that foster learning. In my course, I decided to add, or put considerably more emphasis on, the relationship aspect of learning by telling the students

that we (instructor and students) have a collective responsibility for creating the learning environment. I wanted my role to be a facilitator of productive discussion between students. I saw my responsibility as someone who knew the scientific landscape of the psychology of judgment and decision making and would push and nudge learning so as not to get too far off course and to make sure in the end we moved forward to the learning goals that I had set out. I did not know how well this would work, and I was also prepared to take more responsibility for conducting classroom discussion if the need arose.

The course was scheduled to meet on Mondays and Wednesdays between 2:30 and 4pm. The learning activity on Mondays focused on the collective development of a model for decision-making. Students were to work together to develop a model (or several models if needed) for decision-making. The idea here was that the weekly reading assignments would serve as a basis on which to successively build the model. The model building in turn would create further questions and discussions that could only be solved by consulting the literature and/or engaging one another in discussion. The students would have to decide how the collective work would be conducted. Who would take the lead in driving discussion and creating the model? Could the students challenge one another intellectually in a way that would lead to a better understanding of how to use the group to create a better model?

Wednesdays were reserved for student-led seminars where one student per week led a 60-minute seminar based on the weekly reading assignments. The students presented the gist of the weekly reading assignments and prepared discussion questions to further understanding of the material. This was a welcome challenge for the students, and they succeeded very well. The model building sessions on Mondays, however, proved more challenging, and a midterm evaluation of the course suggested the need for me to provide more structured lectures, which I did. These lectures provided a clearer sense of direction in the course for the students, although I would have liked to keep up the pressure for them to push one another to learn more about decision-making. In the end, the student evaluation of the course was very positive, and it was rewarding to be a part of their learning at Haverford.

## **Haverford and teaching and research**

Haverford College is known for its high academic standards and high achieving students. It is not unusual for an open tenure-track position to attract between 150 and 200 well-qualified applicants from the top-ranked universities in the US. There is an unmistakable emphasis on teaching responsibilities at Haverford. In the psychology department, the teaching load is five courses per year. There are two sixteen-week semesters per year. In addition to teaching, the faculty members are expected to generate research funding and to publish in top journals. There is virtually no option of getting a reduced teaching load because of increased research funding. Faculty members conduct their research by engaging students in faculty research labs and through the supervision of the thesis work of the senior students. It was encouraging to observe this balance between teaching and research.

## Activities during the semester

As a new visiting faculty member, I took advantage of the many opportunities to become acquainted with other new faculty members and the different organizations at Haverford. Given the congenial size of Haverford and the open atmosphere, it was easy to engage with people from administration and support as well as faculty members from other departments.

The program for new faculty orientation at Haverford was extremely helpful. It included introductions by the President, Provost, Associate Provosts and the provost office staff as well as from representatives of support services for faculty and students. By the end of the two-day course of the program, we had a clear understanding of the considerable academic and technical support offered at Haverford. I was particularly struck by the following opening statement of the Head Librarian, "You (teachers) are the mountain climbers, and we are your Sherpas." This was an attitude that I often experienced in my contact with the support services for my course.

Haverford also organized at least six faculty lunches during the semester. This was a very helpful forum to discuss pedagogical issues with other faculty members and to learn more about the many aspects of the Haverford community. It was also a pleasant surprise to have the college president join us for lunch and conversation.



College-wide faculty meetings were held once a month and conducted on the basis of achieving consensus for the collective decisions facing the college. This emphasis on consensus has its roots in the Quaker tradition. Issues are prepared and discussed and then tabled to allow for further discussion and reflection until consensus is reached. This form of decision-making requires transparency, and it results in collective ownership of decisions affecting college-wide policy. It takes more time than hierarchical-based decision-making but seems to create a stronger sense of community as well. Coming from Sweden, I was particularly interested to hear about the committee work being done to create healthcare plan alternatives for the Haverford employees. This topic is not an issue in Sweden, at least not to the same extent if it does occur at all.

I was also included in the psychology department meetings where I recognized many of the topics that were discussed. There seem to be many issues that are universal within academia. I felt I could more actively participate in these meetings than the college-wide faculty meetings. For example, during the department meetings, we discussed the

assessment of final year projects (senior theses) and the skill set and subject area knowledge that students should have when they graduate from Haverford with a major in psychology.

Given the high academic ranking of Haverford, there were many fascinating guest lectures to attend. Researchers who were at the forefront of their fields gave the lectures, and the topics were in the news. For example, immigration reform and the Syrian refugee crisis were hot topics. It was an awakening contrast for me to discuss what was happening in Sweden at the time when the US was debating the decision to allow 1,500 Syrian refugees into the US. Sweden was at that time allowing over 100,000 refugees into the country. I enjoyed the cultural exchange and discussion.

### ***Seminar at The Center for Peace and Global Citizenship***

During the various opportunities to meet other faculty members and learn about the different academic activities that engaged students and teachers, I stumbled upon The Center for Peace and Global Citizenship (CPGC). As a part of the Quaker heritage at Haverford, involvement in issues of social justice is strong among the students and faculty. The role of the CPGC is to provide an academic forum for civic engagement outside of the Haverford community. The emphasis is on using scholarship to promote civic engagement through the many programs that help finance student projects such as internships. One other activity of the center is to sponsor lunch seminars that stimulate discussion of current issues of social justice. In December, I held a lunch seminar on the following theme: Know Thyself and Know Thy World: Decision-Making, Statistics and Social Justice. This fit very well with the content of the course I was teaching. I wanted the students to become better decision makers about the world in which they were to act in as educated people.

As a discussion starter, I used Hans Rosling's TED talk about new insights on poverty. I was happy to use Hans' talk because he is an engaging speaker, he is a Swede, and he uses Sweden as a kind of benchmark in his talk. He also illustrates an informed use of statistics to arrive at conclusions that are very optimistic about the direction of poverty in the world. I used his talk to show how the use of statistics can help us to understand poverty and to make appropriate decisions to combat it. The deeper question that we also discussed was how to use academic disciplines like statistics and decision-making to influence public policy about issues of social justice.

In summary, I used much of my time to participate in the many events that the bi-college community of Haverford and Bryn Mawr had to offer. This was an effective way to learn more about similarities and differences between Haverford and the Swedish educational system in general and the University of Skövde in particular. I also participated in the some events of the Swedish community in and around Philadelphia.

## **Comparison between the foreign and the home institutions in Sweden**

### ***Honor Code***

One of the most distinguishing aspects of the educational community at Haverford is the honor code. Essentially, the honor code governs academic and social behavior. The students take responsibility for behaving according to agreed upon standards described in the honor code. From the teaching perspective, this means that exams are not proctored, and students understand that if exam instructions say that they have two hours to complete an exam, they will not exceed that time. They can work anywhere they choose. The students pledge to abide by the honor code.

The honor code is one indication of the sense of community that is fostered at Haverford. During student orientation week, activities for new students help to inform and create a consensus about the values set forth in the honor code. The students take also responsibility for adjudicating alleged violations of the honor code. There are no faculty-run disciplinary committees. I was somewhat skeptical of this, wondering how well the honor code really worked. After spending a semester at the college, I'm impressed by the way the students conducted themselves and seemed to abide by the honor code. It was a relief to simply trust the students.

There are a few factors that contribute to workings of the honor code at Haverford. Firstly, 98% of the students live on campus, which facilitates the community aspect of the honor code. The students belong to a group that values honesty and integrity. Secondly, Haverford is a small college, which makes it easier to create a communal identity among the new students. A third, aspect is that the student population is very bright, and they do not have to compete with one another. I saw no evidence of competition for grades, and the students never had any complaints about the grades they received. They cared about their grades, and wanted to know how they would be graded, but no student ever questioned my fairness.

Even though Swedish universities will unlikely be able to implement anything similar to an honor code, more emphasis could be placed on developing a sense of community among new students. This is done to some extent during the introduction week, but it falls far short of the community building activities I witnessed at Haverford.

### ***Alumni***

Another consequence of creating a strong community feeling at Haverford is the financial support provided by the alumni. Haverford is perhaps not unique in this sense as many institutions of higher education in the US rely on financial support from alumni. The financial support is one concrete way that alumni show that a sense of identity is tied to where they received their education. There is much to do in this area for Swedish universities, even though it will likely have less to do with financial support. There are many other ways in which former students can be encouraged to support their alma mater.



***Need Blind***

Although the total annual cost for a student at Haverford is \$64,000, the admission policy is need-blind, which means that admission is not dependent on the need for financial aid. If a potential student has what it takes to gain admission to the college, Haverford will meet the full demonstrated need of all admitted students. The financial aid statistics present a generous policy. More than 50% receive a college grant, and the average award of the college grant is \$40,000. This shows that the annual fees for attending the college do not cover the costs of attending the college. Put another way, Haverford seems to rely heavily on their endowment for their yearly operating budget. This also affects the hiring of new faculty at Haverford. Increasing the number of paying students does not cover the cost of additional faculty. This difference in financing models between state-run Swedish universities and a private liberal arts college like Haverford has consequences in other areas such as hiring policy.

***The Research Sabbatical***

The psychology department at Haverford has six full-time tenured (including tenure-track) positions and five visiting faculty positions. The visiting faculty positions are necessary in order to offer a sufficiently wide range of courses for the students. Since Haverford has a bi-co arrangement with Bryn Mawr, the strategy is to hire faculty who complement one another at the two colleges. The role of the visiting (and adjunct) faculty is to teach courses taught by tenured faculty on sabbatical. Since the teaching load is quite high, faculty members need a sabbatical to publish research and apply for research funding. The sabbatical is an attractive way to concentrate research time. It is a welcome form of competence development. Sabbaticals for junior faculty members occur after three years and then again after the 6<sup>th</sup> year.

The Haverford faculty members choose Haverford because they value teaching and the relationships that are formed together with the students, and Haverford has a particularly high ranking in this regard. This is similar to the dedicated teachers at Swedish universities, the only difference being that there is no division at Haverford between faculty who have a large teaching schedule and faculty who devote most of their time to research. There is continued emphasis on improving pedagogically, and seminars are regularly held in order to share successful pedagogical strategies.

***Action plan – topics to address and if possible introduce in Sweden***

While at Haverford, I observed some differences that I would call systemic and other differences that are more individual or institution-based. Even though it is difficult to change the systemic differences, they have consequences for the institutional differences. I've already mentioned a few of the systemic differences like financial models and the length of the semesters (16 weeks at Haverford and 20 weeks in Sweden). Another difference from which even the systemic differences arise is the fact that the Swedish Higher Education System is publically funded and state-run. As a formal state agency, the Swedish university

system abides by the laws and regulations that specifically govern university organization and practice. This creates the same conditions for anyone who wants to study at a Swedish university. For example, students at Swedish universities have to be given a chance to retake a failed exam. Despite the pedagogical consequences of this, it is not an option to disallow a retake. Consequently resources are required to deal with extra exams and to develop testing situations that are efficient.

One possibly beneficial systemic change would be to reduce the 20-week semester to 18 weeks for the Swedish system. This would allow faculty members in Sweden to focus more on teaching during the semesters while knowing that they will have 4 weeks to do research.

### ***Personal Action Plan***

I will do more to encourage a sense of community among my students. Trust and social motivation can be very useful pedagogical tools in the classroom. This is not just an aspect of the flipped classroom but also a central tenet of active social learning. Teaching status is another factor that will continue to affect the university workplace. The goal is to contribute to the development of an academic community where students and faculty members agree about the equal merits of good teaching skills and good research skills.

The University of Skövde is planning a workshop on steps to encourage teachers and students to spend time abroad. This is a part of the internationalization program at the university. I look forward to describing my time at Haverford during this workshop. I enjoyed also meeting the other STINT fellows at the midterm and at the end of the sabbatical. As a group, we have many valuable experiences. The STINT teaching sabbatical program is an attractive opportunity to develop teaching skills and contacts that will be beneficial to one's home university.

During my stay at Haverford, I discussed the possibility of initiating a student exchange with Haverford and Bryn Mawr. We have a planned visit from Bryn Mawr this spring. One desirable long-term goal of this would be to have our students participate in a liberal arts environment at some point in their education. Swedish students could participate in the honor code and be a part of an on-campus academic community that emphasizes scholarship and trust in a way that culturally differs from the Swedish university system.

Thank you STINT and Haverford College for an enriching teaching sabbatical! Thanks to the University of Skövde for nominating me!