

STINT Teaching Sabbatical at the University of Tokyo - Final Report 2015-01-28

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Introduction to the University of Tokyo

The University of Tokyo (UTokyo) is usually seen as the best university in Japan. It was ranked No. 1 in Asia and No. 21 in the world in the Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2014. 15 prime ministers of Japan have graduated from UTokyo and eight people have received Nobel Prizes or the Fields medal. It was formed in 1877 as Japan's first National University (with four departments: Law, Science, Literature and Medicine). Today, the university offers education in most academic areas. There are 7672 permanent employees (faculty and administration), and 2313 in temporary positions. 3181 students began studying at the undergraduate level in 2013, 2807 at Masters level and 1294 at postgraduate level. A total of about 28,000 students, half of them are undergraduate and half of them graduate (Masters and PhD). 10% international students. 80% male students.

Undergraduate Education is divided into junior (years 1-2) and Senior Division (years 3-4). The Junior Division is studied at the College of Arts and Sciences, and consists of training in the liberal arts. The Senior Division is studied at different faculties such as law, economics, engineering, medicine. The largest is the engineering faculty which has more than 2000 of the approximately 7500 students in the senior division. Graduate education is conducted at one of the university's 15 graduate schools.

In October 2012 the PEAK program, where I worked, was formed. PEAK stands for Programs in English At Komaba, and in these programs students can study an entire program in English from undergraduate to graduate level to postgraduate. There are at present two PEAK programs: Environmental Sciences and Japan in East Asia. The PEAK school year begins in the fall rather than in April, in order to harmonize with foreign universities. Approximately 30 students are admitted each year to PEAK. The students who started in 2012, are now (Spring 2015) in year 3, semester 2, so no one has yet graduated from PEAK.

Preparation and planning

On December 23rd, 2013 I sent an e-mail to my contact person, prof. Takatsuka, at the University of Tokyo with greetings and thanks for being invited to the university. Just a few hours later I got a friendly response from my contact person, which already set the tone of what was going to be a very rewarding cooperation. Early during 2014, I got e-mails from Andreas Göthenberg, STINT, who had extensive knowledge about Tokyo and Stefan Norén - advisor to the UTokyo president. They both helped me greatly to expand my network at UTokyo and in Tokyo more generally.

During January, prof. Takasuka and I had a brief discussion about my future responsibilities at UTokyo, and I was offered to teach one course about ethics to the third and fourth year PEAK undergraduate students (the so called senior division), and I also got the opportunity to teach a course for PEAK freshmen and sophomores (the so called junior division), but it was very clear that this second course was optional. I thought that teaching for both the junior and senior division would make me understand more of PEAK, so I decided to do that. In January we decided that I was going to visit UTokyo in April for the planning week. Due to severe workload in Sweden, I could only spend three days at UTokyo in April, although I would have preferred to stay for an entire week, five days. During the STINT teaching sabbatical meeting in early February I got a lot of good ideas for my stay, and I was encouraged to ask the host university for assistance in finding accommodation, which I did. In February, I applied for a family apartment operated by UTokyo, since I was going to Japan with wife and daughter, but my application was rejected. In the next application round, in March, I managed to secure a couple room of 35 sqm operated by UTokyo for the three of us. Also, in February, it was decided that the topic of my senior division course should be ethics and that I should also teach a course for the junior division, in collaboration with prof Woodward. I also got the offer to participate in Faculty Development activities.

On February 19, I got a request to produce a syllabus for my senior division course, and the deadline was on February 23. I prepared the syllabus, but in hindsight it would have been nice to think through the syllabus more carefully. I also got an e-mail from the UTokyo division of educational affairs requesting the same syllabus.

The e-mail was written in Japanese, but this was one of the very few e-mails that I received in Japanese from UTokyo.

During my planning trip to UTokyo, I met with prof. Takatsuka on April 16, and met with a group of UTokyo professors on April 17 and April 18, discussing the syllabi of my courses, and listening to a lecture for junior division students. I remember that I was impressed by the English proficiency of the participating professors, administrative staff, and students, which was very relieving. During my planning trip I also got to know the new director of the Organization for Programmes of Environmental Sciences prof. Shimada, who took over prof. Takatsuka's post from April 1.

My general impression of the period before going to UTokyo is that I was treated very well by the professors and the administrative staff. From the administrative staff, I got much assistance in preparing documents for my visa application, as well as assistance with securing an apartment. I recommend the next STINT professor to apply for accommodation as early as possible. The only drawback of the period before going to Japan was that I felt that the planning trip and also the course planning was conflicting with my everyday work at Uppsala University, which led to quite a lot of stress.

Tasks and responsibilities at UTokyo

Teaching

At UTokyo I was teaching two courses, one for the senior division and one for the junior division. I was told that the average number of students at PEAK was 9, so I expected quite small classes. My junior division class had ten students and my senior division class had four students (three PEAK students and one Swedish exchange student). At UTokyo each course has in general one 90-minutes lecture per week. Since the semester started in early October and ended in late January, and I had to leave Japan in early January to take up teaching/administrative responsibility at my home university, we had to find a solution to my absence from about three classes in each course, explained below.

The junior division course was called Ethics and sustainability in everyday life. During the first half of the course I taught ethical theory and models of sustainability. During the second part of the course the students could choose between a range of everyday life things suggested by me such as coffee, social media, ICT, plastic bottles, clothes, cars, robots, cosmetics, etc. There were five groups with two students per group. Each group chose a topic, and prepared a presentation about the ethical and sustainability issues of the topic, for example cosmetics, for about 30 minutes. The rest of the class was a discussion led by the presenting students. My pedagogical aim was to empower the students to become experts in their topic and create an atmosphere of co-creation and fun. Of course I had prepared basic readings for each topic, but the students were free to add own material to the presentation. The latter half of the course was thus student led, although I took quite an active part in structuring the discussions. I think (based on course evaluations) that the course was well-received by the students. Due to my absence in January 2015, I co-taught the course with professor Jonathan Woodward, who sat in on my classes during the course, and facilitated a class about robots in early January. Then I did a Skype lecture from Sweden, which was followed by an exam administrated by prof Woodward, with me on Skype.

The senior division course was called Ethics and Industrial management. While the junior division course aimed at covering ethics in everyday life, the senior division course was a course in business ethics in industrial firms. It covered basic ethical theory, stakeholder theory, ethical issues in the supply chain, ethical issues in marketing, and dealing with the bottom of the pyramid markets. Based on discussions with PEAK teachers, I converted the course into consisting of ten lectures of 117 minutes each, rather than 13 lectures of 90 minutes each. This was a good solution, since I could finish the entire course before leaving Japan. However, in the schedule it appeared as if each lecture was 180 minutes long. I do not know if this affected participation in the course.

PEAK Faculty Development Lunches

Every Wednesday lunch throughout the Fall semester, Prof. Woodward organized a Faculty Development Lunch. The aim was to run regular informal lunchtime meetings discussing various aspects of teaching, learning and curriculum development. The

number of participants of each lunch was 5-15 people out of a total PEAK teacher population of maybe 40. Some examples of topics are:

- Packed curriculum, compartmentalisation of knowledge and short term memory.
- Student feedback - when, where, how often, what kind?
- Assessing student learning - when, how, for what purpose
- Making the most of MOOCS and OpenCourseWare
- Integrating international students
- An ideal liberal arts curriculum
- Technology in the classroom

These lunches were a good opportunity to meet with other PEAK teachers, who otherwise might not any natural meeting places since they belong to different department. Also, the content of the discussions were very rewarding and this was one of the things I was interested in taking back to Sweden. I shared many things from Sweden and I could hear about experiences from different parts of the world, since many teachers who teach PEAK courses have international experience.

Junior division meetings

Once a month there were formal meetings of the teachers having courses for PEAK junior division students. I was expected to attend these meetings. Once again, these meetings were a good forum for meeting other teachers at PEAK, and to get an overview of the issues of importance for PEAK and important events at UTokyo. The meetings were held in English.

Senior division meetings

I belonged to the Organization for Programmes of Environmental Sciences and was expected to go to monthly faculty meetings, which were also an excellent forum for meeting other teachers of the PEAK senior division. These meetings were conducted in Japanese. Since I understand Japanese, the meetings were very interesting, and quite a contrast to the junior division meetings in being more formal, but the language might be a barrier to future Teaching Sabbatical fellows.

Sitting in

During my stay at UTokyo I took the opportunity to sit in on a PEAK course to understand the pedagogy of other PEAK teachers. To sit in was a valuable exercise. I learned very much about the way one can structure classes. Also, contentwise the course was highly interesting. I realized that I should sit in on more classes also when I am in Sweden.

Pedagogical research: zemi

In my application for the STINT Teaching Sabbatical I wrote that I wanted to study the Japanese zemi system, which I had noticed during my earlier stays in Japan in 2009-2011. According to my experience from another Japanese university, tenured professors have a seminar that runs weekly for students from year 2 to 4 in the undergraduate teaching. Progression in an educational curriculum is an issue that is widely discussed and sometimes deemed to be problematic in the Swedish education system. It is not always unproblematic how knowledge from earlier courses fuel and enhance courses later in the curriculum. At my former university in Japan, apart from progression in the course the zemi-system ensured that students developed over the course of three years under the leadership of one professor, apart from taking courses. My aim was to learn more about the pros and cons of the system and see if potentially might be applicable also in Sweden.

I did some interviews at UTokyo but realized that the zemi system often is only conducted during the last year of the undergraduate studies at UTokyo. I therefore mobilized my contacts at other universities in Tokyo and made a few field visits, participant observations, and interviews with both professors and students. I now have a much better understanding of the diversity of the zemi-system, a system which aims at more than progression and integration of knowledge: it aims at educating the "whole person". I think this system might be relevant for Uppsala University and maybe even Swedish higher education in general.

Assessment of PEAK

Before leaving Japan, I was asked to give a presentation about my experiences of PEAK. My presentation which took place was called "PEAK - creating global leaders for the future?" and focused on the issue of progression and integration of knowledge

in a program with a great deal of freedom and a large variety of courses. About 15 teachers attended and it sparked quite a lot of debate. Parts of my abstract for the presentation were:

In this presentation, I would like to reflect on my experiences of PEAK. The presentation will concern my experiences of teaching my junior and senior division courses, attending the Faculty Development lunch meetings, as well as from informal discussions with teachers and students during my stay. Given the large number of courses within the PEAK programs and the width of the courses in terms of content, I will present some ideas about progression and integration, which could support the mission of PEAK to create global leaders for the future.

Miscellaneous

I had informal meetings with different PEAK teachers to understand both their research and teaching. I also met regularly with Prof. Shimada to discuss various aspects of PEAK and internationalization of education. Apart from the above, I conducted research and expanded my knowledge about Japanese business. Also, I created a very small reading group studying philosophy. I also tried to create research contacts at UTokyo and other universities, pulling all strings possible, including Andreas Göthenberg and Stefan Norén. Due to this, I learned about various groups of researchers in my field in Tokyo. Together with one of these groups, I will organize a workshop later in 2015.

Important lessons

When I prepared my courses I expected the students to be less talkative than they really were. I imagined my educational philosophy of co-creation as a radical break from what PEAK students were used to. This was completely wrong, and I realized that the PEAK students were very versed in the skills of discussion, debate, and contributing to the class. Still, I believe that the students had more of a say in co-creating the course content, but in term of the structure of the classes my course were much less radical than I had intended.

One thing I really was not used to was the low number of students in my classes. At my regular university, my classes are not big, but significantly bigger than 5-10

students. Especially in the senior division course, in which there were only four students, I could engage with the students in a very personal way, making sure that all understood and reflected upon the course content. To teach such a small class was a privilege, but it also poses more demands on the teacher. I think that classes of at least 15 students is quite a good size.

I have often taught at business schools or engineering schools, and usually I teach subjects that are not obviously functional and useful in a professional career as a businessperson or engineer, such as ethics. In Sweden I have the feeling that I have to sell my course much harder to the students for them to take the course, but I am not sure. In the liberal arts inspired curriculum of the PEAK program, the students were not particularly interested in studying for getting a job, but more in the knowledge in itself. I cannot judge if this is a general difference, since I just taught two courses, but this was the feeling that I was left with.

On the same note, I realized that UTokyo is much less company/business-oriented than any of the Swedish universities I have worked in. While in Sweden I often encourage students to do their thesis work in a company, this was almost unthinkable at PEAK. I do believe that the Faculty of Engineering at UTokyo has more contacts with industry than the College of Arts and Sciences. I felt that UTokyo was a university with a high sense of integrity towards the surrounding environment, which might have good and bad sides. It took a while for me to realize this, but when I did, it felt very relieving to understand that the students were there because they were interested (my courses were of course not mandatory).

I went to the reception ceremony of the new PEAK students enrolling in October 2014. This was a high profile event where the vice-dean of UTokyo gave a speech, together with other high-profile people. Students, teachers and parents were dressed in formal attire. Although I might not want that all students nor all teachers have to dress up in suits when they are welcomed to the program, I strongly feel that this ceremony was a sign of deep appreciation for the fact that the students had chosen to study at UTokyo. I will think more actively how to create events for welcoming new students at our programs.

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

- The relation between research and education

As far as I understood, research is highly valued at UTokyo, as well as at Uppsala University. However, recently at Uppsala University there is much focus on pedagogical development with seminars and the new possibility of becoming an "excellent teacher". At UTokyo pedagogy did not seem to be as much of a topic for discussion, and although I experienced that many professors had high teaching loads, were good educators, and were reflective about their teaching practices, academic merit still boiled down to research output. A very interesting exception was the Faculty Development Lunches in the PEAK programs. These helped to create an ongoing discussion between teachers that are teaching on the same programs. At Uppsala University I sometimes participate in pedagogical seminars on a Faculty level, but I wish there could be more ongoing discussions about pedagogical development between teachers teaching the same programs.

- The relation between teacher and student

Of course I expected to be called Professor Lennerfors, and this often happened. Since I had very small courses I tried to actively interact in an informal way with the students in the class, creating the good informal atmosphere that I like.

- The institution's view of breadth versus specialization in education

Comparing to UTokyo, the Swedish education system is very specialized, at least the business and engineering curricula that I have been teaching. During the first two years at UTokyo and other Japanese universities, the students get a liberal arts education, studying courses ranging from biology to philosophy. The pro of this is that students get a broader view of things. I felt that the senior division students, although being in their years of specialization, had a remarkably broad outlook on the world. This is in contrast to the situation we have in Sweden, where for example ethics must be re-integrated into the curriculum, something which I work quite actively with at my home university. The con might be that the students become very split between a lot of different courses. This might lead a program to seem as a mix of courses, rather than a unified progression. This problem was something that I addressed in my Faculty Development lecture about PEAK (see above).

- Curriculum and courses offered

As hinted above, the students take about 16 courses each semester in the junior division, which equals to 24 hours (32 lecture hours) in class per week. Some even take 20 courses. Due to all these hours in class, I doubted whether students have the time and energy to study and prepare for each class. Also I wondered whether the students could cope with such a variety of course content in the same semester. At Uppsala university, our students take about six courses per semester.

- To what extent educational programs conform to labour market needs

Relating to this I felt that myself and the programs I work and have worked with in Sweden are very oriented towards the need of the labour market. At UTokyo, less attention was paid to this issue, although the future careers of the PEAK alumni (no PEAK students have graduated yet) was actively discussed amongst teachers.

- Use of technology

I taught my senior division course in Komcee - the newest lecture room building on campus which has rooms in which the furniture can be easily rearranged and many modern features (giant whiteboards, good audio system etc). It was very easy to rearrange furniture which led to good discussions. Sometimes at my home university I feel constrained by the physical learning spaces. However, the campus of Komaba is a mix of buildings from different time periods, where many of the classrooms have a traditional layout.

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

- Personally

- More consciously look for active learning rooms for my seminars at Uppsala University.
- Reflect upon commercialism and labour-market orientedness in the programs I teach more actively.
- Develop more international contacts, strengthen contacts with UTokyo. I have had a very international outlook in terms of research, but collaborating with other universities for education is something that time constraints has not allowed me to do in the recent years.

- Sit in at more classes taught by other teachers. I know that such opportunities exist at Uppsala University.
- For the department, institution and the Swedish research and education system
 - I have already discussed the possibility of having faculty development lunches internally at our division, which I think was a very good idea. They will now be introduced (maybe irrespective of my suggestion) in February 2015.
 - It would be interesting to let guest researchers that we invite from abroad engage in more teaching, running their own courses rather than just giving guest lectures. This might be a good way to "get integrated", as well as a way to offer interesting and varied courses for students.
 - The pedagogical research I did about zemi could be of importance both for the department, the institution and the Swedish education system. Zemi could be a way to increase the progression and integration in university programs. I will consider whether this can be applied in the program I am currently responsible of. I will present this system for interested educators at Uppsala university.
 - Consider and remember the importance of the academic freedom I was granted as a STINT teaching sabbatical. How can course creation and the formulation of research questions be driven by personal autonomy and interest, at the same time as one fulfills criteria of getting publications in top journals and receiving external research funding.

As a final note, I wish to express my deep gratitude to STINT, Uppsala University, and UTokyo for providing me with this opportunity.