

# STINT Teaching Sabbatical 2023



**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

**SENR**

**School of Environment and Natural Resources**

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## Summary

*This report documents my Teaching Sabbatical experience at OSU in Columbus, USA, throughout the fall semester of 2023. I have compiled my experiences, covering the entire spectrum from preparation, and planning to the execution of action plans. The aim is to provide a practical perspective, enabling new fellowship holders to gain insight into potential difficulties and complications they may encounter during the planning and implementation phases of the program. The primary focus of this report is on my teaching experience and other issues observed during my visit. Additionally, I share my thoughts on living in Columbus, Ohio.*

## Preparation and planning

This project was planned and approved long before COVID-19 appeared, altering the world abruptly. I received this opportunity as an award during Christmas time in 2019, and the initial plan was to travel to SENR, OSU in the fall of 2020. However, the global changes brought about by COVID-19 had a direct impact on this assignment, affecting both its preparation and planning. Despite the extensive planning history in 2020, 2021, and 2022, I will only delve into the actual implementation that occurred in the year 2023.

## Stockholm meeting

A brief discussion with the previous Teaching Sabbatical Fellow at OSU proved to be fruitful in gaining an understanding of the general picture of Columbus. However, due to the prolonged waiting time and the intermittent nature of planning, there was little information available about what to expect at OSU. Nevertheless, the meeting in Stockholm played a vital role in gaining a first-hand idea about the place and the university, and we view it very positively.

## VISA

Working as an exchange visitor in the US requires a nonimmigrant visa (J-1) for the individual and their accompanying spouses and dependents. However, even visiting the US during a planning trip necessitated a visa for our family. Post-COVID-19 changes to the visa application process for visiting the US had a significant impact. We had to wait for many months to receive an appointment date for the visa interview, which was specifically for the planning trip visit.

Originally, we had planned to travel to Columbus in 2021, but the obstacle was securing an appointment date for the visa interview. We were able to obtain a visa interview date 13/14 months after the application. Consequently, our initial plan to travel in 2021 was canceled because obtaining a visa for the planning trip was not feasible. Post-COVID-19 concerns added to the academic travel challenges, with potential hassles of COVID testing and concerns about COVID isolation. The Ohio State University also had no clear policies formulated for post-COVID exchange programs and how to handle visitors. We waited for one more year, and finally, the visa data arrived in the winter of 2023.

Additionally, we required a reference letter from STINT for the VISA application. The reference letter for the VISA went through multiple preparations, and the VISA application dates were rescheduled multiple times. The planning process was not typical, and we had continuous communication with my contact at OSU, agreeing to several postponements. All parties involved, including STINT, OSU, my host professor, and the Office of International Affairs (OIA) at OSU, finally agreed upon the planning trip for April 2023.

## **Planning trip, April 2023**

Finally, we completed our planning trip in April 2023. The primary focus of the planning trip was to get started with accommodation, schools, job responsibilities, and visiting my host institution. The visit to my host institution, the School of Environment and Natural Resource (SENR), was productive. My host and I discussed the possibility of teaching subjects and the potential hours we would be working together. We delved into details about potential lectures and subject areas for my fall visit in 2023, mainly focusing on two subjects: Ecosystem Management and Introduction to Forestry, Wildlife, and Fisheries.

An additional meeting with OIA was necessary to obtain a document called DS-2019. The Form DS-2019 is essential to support an application for a nonimmigrant visa for exchange visitors (J-1) and their accompanying spouses and dependents (J-2), if any. It is a two-page document, and foreign nationals are required to sign page one of the form, agreeing with the certification statement. The DS-2019 is necessary for any J-1 visa holders in the USA to obtain a work permit. After a meeting with OIA, I received the green signal that the DS-2019 would be ready within a few days. Finally, OIA provided the DS-2019 on the last day of our planning trip visit. We also visited some schools to enroll our son and determine which area would be suitable for our stay during the fall of 2023. It was a great visit as it allowed us to familiarize ourselves with the different city areas, particularly identifying family-friendly neighborhoods to live in.

## **Regular contacts with host and SENR**

After my meeting with the host at SENR, I received detailed information about the courses we had discussed earlier. Following our discussion, two courses were selected for me to actively participate in during the fall of 2023. By the end of May 2023, I received course documents to review for planning purposes. Meanwhile, we applied for J-1 visas for all family members and awaited a decision. Unlike our previous tourist visa application that required a trip to Stockholm, this time there was no need to travel, providing us with a sense of relief. We completed all necessary information, paid the visa application costs, and waited for the decision.

According to U.S. regulations, my wife was unable to obtain a work permit. She is coming to the U.S. on a J-2 visa, which does not allow the visa holder to work. Therefore, we needed to obtain additional permission from the homeland department for a work permit. Given the anticipated 4-month processing time for work permit approval, we decided not to apply for the letter. This information was conveyed by the OIA at OSU. While the OIA at OSU provided the DS2019 form in principle, they recommended that we handle finding accommodation, children's school, and further information on our own. We did not seek additional assistance from OIA after that.

## **Accommodation**

The hardest part of this trip was finding accommodation. It was challenging because we had no contacts in Columbus, and OIA had already instructed us to find accommodation ourselves. We registered with many house renting brokers, and our online search exceeded our expectations. We needed a house in a specific area because we liked its proximity to the University, its peaceful atmosphere, and the availability of food schools around.

Our search was the toughest possible attempt, and we contacted numerous landlords for renting. Many of them were looking to rent out their houses for a year, while we were trying to find a place for only half a year. Even the University apartment association insisted on renting for a

year, which we were not convinced about. Most realtor companies required a mobile number from the USA to contact us, which was impossible for us to obtain from Sweden.

Eventually, we found a row house, but the price was steep—about 2800 USD per month, plus utilities. With no other choice, we decided to finalize the rental agreement as soon as possible. While our visa process was ongoing, we needed to secure the agreement. It felt vulnerable to make such agreements because, on one hand, our visa wasn't ready, and on the other, we had to commit to renting a house. The process was highly uncertain.

After completing the rental agreement, we were stressed because our J-1 visa was still pending. To worsen matters, we had to purchase flight tickets as prices were skyrocketing. We had no idea how to manage the sudden increase in costs amidst the ongoing processes of accommodation, visa, and travel. It was a chaotic month and far from a pleasant experience.

### **My host: School of Environment and Natural Resource (SENR), OSU**

The School of Environment and Natural Resources (SENR) at OSU is a school under the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences. The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) is a single college spread across three campuses, with faculty and staff evenly distributed among them. SENR has its offices and classrooms at the house called Kottman Hall (2021 Coffey Road). Kottman Hall is a building constructed in the 1980s, so its architecture is not particularly inspiring to the students. The classrooms are not in good condition, which hinders the creation of a conducive learning environment. Interestingly, my office was also located in the same building. To be honest, my office room did not have any windows, and it did not feel fresh either.

SENR is dedicated to generating science-based knowledge and promoting environmental sustainability through teaching, research, and outreach. Through the integration of natural and social sciences, the school aims to facilitate discovery and leadership, employing a comprehensive approach to better understand and address environmental and natural resource challenges at local, regional, and global levels.



As an interdisciplinary academic unit, SENR is administratively housed within CFAES. It offers a diverse curriculum, including at least 94 graduate courses and 111 undergraduate courses annually. Within my teaching area, which focuses on forestry, forest management, and ecosystems, there are numerous related courses that are interconnected with core forestry programs and natural resource management programs.

### **Tasks and responsibilities**

I had two courses in my teaching responsibilities. The first course, ENR 3300 - Introduction to Forestry, Fisheries, and Wildlife, consists of approximately 40 lectures, with the forestry component covering about one-third (approximately 12 lectures). This undergraduate course



serves as a foundational offering at the beginning of the Natural Resource Management undergraduate program and spans the entire semester.

The course serves as an introduction to the fundamental aspects of forestry, fisheries, and wildlife (FFW) ecology and management. It aims to provide students with a comprehensive and integrated understanding of the problems, concepts, and strategies that unite these disciplines, while also highlighting significant differences between them. Additionally, the course is structured to introduce non-majors to these fields, offering insights even to those who may not pursue further coursework in these areas.



**ENR 3300- INTRODUCTION TO FORESTRY, FISHERIES, AND WILDLIFE**  
Course Syllabus  
Fall Semester 2023

MWF 9:10am —10:05am  
Howlett Hall 164

The first course, ENR 3300 - Introduction to Forestry, Fisheries, and Wildlife, spans the entire semester with 40 planned lectures, each lasting 55 minutes. Students' performance is assessed through class quizzes (15%), Midterm Examination I (25%), Midterm Examination II (25%), and the Final Examination (35%). A total of 65 students were registered for this in-campus class, which took place in Howlett Hall 164—a spacious venue accommodating 80 students with three large screens and equipped with modern classroom technologies.



The second course, ENR 5340 - Forest Ecosystem Management, explores the concepts and methods of managing forests across large landscapes for biodiversity, multiple uses, and ecosystem integrity. The course focuses on applied biological and ecological principles in forest management, addressing both private and public lands. While policy is discussed minimally towards the end of the course in the context of synthesis into plans, the primary objective is to examine biological/ecological principles and their application to management at broad scales.



**ENR 5340 FOREST ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT U G 3**  
Fall Semester 2023

The concepts and methods of managing forests across broad landscape scales for biodiversity, multiple uses and products, and ecosystem integrity.

Au. Sem., 2 1.3-hr cl. Prereq: Sr. or grad standing; permission of instructor  
Tuesday & Thursday, 9:35am - 10:55am Kottman Hall room 245



This elective course, offered to both undergraduate and graduate students, was conducted twice a week in Kottman Hall 245, with each session lasting one and a half hours. A total of 35 students were registered, and evaluation methods differed for graduate and undergraduate students. The course comprised a total of 26 planned lectures, with the responsibility for about half of them assigned to me, meaning I taught approximately 12/13 lectures. Undergraduate students were assessed based on homework (20%), Midterm Examination I (25%), Midterm Examination II (25%), and the Final Examination (30%). In contrast, graduate students were evaluated using homework (15%), Midterm Examination I (20%), Midterm Examination II (20%), and a Case Study (20%).

My host had 100% trust in my teaching abilities from the beginning. I was given the opportunity to start the graduate course, and my deliveries were well-received. I received course evaluations for both courses, and I am pleased with the students' feedback. I received top-ranking evaluations from the students. I was able to assess the students' exam papers and assign grades to them. My host and I had excellent cooperation during the course, managing activities seamlessly.

### Allowed to sit in other course

Due to my interest in wildfire management courses offered by my host, I was permitted to sit in the classroom and also had the opportunity to participate in field activities, including prescribed burning practices. The course, ENR 3335.01 - Introduction to Wildland Fire Management, was conducted in the evening, allowing me to attend the lectures. The course was designed to provide students with an understanding of fire behavior, the factors influencing it, fire safety, effective wildland fire control, and the use of prescribed fire in wildfire management and other ecosystem objectives. This course aligns with the requirements and standards established for courses developed under the interagency curriculum coordinated by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group in the US.

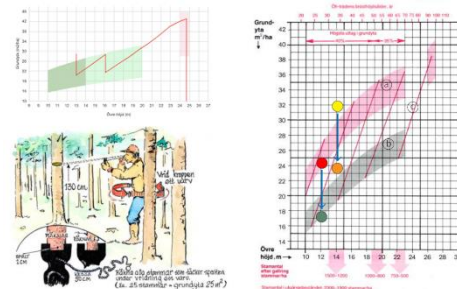


Additionally, the course ENR 3335-02, Wildland Fire Laboratory, was also an interesting course to attend. The course aimed to impart basic firefighting skills through hands-on demonstrations, visual presentations, and various media, including videos. This encompassed safety protocols, communication techniques, crew organization, the proper use of tools and equipment, and different methodologies. I had the opportunity to visit the prescribed fire burning site alongside the teachers and students. This was a remarkable experience for me, as I had never participated in such classes before.

All of my assigned tasks were completed in collaboration with my host. Although I was provided with an office, there was no computer or other equipment. I managed everything using my resources from Linnaeus University. While my host gave me the opportunity to interact only with students, I did not feel like a part of the institution. To be honest, throughout my stay, I never felt integrated into the institution because I did not have the chance to meet other colleagues in meetings, and my host did not introduce me to any other faculty members. I requested to be introduced to the department, research group, and, if possible, to participate in faculty meetings, but my requests were not considered. This was the most challenging aspect of my time at SENR OSU.

### Activities during the Teaching Sabbatical

I delivered two additional lectures on Swedish forest management to students in two separate classes. The course coordinator for the "Silviculture" course requested me to give a lecture to their students. I delivered a lecture to that class, and an additional lecture about Swedish forestry was presented to students in the course ENR 3300.

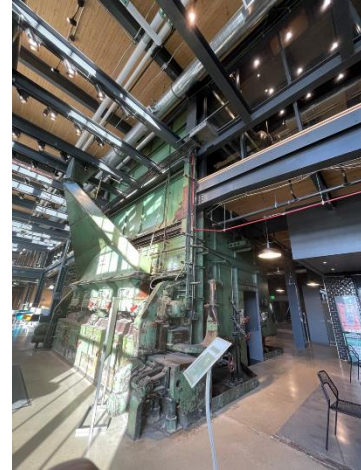


I had the opportunity to travel to Michigan State University (MSU) through my personal contacts to deliver a seminar at the Visiting International Professional Program (VIPP) at MSU. The

presentation was titled "Value Chain of Forest Products in the Context of Nepal's Forest for Prosperity Project."

A brief description of the seminar was provided as: "The recent increase in forest cover and biomass stocks in Nepal has generated interest in the establishment and operation of forest-based enterprises. In this context, it is important to explore the value chain of prioritized forest products in Nepal. The study employed a mixed approach to data collection, including a literature review, fieldwork, and secondary data sources. Subsequently, data were integrated with information obtained from stakeholder consultations, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. The data were analyzed using value chain mapping, cost-benefit analysis, material/carbon flow analysis, lifecycle cost analysis."

During my visit to MSU, I had the opportunity to explore the university's facilities. It was fascinating to visit the old diesel power plant, now converted into a building that preserved the original power plant's physical structure, serving as a reminder of the past energy system in society. In my opinion, this preservation serves as evidence of the shift towards exploring renewable resources for energy purposes. Students at MSU will be able to recognize the changes that have occurred in society over this short span of time.



### Important lessons

My important lessons as general take-away is that I am proud of what we are doing at my home institution at LNU. The courses I was involved in at OSU were mostly theoretical, with the exception of the wildland fire laboratory. I observed that OSU follows a very traditional teaching approach where teachers play a leading role in instruction. However, there are some ideas I bring back that could be implemented at my home institution. The subject matter I was involved in at SENR, OSU is not extensively developed in the Department of Forestry and Wood Technology at LNU. Forest ecosystem management, a fundamental concept in forestry, is not currently taught, despite being one of the most important topics in forestry education. Forest wildfire management is gaining prominence, and there have been no prescribed burning sessions in Sweden yet. I have compiled a list of points that I am proud to bring back to my home institution, outlined below:

**Subject Matter:** Forest ecosystem management is the fundamental concept in forestry and LNU would be willing to develop this subject area to integrate with forestry subjects in the future. Wild land forest fire management is a challenging topic not only for LNU but also for whole Sweden. Fire occurrences in the forest have become more common in recent days. Developing such education at home institution would be overwhelmingly good for me.

**Pedagogical Skills:** Pedagogical methods at SENR differed from those practiced here at LNU. The classrooms I was involved in varied in size, with 35 and 65 students. Managing students with different types of assignments and time constraints proved challenging, depending on the class size. I was able to effectively communicate complex concepts in larger classrooms and developed my teaching strategies to assist students.

**Communication Skills:** Teaching in Sweden requires a strong command of the Swedish language. Opting to travel to the USA and teach English-speaking students, starting from their

first class, was quite challenging. Communication, particularly verbal skills, was crucial to effectively convey information, present findings, and ensure students understood the concepts and issues. I take pride in being successful in this regard. In my teaching evaluations, I received entirely positive responses and am pleased to note that students found my lectures interesting and well-taught.

Moreover, I take pride in having adapted to an institution with a vastly different culture, distinct teaching methods, and a unique educational setup. I successfully collaborated with colleagues, provided additional lectures, and actively participated in networking. We have been exploring possibilities for future collaboration, particularly in the area of forest fire management. I was impressed by the graduate students' project work on "Forest Management in the West," where they demonstrated critical thinking skills and proficiency in analyzing forestry programs in the Western United States. As a STINT fellow, I found the opportunity to experience another world as a foreign teacher in the United States. Successfully completing all the tasks assigned to me was a moment of personal pride. Additionally, I am extremely proud to have received positive course and lecture evaluations from the students.

### **Comparison between the host and the home institutions (in Sweden)**

Teaching in Europe (Nordic countries) and the United States exhibits many differences and some similarities concerning the subject matter. Having developed as a forester and experienced various institutions, I can discern the variations in teaching-related aspects. Below, I describe separately the differences and similarities I found during my term as a STINT fellow at OSU.

#### **Pedagogy and its Importance:**

Pedagogical emphasis is primarily given in SENR, where fundamental concepts are taught to help students understand the basic principles and progress to practical applications in the field. In Sweden, forestry is directly taught based on what is happening in the field, with a more industrial perspective and less emphasis on theoretical understanding. I appreciate how the courses at OSU are designed to make students grasp the fundamental knowledge of forest growth and understand how it can impact the entire system due to changes in one component. Swedish institutions, in this context, need improvement in course design to include basic concepts for advancing knowledge in courses.

#### **Curriculum and Courses Offered:**

SENR offers a large number of courses and runs many programs with in-campus students. At my institution, we offer many distance courses, and only a few courses are offered each year. There are also differences in curriculum development. Curricula in SENR are more detailed, providing thorough descriptions and clear expectations for students on how they will be evaluated. Evaluation is expressed in percentages, whereas in Sweden, the 'kursplan' does not include as much information. This may be due to educational ordinances, as course descriptions are prepared based on the 'kursplan'. I believe providing more detailed information in the curriculum helps students better understand the purpose of enrolling in the course and what they will gain by the end of it.

#### **How teaching is conducted**

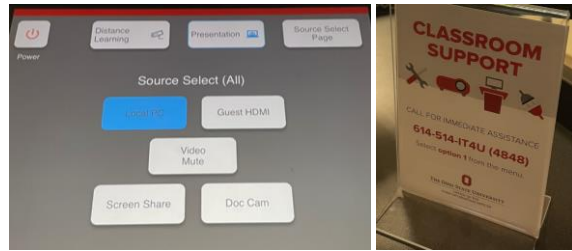
The courses I was involved in SENR were mostly theoretical. One course "wildfire laboratory" was offered for practical sessions during prescribed burning in the field. Courses offered in my institution at LNU mostly have practical sessions, laboratory work and excursions. However, teaching in SENR were campus-based classroom teaching. This would provide motivation for



students to come to the campus and complete what they are coming for. Here in LNU the distance programs have difficulties of monitoring student's activities.

### **Use of technology/IT in education**

Linnaeus University has employed various tools for distance education to meet technical requirements and support students in their studies. In the School of Environment and Natural Resources (SENR), I discovered that the lecture rooms were equipped with the necessary tools for classroom education. These available tools



were also sufficient for distance education. For instance, the classroom featured computers and monitors connected to iPads with clear instructions on how to operate the computer and presentation screen. There is always a small sign indicating the contact person for immediate assistance (see photo).

Ohio State University utilizes a course portal called "Carmen," which is similar to Canvas. The course platform 'Moodle' used at Linnaeus University is not as efficient and user-friendly as Carmen. To be honest, managing tasks in Carmen is very straightforward, in my opinion. However, it's worth noting that others may find Moodle easier to handle than Carmen.

### **Forms of examination**

Forms of examination at my home institution, LNU, mostly include written tests, project work, and some presentation tasks. At LNU, we emphasize literature studies and encourage students to think critically before presenting to the audience (fellow students). Sometimes, we also assign opponents for the presentations.

In contrast, at OSU, my experience involved evaluations based on class quizzes, mid-term exams, and final exams. Almost all exams were multiple-choice or objective-type. For graduate students, a significant assignment required them to read literature and prepare a project report. They also presented their findings to the entire class in a series of three lectures. This was a valuable exercise for senior students.

### **The relationship and/or status of pedagogical merits compared to research merits**

I have noticed that this question has been asked before. In the School of Environment and Natural Resources (SENR), I observed that professors were involved in both teaching and research. I did not perceive a strict separation between teaching and research merits; instead, I noted differences in the nature of both types of work. The professors I collaborated with as hosts were more occupied with teaching, while others were focused on research.

### **To what extent educational programmes conform to labour market needs**

Universities in the United States attract a substantial influx of students, both domestically and internationally. This is primarily due to the openness and high demand in the labor market. Additionally, courses are tailored to align with the needs of the labor market. The curriculum for these courses is aligned with federal government employment requirements and must be accredited according to certain standards. For instance, in the forestry sector, accreditation by the American Society of Foresters (ASF) is sought. This implies that students seek courses that will enhance their employability.



In contrast, in Sweden, courses are not necessarily geared towards meeting specific labor market demands. Instead, they are designed to assist private forest owners and those engaged in industrial forest management, often focusing on technical details from a practical perspective.

### **Competence development and career opportunities for teachers**

At OSU, you aren't required to teach many hours, allowing you to concentrate on competency development and advancing your research. However, in Sweden, there are limited opportunities to enhance your skills while working.

### **Recommendations**

The STINT Teaching Sabbatical program serves as an excellent gateway to experience a different world compared to what we encounter in Sweden. I highly recommend applying for it. Despite the abundance of information conveyed, actual experiences during your visit will expose you to various circumstances. Although Ohio State is a huge university, your engagement with specific courses and teaching will place you in a distinctive corner. If you have the desire to explore more, please keep this in mind. A specific recommendation for future visiting scholars is to prepare yourself for being in a very different environment and anticipate encountering unfamiliar situations. Be ready to teach without extensive assistance, as most of the time, your host may not even know how to provide the help you need.

### **Action plan: Topics to address and, if possible, introduce in Sweden**

As an individual, I aim to introduce at least one similar course and integrate content into other courses. I intend to discuss this initiative with the institution and work towards its implementation. While the examination methods at my institution are generally satisfactory, I am intrigued by the idea of incorporating graded quizzes. This presents an opportunity for both the department and my home institution to create something international. By implementing the ideas developed during my Teaching Sabbatical, I can contribute to the advancement of education at my institution. Of course, this requires the willingness of my home institution to engage in these areas.

In the context of the Swedish research and education system, there may be limitations on what a teacher from an institution can achieve or change. However, I recommend adopting an 'international perspective.' Education and research have evolved significantly, and it is crucial to develop competitive education that can be recognized in the international labor market. Drawing inspiration from the education system in the United States can help us in this endeavor. We plan to maintain a relationship with the host institution at OSU, specifically SENR. I am actively exploring opportunities to invite my host to Sweden and collaborate on developing a forest fire-related course or content, which is significant for both me and my institution. We have agreed to write a research proposal and explore ways to collaborate.

### **My general tips**

Start planning early for everything before the summer vacation. Search for your accommodation in advance. Otherwise, renting a house or apartment in the US can be very expensive, so be prepared to pay more than you expected. Explore the country; we visited 15 states during our time at Ohio State. Seize the opportunity to be open to visiting different places and experiencing the culture.

**Good luck!**