



STINT TEACHING SABBATICAL FALL 2018

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES

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Preparation and Planning

A couple of days before Christmas Eve 2017. An early gift from Santa. An email from STINT, acknowledging my Teaching Sabbatical Grant at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). Hurray! Now the whole family, Niklas, Associate Professor in English at Linnaeus University, wife and special needs teacher Katrin and wee three year-old Ennio, are going to be *Angelenos*! And I am going to teach at one of the finest institutions in the world! UCLA is part of the University of California public university system under the motto "Fiat Lux" (Let there be light) and is the system's flagship together with Berkley. UCLA was founded in 1919, so my visit there (which extended into 2019) coincided with its centennial celebration. Approximately 31000 undergraduate and 13000 graduate students are enrolled each academic year. In 2016 UCLA had 116000 applicants which is the most in the US, a fact which reveal the competitiveness of the institution. UCLA is constantly ranked top 20 in the world in all different university ranking systems and is usually ranked the top public research university in the US. As a STINT sabbatical, I was placed in the Scandinavian Section under College of Letters and Science, faculty of Humanities.

I immediately wrote an extensive email to my assigned academic hosts at UCLA, Professors Tim Tangherlini and Arne Lunde at the Scandinavian Section, informing them about my upcoming visit and presenting myself as well as wishing them both Happy Holidays. Tim wrote an encouraging, long reply after New Year's welcoming me to the department and sharing some basic information about the university, faculty and Scandinavian Section as well as providing helpful advice for accommodation. This was the beginning of an intense and creative correspondence through email and Zoom meetings in order to prepare for my visit. Arne Lunde was at this time on a sabbatical leave and did not participate, initially, in our communication. He was, as it turned out, the most generous colleague once I started working at UCLA. Tim and I worked out the best time for my preparation visit, which was to concur

simultaneously with UCLA hosting the major annual conference in Scandinavian Studies, SASS, in May. Mostly we discussed the upcoming merge of the different language sections (Spanish, French, German, Italian and Scandinavian) into one large department (Department of European Languages and Transnational Cultures) and my teaching obligations during my visit. I handed Tim a list of potential courses that I would like to teach and he encouraged me to develop a course on Nostalgia and Nordic Culture which was to become *Scandinavian 180: Literature & Scandinavian Society: Nordic Nostalgia*.

Syllabus work

Tim shared his own syllabi for inspiration and formatting, and was very helpful answering my enquiries. But in general, in line with syllabi construction in the US, I was very free in developing my curriculum in any way I desired. There is a trust in the Professor as a craftsman and

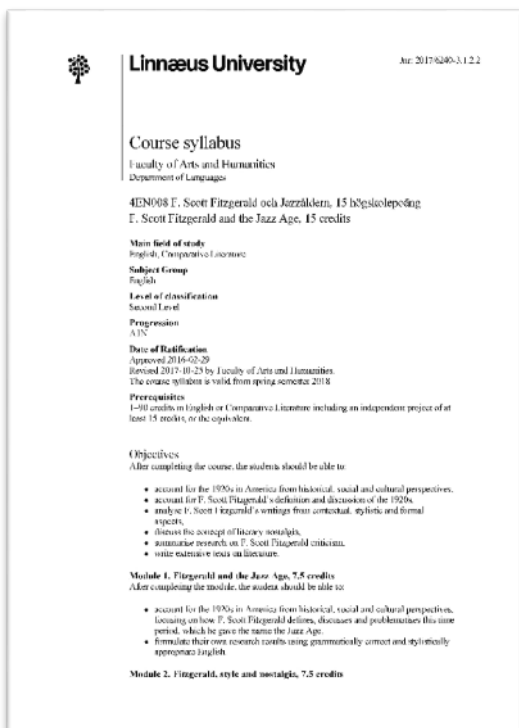


Figure 1. A Syllabus at Linnaeus University



Figure 2. A Syllabus at UCLA.

academic to have the ability to develop a functioning and pedagogical syllabus – this often coincided with Professors teaching classes close to their own field of research. This freedom, both in terms of content and format, both inspired and dazzled me. I am used to the strict

format and content of *Kursplaneutskottet* at home where every syllabus is supposed to look identical. At UCLA a syllabus is both a detailed description of the course, including precise details about examination, all teaching, reading list for every class, and all assignments. It is a legal binding document, but it is directed towards the students rather than administration. It is part of the marketing campaign of a Professor, trying to make his/her class as attractive to students as possible. Hence, the syllabi at UCLA include popular descriptions of the class, images, photos, graphs, and a detailed schedule of all classes, even taglines. Students at UCLA have a huge amount of courses to choose from besides their mandatory course work within their Major, so departments (and teachers) compete for students; therefore, it is important to market your class as exciting, innovative and important as possible.

Since my Nordic Nostalgia class was an entirely new invention and not something I taught at home nor part of the subject of English Literature that my employment at Linnaeus University is directed towards, it took quite some time constructing the syllabus from scratch. It is a challenge finding literature about Nordic culture in English as well as primary texts in translation for the reading list. And since the syllabus needs to specify reading for each class in a course including over 30 lectures/seminars, the reading list took time to compile. I understood that there were opportunities to revise the syllabus as late as one day before classes starts, so once I felt that I had a decent draft with a complete schedule of classes, themes, reading, and film screening as well as a general idea of examination and grading criteria, I submitted it to Tim for approval. He considered the amount of reading to extensive for students at UCLA since they usually have three to four parallel courses at the same time within one ten week quarter. I decided to cut a few novels, using other media more and/or excerpts from longer fictional texts. Tim also suggested that I made sure all material was easily accessible to the students and therefore I scanned in all books and articles to PDF-files as well as made sure that all music was available online. One challenge here was to find Scandinavian films with English subtitles, merge subtitles and video into one coherent Mpg4 file and upload them to UCLA's google drive.

Social Aspects

Since I was bringing my family, it was of utter most importance that we found somewhere to live where they would feel safe as well as inspired, but still not too far away from UCLA. Tim suggested Santa Monica: "Great for Kids", he said. UCLA administration, which were very helpful in all practical matters, could not provide housing but provided information about how to best secure accommodation. They offered to help with advertising for a place as well as asking staff going on a Sabbatical if their housing would be available. In the end, we found a bungalow on Third Street in Santa Monica much thanks to the previous Stintonian at UCLA, Anders Broström, who recommended it to me when we met during the planning meeting in Stockholm in February. This turned out to become a real home for us, two bedrooms and a few blocks from the vibrant Main Street and the Ocean. Ennio was at biking distance from several wonderful playgrounds on the beach and, as it turned, out his Swedish preschool in Santa Monica. I biked to the campus, or when I grew tired of crossing the San Diego Freeway, took the very same Big Blue Bus Jim Morrison refers to in "The End": "The blue bus is calling us ...". Sitting on the bus for about 50 minutes to work provided me with a unique glance at a macrocosm of USA as well as unusual time for introspection and reflection. This latter was something I embraced during my Doctoral Studies at Edinburgh, something precious in order to develop my academic reasoning, but lacking in my stressed professional life as an employee.



Other Practicalities

I more or less commenced the VISA process immediately in January 2018 and it took until mid-July until we received the passports with our Visas from the US embassy in Stockholm. Despite all the encouragement from UCLA, one cannot avoid getting the sense of not being entirely welcome to the US. The bureaucracy involved in this process is just simply very demanding, writing the same, identical information on dozens of forms, both in paper and electronically. And as it turned out, all this was not enough. Once in the US, several new processes began in order for UCLA to be able to hire me. The problems coincided, unfortunately, with a change of administrative software and routines at the University (the Glacier System), but included several visits to the local Social Security Office, the International University Office – the Dashew Center – and additional forms to fill in, online courses to participate in and several phone calls. When I started my class in early October (my STINT commenced September 1) I still did not have access to my course website and platform, student roster, no UCLA ID card or library card. In fact, I started teaching without formally being eligible to do so – something I heartily joked about with my students! This was a nuisance, and it also made it impossible for me to develop the course website. On the other hand, one learns to go with the flow when abroad and in a different context and I had to be quite inventive to pull the teaching off the first two weeks before everything fell into place. I am very grateful for all the help I received from the friendly, and apologetic administrative staff, as well as my faculty colleagues.

Teaching at UCLA: Experience, Reflection, Comparison

My main responsibilities at UCLA have been teaching, co-teaching and supervision. Most tenured faculty teach one or two classes (4-5 credits each)¹ every quarter until they have their sabbatical term. Non-tenured staff, lecturers, might teach up to four classes. The usual size of a class at UCLA varies from classes of 40 to classes of 300. When teaching larger classes, Professors are supported by TA:s (Teaching Assistants) who are graduate students and responsible for seminar work as well as grading. The common set up for a class of 300 students would involve the Professor to lecture for the whole class whereas the TA:s would tutor smaller seminar groups in between lectures. The Professor would construct the examination but the TA:s would be responsible for marking them even if the Professor formally grade the students. This set up is interesting for various reasons. From a positive perspective, involving graduate students in teaching is valuable for their own development as pedagogues. It also enables the oscillation between large lectures and more intimate seminar settings, focusing on different metacognitive skills for the students. Nevertheless, in order for this to be successful, the Professor has a responsibility to synchronize his/her teaching with the TA:s, inform them about the general objectives of the course and establish sound and regular communication. Although, differences in opinion between Professor and TA:s illustrate the ambiguity of the humanities and the lack of totalitarian cultural ideologies, it nevertheless becomes a problem for the students who are not entirely sure who to trust. Speaking to students about this they stated that they usually paid more attention to the TA:s opinions since they in the end are responsible for marking their essays or exams.

Comparing the teaching load for faculty at UCLA with Linnaeus University is difficult. As in Sweden, it depends on your status (lecturer, senior lecturer, docent, full Professor etc.). Teaching, though, is not something that is downplayed compared to research. The occasional sabbatical quarter ensures both a distance to teaching (and in reality, designing new courses)

¹ This would be the equivalent of 7 credits in the ECTS Bologna system.

and a coherent research time preparing a monograph or editing a volume. Also, it was my impression that teachers have an arsenal of classes that they teach and have been teaching for a long time (based on their own research interests, publications) so preparatory time is kept to a minimum and new classes can be designed either during a sabbatical or extensive summer leave (most Professors do not teach summer quarters). A quarter at UCLA is 10 weeks and if we calculate 2 classes of 4 credits each, this would compare to 10 weeks teaching a total of ca 15 ECTS credits. This seems to be a similar workload, in terms of credits only and not involving the size of a class, assigned hours etc., between a UCLA Professor and a Senior Lecturer at Linnaeus University with at least 20% research time. At UCLA these two 4 credit classes would necessitate six contact hours/week totaling 60 contact hours for a 10 week period (this is regulated by the faculty and not optional). My experience is that 15 credits at Linnaeus yield approximately 30-40 contact hours, significantly less than at UCLA, but, on the other hand, the administrative workload in Sweden is much more demanding than at UCLA where meetings are kept to an absolute minimum and administration is usually carried out either by the admin staff or by the teacher within a seamless, functional and effective system. At the language departments at UCLA, extensive and important administrative or strategical work by faculty staff is measured in a pre-defined matrix, offering less teaching to compensate for other engagements, instead of using a generic template as at Linnaeus. Comparisons like this are always somewhat arbitrary and complex, but intuitively I feel that teaching is not as demanding at UCLA, especially since one teaches the same class over and over, a class closely related to one's research, and teachers are not overwhelmed by administration or too many courses simultaneously. Exam periods between quarters give time to relax and stress down as well as preparing for the next quarter. And every third quarter usually involves one class less, opening up time for research and pedagogical development. I say this in correlation to that UCLA students, at least in the humanities, seem to have more contact hours (also including office hours) than their Swedish equivalents. This balance between teaching, researching, rest, and high rate of contact hours with students, appears to me to be much more balanced than in Sweden. However, I did not see much collaborations in teaching, neither within the

department or interdisciplinary at the faculty. I think we have developed strategies for collaborations, also with society, to a much higher degree in Sweden. On the other hand, such collaborations obviously takes a lot of effort, energy and extra work, maybe a reason why Swedish teachers feel so stressed. It is easier, as at UCLA, to “run your own shop” with great, dedicated and professional assistance from TA:s, technical support and administration. The administrative office for the language departments was small but effective, involving only eight employees highly specialized and with long experience within their respective administrative fields. There had been a long continuity within the administrative staff, so staff knew how things were done. Sometimes, this can lead to rigid and bureaucratic rules, but this was not something I observed. The admins are all located in the same lounge, which makes communication easy. Staff was also entirely assigned to the three departments and did not work for other departments or were engaged in faculty work. Admin consisted of a Student Affairs Officer, a Program Coordinator, a Fund Manager, a Personnel Officer, a Technology Analyst and a Front Office Coordinator. These were supervised by the Chair’s Executive Assistant and a Chief Administrative Officer. The proximity to administrative help was just amazing, and equals how administration was closer to the actual departments at Linnaeus University before the severe changes to the structures of the university in 2012/2013.

Pedagogics

As mentioned in the previous section, my main tasks has been teaching the 4-credit upper division topic class *Scandinavian 180: Literature & Scandinavian Society: Nordic Nostalgia* and the graduate class *596 Directed Individual Study or Research*. In addition to those classes, I have been co-teaching, mostly with Professor Lunde in his class *Nordic Cinema*. The co-teaching has provided me with additional insights in syllabi writing, different teaching techniques in classes with different sizes and contexts, and pedagogical issues. Peer teaching is a valuable didactic experience, especially when one has the opportunity to discuss class and teaching proximate to the events with other instructors. Peer teaching is something we have introduced at the Department of Languages at Linnaeus, so it is not new to me. Nevertheless,

the openness that teachers expressed in including faculty staff into their classrooms were astonishing. At UCLA I experienced, at least at my department, a willingness to excel in teaching and learn from each other pedagogically. Several teachers sat in during my teaching, providing not only feedback afterwards, but gratitude for the opportunity to learn from my pedagogical strategies. Perhaps part of their curiosity stemmed from an insight that their teaching models were somewhat old fashioned and that my own didactic perspectives provided them with new ideas and impulses. Despite the high status of teaching as well as the genuine interest among many professors in pedagogics, teaching is still mostly a passive act, a delivery of knowledge from the instructor's desk. Hence, the active classroom is a relatively new concept at UCLA as are other more contemporary pedagogical strategies. During interviews with students, I also found that they expected their Professors to deliver the "truths" and were slightly skeptical towards active classrooms.

Pedagogics in general at the Faculty of Humanities is overseen by EPIC (Excellence in Pedagogy and Innovative Classrooms) who organizes a series of workshops on teaching in Higher Education at the start of each quarter. I participated in the workshop "Ready, Set, Teach!" before my teaching started. The workshop was divided into two sections: one where undergraduate students in the Humanities discussed their experiences of classes and teachers at UCLA, and one roundtable on teaching where common topics were discussed. During the former, five diverse students discussed how they experienced the pedagogics in class. This gave an invaluable insight in the sometimes discrepancy between teacher aims and student aims. One such example was their negative attitude towards a very popular activity, the short discussions in pairs. They all concluded that if they were not responsible for presenting their discussions, pair discussion tended to focus on anything but the topic suggested by the instructor. They also discussed how different teachers use the classroom and university spaces, how personal a Professor should be, how important clarity of examination criteria needs to be, and, most importantly, how teachers can ensure the success of their students. Even though I have more than 20 years of teaching experience, I found their comments insightful and

inspiring. The latter session involved hectic roundtable discussions on a variety of topics. Each topic was discussed for about 15 minutes and then you moved to another table, which constantly shuffled the delegates around the tables, creating new constellations for each topic. The following topics were discussed: Effective Writing Assignments, Hot Moments in the Classroom, Know Your Students, Best Practices in Grading, Teaching Large Courses, Syllabus and Course Design. Besides the lively debates and discussions, this was also an excellent way to meet teachers from other subjects and disciplines, thus enhancing the social aspects of the Faculty. Both these sessions were supervised by the Dean of the Faculty, David Schaberg.

596 Directed Individual Study or Research

This class was a one to one seminar with graduate student Mads Larsen. It constituted an individual study plan based on the specific research interests of an individual graduate student as a way to encourage professional and academic social developments within a variety of theoretical and methodological specialties. I met with Mads for two hours a week. The seminars were constructed around a mutual selection of theoretical readings, primary texts and Mads process of writing three articles. The general theoretical framework included adaption studies, intermedial theory, Darwinist literary theory, Scandinavian detective fiction, readers-response theories, Scandinavian consensus models, and concepts of humanisms as well as cognitive, evolutionary theories of storytelling. I prepared for this seminars by reading theoretical texts and Mads' own writing and the actual seminars were usually dialogical and very constructive, for me as well. The liberal and informal set-up of this course I found intriguing; what a privilege for a grad student to have the opportunity to discuss literary theory with a senior specializing in these very fields ... and I must add – what a privilege for me too. Examination was based on our discussions and Mads' academic output during the quarter.

Scandinavian 180: Literature & Scandinavian Society: Nordic Nostalgia

This class was an upper division topic class, which means that junior or senior undergraduate students as well as graduate students (they will be examined differently) can take it. This class

would interest students majoring in Nordic Studies, students with a particular interest in Nordic cultures, literature, cinema and nostalgia. It also fulfills the requirements of upper division class on literature in translation which is mandatory for most students at some point in their study. Students “shop” classes during Fresher’s week where they pay close attention to the ratings of the professors through either RateMyProfessor.com or the local similar evaluations at BruinWalk.com.² They can access the syllabi where the blurbs and popular



Figure 3. Nordic Nostalgia Class at UCLA.

descriptions become important in attracting students. The particular reputation of a teacher and a department thus plays a huge role in their selections. Considering that students from all over the university can select your class, the 38 students in my class were as diverse as one can imagine. Besides a few English majors, my students were ranging from disciplines such as chemistry, design, history, sociology, film and television, bio-chemistry, political science,

² It is fascinating how students and teachers alike are engaged in these ratings. Obviously, students prefer teachers with high rankings but also teachers who are considered “positive graders” (they tend to give higher grades for less work). Teachers might claim that they are not interested in their ratings, but most of my colleagues confessed that they, indeed, pay attention to their rankings. Professors I spoke with explained that this system does offer an incitement to improve your own pedagogical work. It is also an important factor in applications.

economics, pre-European studies, mathematics, anthropology, bio-engineering, theatre and the somewhat odd financial actuarial mathematics. I embraced this diversity as both an advantage and a challenge. Obviously having students from different disciplines and with various experiences contribute to a classroom where disparate opinions and contexts would enrich the debate and even transgress the structures and ideas that I might have. However, it involves a challenge too, trying to communicate analytical hermeneutic skills usually reserved for the humanities to students from, let's say, the hard sciences. You cannot take for granted that they are all onboard and/or have the same experience in, for example, analysis of film or understanding of history. In any way, this needs to permeate the structure of your teaching and approach to the material. However, any fears of not being able to include the whole class soon became a mirage since I understood that all students had a good grounding in the humanities from High School and thus were not only able to follow my teaching but also contribute to it in an extraordinary way. In addition, these students always came prepared to class seminars and had obviously read the literature in detail beforehand. Their level of ambition was overwhelmingly high and I was impressed, not only by their vocal and analytical skills, but also by their social skills. I learned that humanities informs sciences and vice versa in a very natural way when you do not need to enforce it. Students made connections between what they learned in my class and their major disciplines – this was apparent in their participation during seminars as well as in their evaluations of the course.

The Nordic Nostalgia class covered a variety of themes related to nostalgia and Nordic cultures in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries such as nostalgia and Nordic Noir, nostalgia and Scandinavian Nationalism, nostalgia and the Anthropocene, nostalgia and children in Swedish culture etc. It was multidisciplinary and multimedial, involving history, literature, sociology, psychology, neuroscience, aesthetics, as well as music, film, art and fiction. The teaching spanned over the entire fall quarter, which is 10 weeks where each week marked a new theme in the class. Study questions for their course literature (or music, films) were posted on Friday the week before so that they could use the questions as an aid and inspiration when digesting

their material and giving them a sense of direction what to focus on. The study questions sometimes involved student presentations in class.

Since UCLA operates within the quarter system rather than the semester system, teaching becomes very dense – the four credits are squeezed into 10 weeks rather than 15. Add to that the fact that most students take three to five courses parallel each quarter. I was assigned to teach my class during 50 minute sessions every Monday, Wednesday and Friday starting at 2pm. Initially I objected to this set-up, feeling that a 50-minute class was too short in order to develop any ideas more extensively, but these slots were decided early on and could not be changed. Later I found out that I was an experiment of a structure that would be standard after 2019. This was made out of necessity in order to spread teaching during the whole, rather than the favored Tuesday to Thursday slots by most Professors, in order to maximize the use of classrooms at the campus. An additional argument was that students cannot focus for more than 50 minute at a time. This structure forced me to rethink my schedule since I had originally planned two sessions a week for about two hours each and I must admit that I found it challenging to work with the 50 minute lessons since I like to incorporate both lecture and seminar, what I call the *leminar* in my teaching as well as stimulating discussion and having students present material. I felt that I rarely had time to develop ideas, encourage longer classroom discussions or even finishing lectures. I guess I was so tuned into the two hour setup that is most common in Swedish universities. But I did like the intensity that the shorter format brought and I think with some more experience and a different structure of my lessons, this format is not bad since it does keep the students attentive. Perhaps rethinking our Swedish model of a few longer seminars per week into more but shorter contact times can open up new ways of teaching. One benefit is that you see your students more frequently which enables a sense of a coherence in your professional relationship with them.

Maybe I was naïve, but I figured that the students in my class were all eager to learn something. I guess that is the approach every serious teacher has, that my knowledge and teaching skills

will open up imaginations within the students that will change their lives. I did find out, both through colleagues and my own experience, that *learning* is a complex word at UCLA, and that students' relation to learning alters the way you construct and examine a course. Professor Lunde informed me early on that I need to make sure that my students were held accountable for their learning and work in order to secure tier attendance and level of preparation. This was not due to their inabilities; quite the contrary, all these straight A students have developed, in addition to high metacognitive abilities, a kind of academic street smartness out of necessity to reach as high grades as possible with the least of effort. I will say it straight: all students value grades more than knowledge. This does not mean that many also want to learn and develop as human beings, just that the pressure from the system itself (parents, high fees, university structure, individual success, the American Dream, too many parallel courses etc.) forces them to make decisions that benefit their grades. During interviews with my students I became aware that motivation is related to stress. The students are motivated to study in order to obtain better grades, since top grades are the only way to gain access to a successful working career and/or graduate school. In that sense, undergraduate time is a liminal space between adolescence and maturity. If they learn during this process, fine, but it is not the priority. Hence, you have to make sure that your teaching and syllabus reflect these concerns and both forces students to be accountable for the material and learn something. To me, where classroom participation is fundamental in the didactic process, this meant that I had to assure that they were attending, participating and presenting material in class; hence, I made sure that both attendance and active participation was part of the grading *in addition* to informing them that participation and listening to my lectures would enable them to succeed in the other examination moments, the midterm exam and the final essay. Attendance was marked through an app called *Arkive* that all students had to download and sign into with a special class code. This app could only register attendance if they were in the proper location and in time. The idea of using an app was experimental, and suggested to me by Professor Tangherlini, and I initially thought it would be time saving to not have to take up attendance (or even having a list go round) every lesson. As it turned out, there were so many technical

issues with the app that attendance still became much of a manual process. A challenge to have active participation count as a grade is that you need to learn all 37 names quickly, recognizing who says what and make careful notes after each session. In addition to measuring their participation during classroom dialogues, I initiated the idea that everyone should at one point present something short in class. In order to not ensure that a student only prepared for class when s/he would present, I randomly picked students each seminar to present. I made sure that I did this after a few weeks when I had managed to, I hope, create a more open and liberal classroom atmosphere. In general, I was very pleased by their presentations, which both emphasized the course literature and critical material and exposed analytical and individual skills. The reputation of American students being very skillful in presentations were confirmed and this ability is quite different from my experience in Sweden.

The midterm exam occurred half way through the course and the main purpose of the exam was to make the students accountable for the material and lectures. This idea, I must admit, had a somewhat bitter taste in my mouth, echoing old-fashioned pedagogical ideas where facts are more important than skills. Still, I must adhere to this approach since it did make the students read all the material and made them prepared for class lectures and seminars. The structure of the midterm exam was not revealed until one week before the exam. It was an in-class exam for 50 minutes, divided into two sections. Section one was a list of ten terms, themes, or tropes related to nostalgia and Nordic culture. Out of the ten they should write short five sentence concise explanations. The second part involved writing a short essay on one out of three citations from the primary material, identifying the work and discussing it from a nostalgic perspective. In all honesty, I have never witnessed such a focus in a group for 50 minutes – it was truly impressive, as were the results of the exam. This, to my belief, turned out to be an excellent way of grounding the students' essential competences in Nordic Nostalgia, before writing a more elaborate and imaginative final essay.

In the same fashion as with the midterm exam, the topics of the final essay were not released until one week before the end of the course so that they would keep their focus up the entire time. Nevertheless, after the midterm exam I noticed a slight decrease in focus and attendance. Part of that could be ascribed to the fact that an essay as an examination does not necessitate the same focus as a proper midterm exam could. But there can be other reasons as well. Meeting the same teacher 30 times might wear out his/her originality and even if I tried to incorporate different didactic methods (dramatizing Moomin and the Sea with the students, discussing Boye's *Kallockain* in the sculpture park etc.) there is just so much one can do to vary lectures and seminars. In addition, the physical construction of the classroom where all individual, small desks are mounted to the floor and directed towards the teacher, makes group discussions difficult. I welcome the idea of a longer course for many reasons (time to expand, developing a relationship with students etc.), but it also provides a challenge so that it does not become stale.

The topics for the final essay were slightly arbitrary, divided within the four seasons as metaphorical themes in order to stimulate creativity. The essay should be between 1500-1700 words and reference at least three primary and three secondary texts. For example, "Summer" could involve an exploration of the use of summer nostalgically in Swedish films and literature or exploring childhood themes in different Nordic media. Overall, the students reacted very positively to this freedom and their essays, written in a very short time parallel to three or four other exams during examination week, were all impressive. One thing that stuck me is how well versed they are in the art of the essay, which means that all students know how to properly structure an essay. This meant that my focus in marking them could be less on style and form, and more on content, something opposite to my experience in Sweden. Students uploaded essays to the course website in an activity called *turnitin* (based on the Moodle system). Speaking with other teachers, the course website was mostly used as a channel of communication and rarely part of creative pedagogics or ICT. I used it mostly to create forums for discussion and so on. One thing that I really appreciated was the essay grading tool,

Feedback Studio, which is an integrated part of the *turnitin* application in Moodle course website. Clicking on a submitted essay opened up a program with predefined comments, grading tools, etc. which made the marking much easier. In addition, the information available

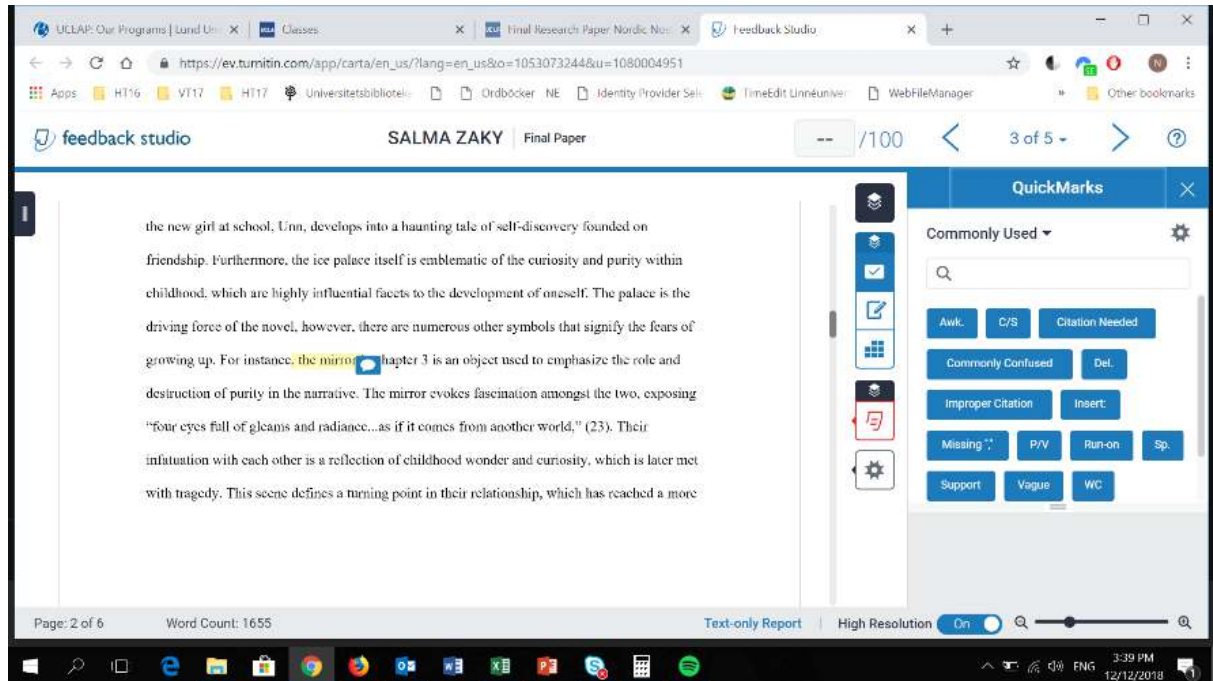


Figure 4. Feedback Studio as part of turnitin on Mymoodle.

from the administrative panel in the course website was excellent and easy to navigate. I especially cherished the Photo Roster where you had access to a Pdf with a selection of information as well as a color photo of each student. This made it much easier to learn all the student names.

A new and very positive experience was office hours. All students in a class have access to their Professor during office hours, usually two hours/week or by appointment. I had my office hours on Wednesdays after the seminar. At the beginning, I expected these hours to be used mostly for practical questions related to the syllabus, grading, examination, study questions, attendance etc. They did involve some of these, but mostly my office hours turned into minor seminars with students interested in discussing and developing ideas and arguments from the seminars. Although I learned, especially from the students in the natural sciences, that coming to office hours was a way of creating a personal relationship with the instructor which could

give them an advantage in terms of grading but also in terms of networking, obtaining letters of recommendations and so on, I found most students who regularly visited me during office hours genuinely interested in the course material and primary texts. Hence, the office hours



Figure 5. The Scandinavian Section Lounge (my office with the open door).

were not usually a one to one affair, but involved a handful of students in my office discussing and debating the class. I must confess that I much looked forward to these meetings; they seemed to me to be an integrated part of the class for students with extensive interests in Nordic culture and nostalgia. In general, I find it important that we can create ways for teachers and students to meet, no matter why. This diminishes the distance between professionals and students.

Grading in itself deserves a few comments. ULCA uses the A+ to F grading system, which means 13 different grades (every grade can have a plus or minus). In Sweden we mostly use the Pass with Distinction, Pass or Fail scale, or occasionally the international ECTS scale of A-F. To me from a Swedish context, a Pass with Distinction or an A in the ECTS scale would signify an extraordinary effort from the student who should display integrity, originality, often using

references and sources not on the reading list in the syllabus. A Pass is a fully acceptable grade in Sweden which would correspond to E-C in the ECTS scale. Hence, a C would be a satisfactory grade, where the students fulfill not only the minimum requirements of a Pass but also display fairly high competence. When I started grading the midterm exam at UCLA, I ended up with a bunch of C:s, a few D:s, and mostly B:s. I was impressed by the students – good grades I thought! But before I reported the grades to the students, I thought I'd run it over with Professor Lunde; his reaction was quite strong! He explained to me that a C would be considered a complete failure and devastating for the students, and that many who obtained a C in a midterm exam would terminate the class so that their GPA (Grade Point Average) would not be significantly lowered. A grade C would be equal to an F! If they fulfilled the minimum requirements of the course, they would deserve a minimum of a B, usually a B+. Grade A would suggest a very decent effort and adding the plus would signify good academic work. Hence, a B would equal the Pass in a Swedish system. I was informed that previous Fulbright Scholars from Scandinavia often initially gave the students at UCLA too low grades. I discussed the matter with the Dominic Thomas, the Chair of the Department, and he reiterated Professor Lunde's standpoint. I asked the reasons behind this grade inflation and he explained that there are several factors involved. One has to do with what students expect from an elite institution like UCLA (this is similar, as far as I understand, to other Ivy League universities) and the status of the university nationally. Students from UCLA expect grades that give them an edge in the competing working market and/or the possibly to be accepted to graduate schools and PhD programs. The other reason has legal undercurrents; the university, quite frankly, cannot handle to be subject to legal actions. This costs too much money, and students from wealthy families hire specialized lawyers who scrutinize everything from the legal status of syllabi to teachers' work. Both Lunde and Thomas agreed of course that this development of grade inflation was absurd – in the end, a good grade means nothing at all. This is also, they signaled, one reason why students hesitate to study abroad where the grading system is very different, since it would affect their GPA negatively. As an antidote to this, some institutions use a specific grade transfer table to convert international grades to US

grades, boosting the grades. In the end, this meant that I significantly had to improve the grades I initially gave, so that C:s became B:s and so on.

The official evaluations of instructor and class was very streamlined. Students did the evaluation online *before* they received the grades. Similarly, the teacher could not access the evaluation results *before* they had graded all the students. This means that the students' evaluations should not be biased by their grades and vice versa, teachers should not, even if evaluations are anonymous, be affected by the students' comments in their grading. Via email from the Faculty, teachers were encouraged to assign class time for the evaluations in order to improve the response rate during the last week of instruction. Just like at Linnaeus, the response rate at UCLA were usually not high enough to make definite deductions from the students' evaluations I was told. Hence, I was very happy to receive a response rate

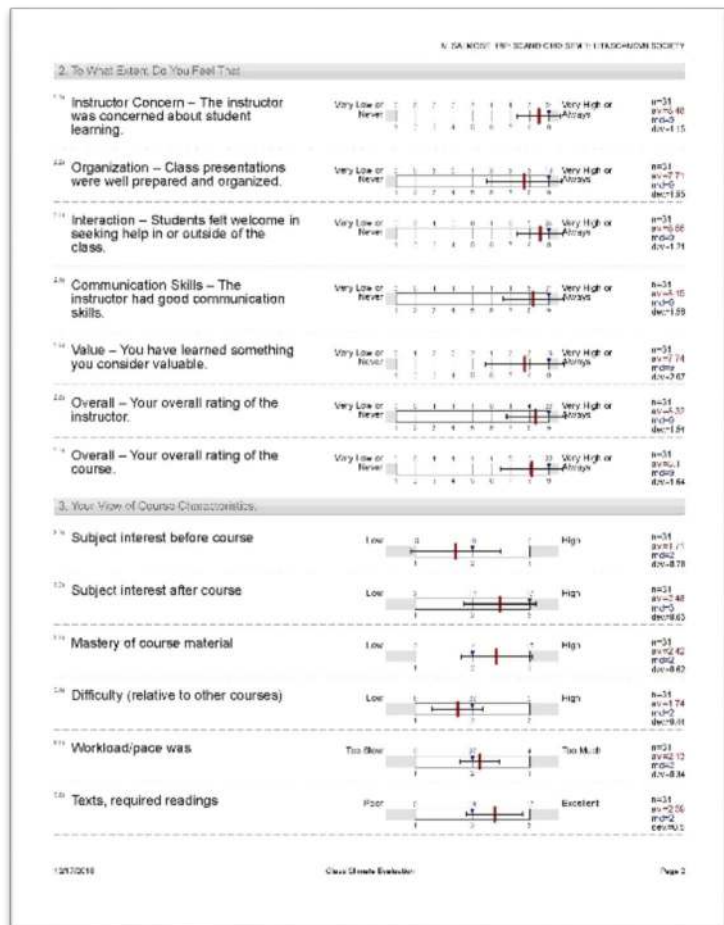


Figure 6. Page from the course evaluation of Nordic Nostalgia.

of 89% in my class. The official course evaluations in Linnaeus can be much improved I found

in comparison with UCLA, where there are much fewer but more significant questions posed (rate between 1 and 9). The results of the evaluation show individual choices but focus on the median result and the span between the lowest and highest opinions. Visually, this emphasizes *not* the few, deviant results, but the overall result. Many questions relate to the quality of the instructor, rating concern about student learning, organization, interaction with

students, communication skills. Some questions dealt with if you had learned something valuable, the level of difficulty compared to other classes, workload/pace, required texts, homework, classroom discussions etc. Two questions that I felt really yielded the quality of a class were subject interest *before* and *after* the course. In addition to these set questions, students had the opportunity to write personal comments on the course. I found these exceptionally engaging and constructive in their criticism, compared to what I am used to in Sweden. One student even found my course “dangerous”! Who would have thought that anything in Higher Education can be so powerful as to be considered dangerous; I took this as a compliment.

Students and Campus

It is my opinion that to properly understand the complexity of an academic system different from Sweden, one has to invest some time in students’ perspectives. In addition to that, the unique campus environment in the US in particular, and at UCLA specifically, is an essential building block in student learning and academic life. Therefore, I conducted seven one-hour long interviews with students from my Nordic Nostalgia class. They also showed me around campus, student dorms, student hangouts and invited me for lunch at one of the four residential restaurants where students can choose between health themed food, Mediterranean cuisine, American street food and Asian menus. We went to *Covel Commons*, specializing in Mediterranean food, where students can eat lunch between 11.30am and 3 pm and dinner between 5pm and 9pm. The food was exquisite and students could choose from Italian food, Lebanese meze, Greek gyros, a variety of kebabs and salads, as well as a huge assortment of deserts and cakes. I was inspired by the quality of the food, which made the lunches bleak at the Faculty Club in comparison (sorry Arne), and the atmosphere friendly and relaxed even if it was heavily frequented. UCLA is top three in residential dining, a factor that prospective students look into before applying. It shows the importance of proper and healthy food for achieving success in studies in a very competitive and stressful environment.

The campus is extraordinarily beautiful, constructed on a hilly landscape between Westwood, Bel Air and Beverly Hills. It is divided into North Campus, the old part of the college, home to arts, social sciences and humanities, and South Campus housing the sciences. The original four buildings from 1929, Royce Hall, Haines Hall, Kinsey Hall and the Powell Library, were all built in a Romanesque Revival Style in order to differentiate UCLA from east coast Ivy League institutions such as Harvard, Yale and Princeton who modelled themselves on Anglo-Saxon ancient universities. This “mood” of being something different than the Anglo tradition of knowledge from Oxbridge, still permeates the university’s ambition of being radical, liberal, experimental and daring rather than traditional (or rather incorporating the southern



Figure 7. UCLA North Campus, Royce Hall.

European tradition of universities such as Bologna). The aesthetic beauty of the Northern campus adds to the quality of education (something students and teachers alike confess to), offering options of reflection, meditation, introspection in such varied locations as the “sunken gardens” of Dickson court and a sculpture garden (with outdoor teaching facilities) as well as a Botanical garden. Since the weather is so favorable in Los Angeles, the campus is swamped with outdoor furniture for discussions and studying. This gives the campus an aura of

communion and social interaction. Most of the sport venues are also placed within the campus limits (with the exception of the football stadium), mixing academics with athletics and band music. The campus is flanked by the sororities on the east side, comfortably placed as far away as possible from the fraternities on the west side. Further west is the student dorms. Three students generally share one small room, cooking options and bathrooms are placed in the corridors. Each corridor in the residence halls has their own theme. Overall, the campus entails more than 100000 people, including students, staff, faculty, and all infrastructural aspects such as healthcare, dining, police etc. In short, UCLA campus is in itself a contained "city", larger than my home town of Växjö. The heart of the campus from a student perspective is the student union Ackerman Union, providing students with all the necessities ranging from book stores to hairdressers, pharmacies to the UCLA store. In the latter, students can buy UCLA paraphernalia. I was told that new students can exchange their old college clothes to the blue UCLA dress, hence the campus wavers in the UCLA color of blue – it is worn proudly by most of the students. Bruins Walk is the most vibrant place at campus, where societies and clubs engage in public displays and try to recruit new members. This is also a space where the "real" world integrates with academia through demonstrations and political engagements. One day I passed Bruins Walk and heard a commotion. A bearded, old man stood on the grass, preaching the word of the Lord, and on top of the stone wall stood two girls shouting at him: "You sexist pig!". This seemed to me to be a place open for all kind of discourses, people, ideas and futures. There is a true revolutionary spirit at UCLA that I admire. Students and teachers think they can change the world! That is so inspiring.

The sense of pride of "being selected" into the UCLA community (becoming a Bruin) is something all the students I interviewed witnessed. You are part of a community, an elite club, and this further pushes student motivation and dedication. The seven students I interviewed had very different backgrounds.³ Sarina (major English) transferred from a community college

³ I have consent from all the interviewees to publish or refer to their interviews in this report.

in her junior year. She is originally from South Carolina, engaged in LGBT questions and lives in an LGBT dorm. Claude (major Linguistics and Computer Science) is from Shanghai and arrived in the US as a junior in High School. He is also a transfer student from a community college. Matteo (film) grew up in the Chicano part of East Los Angeles under poor and violent circumstances, "cracked the code" in High School and his tuition is paid by the state and UCLA. Max (cognitive science) entered into UCLA as an athlete representing UCLA in Water Polo. Katherine (sociology) is a transfer student, living in the desert east of LA. Fadi (chemistry) fled from Syria with his family, went to High School in the US, and then transferred from a community college to UCLA as a junior. Finally, Youhan (undeclared) came to the US from Iran with his family. With the exception from Matteo, all these students were transfer students from community colleges in California. They expressed the advantage of having two years in a less competitive environment to prepare for the standards at UCLA, offering them an opportunity to find their own interests, mature as persons, experiment with different classes, and prepare for the competitive application process at UCLA. As a transfer student, UCLA admissions do not look at their High School grades, only the GPA from their community college, interviews and approximately six different, extensive essays written only for the application.

Most of the students I interviewed conveyed how the competitive atmosphere at ULCA is both positive and negative. For many of these students, who excelled in High School, they suddenly become "ordinary" in relation to all the other students. This is an initial challenge that most students seem to overcome. The economic pressure is of course unmistakable, tuition fees range between \$40000 and \$70000 a year depending where you come from. The reality on the American working market is also that you need at least an MA to be competitive, and in order to be accepted at the MA level at a prestigious university, you need a perfect GPA. As Sarina said: "University studies are not a luxury anymore but a necessity." Transfer students also expressed an additional stress due to a higher tempo, transitioning from a semester system to a quarter system, which in reality means that you read the same amount of texts in 10 weeks instead of 15. But in general, the motivation seem to be mostly coming from "inside". As

mentioned, these students were always best in their class, and they have strived for excellence and success throughout most of the school career. Students articulated that it was stimulating to be part of classes and groups where everybody was highly motivated, had prepared for class, intelligent and verbal. They all raised to the occasion so to speak, pushing each other to work harder. They also point out that integration with the UCLA community is very important in order to handle the academic stress. This also conjures with the sense of being selected and part of something important. All seven students were very proud of being Bruins (UCLA students), and endorsed how the university encouraged their students to participate in different form of communities, clubs and societies. Since UCLA is so large, there is something for everyone and no one should arrive and not find a "home" in a society of some kind. Some studies have shown that students that are part of Greek-letter organizations excel in their studies since they have an additional pressure (as well as academic and social assistance) from the society they belong to.⁴ Overall, what the above suggests is a wide understanding of the importance and interplay of both physical and psychosocial aspects of education.

Finally, one aspect that I was curious about was the liberal arts idea that ULCA promotes and how the students reacted to this concept. What I found out was that the notion of combining humanities and sciences in the undergraduate program was one-directional. Science students were forced to take a certain amount of credits in the humanities but humanities students did not have the same obligations to the sciences. Several students felt that this was odd, fulfilling only half of the liberal arts idea. Nevertheless, the students I had who were not majoring in the humanities all embraced the concept of also studying social sciences and the humanities. Fadi, for example, gave three reasons: (1) explore yourself in relation to science and society, (2) distance to science, (3) learning social and human skills important for graduate work and later employment.

⁴ Jacobs, Peter (8 January 2014). "Don't Ban Fraternities". *Business Insider*. Retrieved 28 December 2018.

Overall, I would say that UCLA takes good care of integrating students into their own vision of an elite university. But this is not only a superficial strategy, I am certain that the holistic approach to studying is beneficial also for the students' results. Despite a strong grade deflation, no one can question the quality of the learning experience at UCLA.

Important Lessons – A Recap and Action Plan

Living and working abroad always provide an in depth experience and a necessary distance to your own country, region and working place. First and foremost, it opens up a space for reflection and introspection that is but a rare privilege at home. This, by all means, refer to personal development as well. Living in a vibrant city like Los Angeles effect the whole family. My three-year-old son Ennio constantly asked where all the “crazy” homeless people lived and what they ate. You cannot avoid the more than 100000 homeless people in the county of Los Angeles, a majority living along the coast of Santa Monica and Venice. They form a stark contrast to the brand new luxury Mercedes cars roaming the wide streets of the city. Wealth and Trauma, welcome to the US. These homeless people are drug addicts, mentally ill, unemployed, victims of a harsh capitalist consumerist society, or a combination thereof. Still, living a privileged life in North Americas second largest Metropolis, and the home of the entertainment industry, provides some of the best living in the world. Not to mention the fresh, white Peaches in September and the openness and curiously, and multi ethnicity of Americans. It is a land of contrasts and so far away from the consensus culture of Scandinavia as one can imagine. All this, of course, permeates higher education. I have learned a lot, but hopeful, I have also given UCLA some important impulses. Being abroad is not only about learning from a different university, it is also learning about your home university understanding the direction of your own institution. Many things are great about UCLA, but we also do many things better at Linnaeus University, and that insight is valuable too.

I was working for the Scandinavian Department at ULCA, but during my time, they had commenced a fusion between the departments of Germanic Languages, Italian, French & Francophone Studies, and Scandinavian into a new, larger department titled *European Languages and Transnational Cultures* (ELTC). This process engaged me on a personal level since many of the motives behind this merge, decline of interests in pure language studies, a

growing focus on transdisciplinary and transnational subjects within the humanities, and an unwillingness from the faculty to support language education in the present format, echo similar concerns in my own Department of Languages at Linnaeus University. Since I am vice-chair in my own department, I found the regular meetings and lunches I had with the new Chair of ELTC, Dominic Thomas, exciting, inspiring and rewarding, and something that will provide a basis for similar future changes at my home department. This has offered me unique insights in and experiences of a transition to a more modern approach to language education that will be essential for me at Linnaeus University. In addition to this, I have successfully implemented the idea of a bilateral agreement between UCLA and Linnaeus University, which I hope will provide opportunities for future collaborations within staff, faculty and among students. The focus, however, in this section is to describe more general learning outcomes from my STINT sabbatical related mostly to teaching.

In the previous section I preferred to merge experience with reflection, as I felt that it is better to discuss the two in close proximity to each other. This section will be a concretization and a recap of what I have learned, in terms of academia, during my STINT visit at UCLA. These experiences will, in one way or another, be part of the ongoing discourse of developing education at Linnaeus University, but I will also in the end provide some concrete examples of how to work with this.

Lessons

- A syllabus can reflect both the marketing strategies of a subject and the details of a class, providing a detailed schedule and plan for how the teaching should be carried out. This leads to more work, initially, but I think considering both marketing and pedagogical work at an early stage is advantageous. Further, the trust in the teaching Professor to have the ability to make his or her own decisions on examination, teaching goals, objectives, is a much more professional way of relating course design and

profession than at Linnaeus, where formal and bureaucratic structures are more important than the actual content of the course plan (Pages 3 - 4).

- The involvement of graduate students in ordinary teaching, with TA:s who are both MA students and PhD candidates, have the advantages of providing assistance to Professors in large classes, making smaller seminar group work possible with less economical constrains, and giving future academics invaluable experience in teaching (Page 7).
- The UCLA concept of less but more engaged teaching *and* more contact hours with students, seems to me to be a win win situation. This also involves developing and teaching courses in close proximity to the research that is carried out by individual Professors as well as at the faculty. I think we have to investigate how we can spend our time wiser at Linnaeus (Pages 7-9).
- The advantage of a streamlined, experienced, and dedicated administration for each department (Page 9).
- The EPIC project (Excellence in Pedagogy and Innovative Classrooms) seem to be a good platform for pedagogical discussion in a non-mandatory capacity. I especially enjoyed the student interaction in didactic matters (Pages 10-11).
- The importance of one to one tuition was prominent, both from a teacher and a student perspective, in my Directed Individual Study with graduate student Mads Larsen. This is common in the relation between a supervisor and doctoral student at the PhD level, but I find that these kind of meetings and discussions can be developed in smaller formats also at earlier stages in students' academic career. The office hours provide a light version of this even at the undergraduate level (Pages 11 and 18-19).
- The Liberal Arts idea is challenging but rewarding. I know that the elite private liberal arts colleges, such as Williams and Amherst, embrace the multidirectional liberal arts idea more than UCLA. But in general, it is an asset to have such a disciplinary diversity of students in the humanities classroom. It broadens the discussions, and pinpoints aspects of humanities that might be taken for granted internally (within the

humanities) but not in the hard sciences. The set-up of major/minor studies at the undergraduate level at UCLA is *so* different than the more contoured focus on professional and program education we have in Sweden. Still, there might be ways of incorporating science in the humanities and vice versa to a larger degree even in Swedish Higher Education (Pages 12, 26-27).

- At Linnaeus, the two-hour seminar construction is norm and we might forget to explore alternative time spans in order to increase learning outcomes and utilize modern cognitive research on learning. Trying the 50-minute lecture/seminar set up made me realize that we should initiate a pedagogical discussion varying our teaching structure related to length of lectures and seminars. Another factor is how often we meet our students and how that both improves our relationship to them but also creates demands on a diverse and varied pedagogical method (Pages 14, 16-17)
- I learned that motivation and “motivated” students are complex terms and that it is important to encourage not only teacher perspectives on motivation but also student perspectives. Understanding motivation is important in order to tailor education for a specific group of students (Pages 14-16, 24-25).
- I understand that there are technical tools in order to improve attendance control in a classroom. I used the app *Arkive*, and although it did not work properly, it is a promising development towards attendance control. In addition to the use of the app, this initiated reflections on mandatory attendance in Higher Education in general (Pages 15-16).
- There are times when the objective of examination is to make students accountable for their own learning and the material in a course. Although this kind of examination usually is regarded old-fashioned in Sweden, I can see situations when it has didactic advantages (Pages 16-17).
- Having students who have practiced the art of essay writing for a long time, allows me as a teacher to shift focus from essay structure, thesis statement and language

proficiency, to content. Perhaps we need to spend more time on actual essay writing at the G1 level in Sweden (Pages 17-18).

- The grading tool in the course website, *Feedback Studio* (part of the *turnitin* suite), was an excellent integration of grading and marking tools (in terms of comments and reflections) integrated in the Moodle platform. I particularly liked the possibility to record comments (Page 18).
- The availability of a Photo Roster for each class made it a lot easier to deal with administrative assignments and learning the names of the students. The photos in the pdf were linked from the student ID information database (Page 18).
- Grading is always arbitrary, no matter what scale is being used, but the inflation of grades is something we must avoid in Sweden at all costs (Pages 19-21).
- The system of evaluations for each class were integrated in the course website and administration, offering a system that worked really well and focused on the most pressing issues in terms of the quality of teaching and learning (Pages 21-22).
- A holistic approach to campus, locales, student social life, environment, study places and so on, is significant in order to engage students, enhance learning, and make them feel included in Academic life in different ways (Pages 22-27).
- A student who feel "selected" are bound to perform better. Competitiveness is an integrated part of an elite university with many applications but relatively few admissions. It is hard to accomplish the same kind of selection in many programs and courses in Sweden, but there are other options to make students feel "selected" (Page 24).

Action Plan

As Vice-Chair of the Department of Languages, I have a fair amount of influence in the development of pedagogics, teaching, administration and other relevant areas in my own department. Hence I can work both with immediate impulses and changes, and more long-term, in collaboration with staff and faculty. Initially I will present and describe my experiences

for the Department through the Director of Studies seminar meeting as well as the monthly departmental meeting. I will conduct a special pedagogical presentation within the seminar series on pedagogics held at the department, where I will discuss my acquired knowledge from UCLA and how some of these ideas could be implemented in our own educational system. This lecture will be more of an inspirational lecture, since it is important to consider the affective way a sabbatical experience is communicated to the faculty staff of the department. At faculty level, there will be, in line with university policies for Stintonians, an open lecture where I will present my experience. I think it is difficult at this stage to illustrate a concrete way of implementing changes; these have to be sanctioned at different levels at the university, and my experiences have to create a basis, a foundation, for developmental work in diverse areas. But in a more personal way, I will experiment with and realize many of the above mentioned "lessons" in my own teaching. Depending on their success in a Swedish context, these renewed experiences can be instrumental in arguing for more radical changes to administrative and pedagogical routines, as well as to the overall vision at Linnaeus University.

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Figure 8. Ennio, Niklas & Katrin in the Santa Monica Ferris wheel.

Outside UCLA, Katrin, Ennio and I feel thankfulness to the following people who made our stay such a socially wonderful experience in Los Angeles: my old High School mate Nate and his family, Ahree and Miah; my former student from Stockholm, Erik Palm; everybody at the Swedish School in Santa Monica, especially Tilde Norén, Ennio’s teacher. Thanks also to our proprietors Karina and Floyd as well as our neighbors at 2411 Third Street, Ian and Chris. Most of all I want to thank my wife Katrin and my son Ennio who supported me throughout this adventure.