



**STINT**

Stiftelsen för internationalisering av  
högre utbildning och forskning

The Swedish Foundation for International  
Cooperation in Research and Higher Education

2019



## Teaching Sabbatical | Final report

by

**Soniya Billore**

**Linnaeus University, Sweden**

**Sabbatical fellowship 2019 at Arizona State University**

**Host Department: W.P. Carey School of Business, Tempe Campus, AZ.**





## Preparation and planning

On hearing the happy news about my selection as a STINT fellow for 2019 and allocation at the Arizona State university, me and my family were ecstatic.... we were looking at the golden opportunity for me to teach and research at one of the world's prestigious business schools – the W. P. Carey School of Business at ASU, and the relocation of the family to the US for the entire fall semester. While this meant a lot of excitement for the kids, me and my husband started to plan together all the activities that we would have to take care of – the mandatory and very important planning trip in early 2019, connection to schools, accommodation, other relevant logistics and of course the packing up for the relocation in August 2019.

The first step was the planning trip which we did in April 2019.

During this trip I was able to connect closely with my ASU coordinator Shelley Stephenson, my SOB academic contact Prof. Amy Ostrom and other colleagues at the department with whom I would be engaged in teaching and research. There were in-depth discussions on which courses I would be involved, how the course content would be used, what new topics could be introduced in class, and generally how the teaching and research could be allocated during my stay with W. P. Carey for the fall semester. There was some idea of the events that I could possibly participate during my stay such as the Halloween event, the Homecoming and fall Graduation. My coordinator helped me to solve many aspects related to school and housing and actually drove us in her car to different possible residential locations that were close to good schools and logistically relevant for the Tempe campus to help us have a feel of the place we were 'gonna' call home for fall 2019.

We tried to solve as many issues as possible during our planning trip – but we could solve none. All rental agencies wanted us to wait until end of June when they would know about possible accommodation slots available for the fall leasing period. As far as schools was concerned there was a lot of correspondence in store...

Practically, it would have been easier otherwise with renting a home near the campus and getting my kids to go to nearby schools...but is LIFE ever simple?? My daughter was in high school and since she was doing her education in I.B. with specific subject choices it was imperative for her to follow the same curriculum and study pace as in Sweden which meant that we needed to select the best suitable school for her in the vast premise of Phoenix area. Unless that was sorted out we could move no further with accommodations nor for my son's school ...forget about how I was going to go to my work place at ASU every day!!!

This step itself took a good three months and by June 2019 we could decide that my daughter could go to a school in Mesa, AZ; some 10 miles from ASU campus in Tempe.

The next milestone was housing and we started with this – a huge map of Mesa on my bedroom wall.



Fig 1. Map of Mesa, AZ and house search

After a few initial hiccups, we finalised our home in the end of July from a rental agency in Mesa, AZ and this helped us take the concrete steps towards finalising my son's school, getting the house set, renting a car for our stay and understanding local logistics for my workplace.

## Tasks and responsibilities

**Official Allocations** – I was allocated participation in two courses at the Business school for co-teaching

- Marketing 540 - consumer markets and brand strategy
- Marketing 502 - marketing management
- PhD seminars at the Cialdini Consumer research Lab at W.P. Carey

Co-teaching was a strategic choice mainly because I wanted to integrate into the ASU system and use the sabbatical period to observe, learn and gain knowledge about how W. P. Carey, the marketing department and their teachers teach and engage with students. I could also use the knowledge gained through practice by co-teaching activities and PhD seminars.

To prepare for the courses I was given access to the material used by the teachers in their courses including books, cases and presentations. Some classes had student led or teacher led class activities and the teachers had assignment sheets that were distributed during class for the activities to be carried out in groups or individually. All assignments were focused mainly on getting the students to work with practical business issues in which they examined real life examples or contexts and assessed them on a theoretical basis, further giving a justification for their decisions alike a manager or stakeholder. There were guest lectures where corporate practitioners such as product managers, sales managers etc. were invited to lecture on challenges faced in their businesses and to present a real-life environment to the students. These contexts were then converted into case studies and students were required to hand in the case analyses to present a possible solution to the challenge. In order to assist in the case





assessments, I was also given access to grading rubrics that helped me to understand the specific requirements for evaluations.



Fig 2 : Office at W P Carey



Fig 3 : Class photo

**Self-allocations** : ASU is an intensely active place and with all the courses of relevance happening on the ASU, Tempe campus I decided to engage in more programs than were officially allocated to me. Of particular interest was the School for Future of Innovation in Society (SFIS) since it was valuable for my own learning on how Innovation based programs are conducted at ASU, particularly since I am program director of the Masters in Innovation program at LNU. So, I met the concerned faculty at SFIS and after a warm and inclusive interest from them, got myself 2 allocations:

1. **IGD 601 – Rethinking Global Development** – core course for the PhD in Innovation in Global Development
2. **Project cities** – community development in the city of Peoria



Fig 4. Photo at the final presentations of Project cities



## Activities during the Teaching Sabbatical

### Meetings with other centres and events at ASU

1. Innovation centre at Sky song
2. Attended the faculty meeting at the WP Carey School of Business, September 2019
3. Attended the Teaching and Learning workshop, October 2019 at the WP Carey School of Business
4. Homecoming ceremony, November 2019
5. Lantern walk at ASU, November 2019
6. Graduation ceremonies in the Sun devils Stadium, December 2019



Fig. 5. Graduation ceremonies in the Sun devils Stadium

2. **Local community** – I was invited to be part of the Mesa city council meetings to discuss how Innovation and Business could be focal areas for the development of Mesa city activities for a sustainable future. Sweden has a reputation of being innovative, sustainable and entrepreneurial and their interest was in exploring if knowledge transfer can happen between Sweden and Mesa so each can learn from the other.

3. **Nature galore** – We had the fantastic opportunity of visiting nature's treasures in Sedona and Grand Canyon . The Heard museum and the Pima Salt river reservation in Phoenix left its impressions on us as it brought forward the socio-cultural heritage of Arizona as were trips to nearby areas such as Cave creek and the Desert Botanical garden; and a host of other very local events such as the *Dias de los Muertos*(Day of the dead) festival, the Vintage and thrift weekend fairs in Mesa, the Arizona state fair, the Schnepffs pumpkin farm event, the Gilbert balloon festival, and of course a host of Christmas time events around us in the end of 2019.

4. **Indian events** – The Indian community in Phoenix is huge and we spent some good time with the local Indians during Diwali and other events. A regular weekend visit to nearby temples was always on the calendar



Fig 6 . Visit to gurudwara



Fig 7. School

**5. School events** – I cannot ignore mention of our participation at the school events of my kids as there were Halloween celebrations, dance and music festivals happening now and then. Both me and my husband used every opportunity to volunteer at the school events and make local networks whenever possible.

### Important lessons

I feel that overall the approach to teaching and teacher student relationship was largely similar in both ASU and LNU at least at the undergraduate level. The upscaling happened at the Masters level and PhD where the demands to quality were so much higher, the teaching was much rigorous and so was the grading, leading to high competitiveness and performance.

#### As a teacher –

1. Classes in ASU were not only presentation based. Most lectures were 2 hours long with a 5-7-minute break in between. The teachers spent not more than 40 minutes doing a lecture and the rest of the time was allocated only for class work, discussions, cases and assignments. All material including cases were already put in the online system called Canvas and students had to read through all material before the class.
2. Students were graded on class attendance and class participation and teachers could deduct class points for students who did not behave responsibly for both.
3. There was a strict 'No laptop' policy in classes and was followed strictly. Teachers made it a point to rebuke students for this as unacceptable behaviour. Swedish universities do not follow this rule.
4. Canvas was the digital platform used for teaching and assignments and it was used extensively by the teachers and students. All quizzes, case submissions were done on canvas and it was also actively used by students to post discussion threads. We have my Moodle but it is not efficiently used by teachers. Perhaps we need more training to do so.





5. The teacher-student relationship was friendly, quite similar to LNU; but it also had a good level of formality and much more respect to the teacher than is seen in the Swedish system. Referring to the teacher as *Dr. so and so* or *Prof. so and so* was commonly observed a major difference was teacher availability. On the teacher's side, I think that the teachers at ASU were much more available to the class, sometimes even coming on weekends to support student work with assignments and research guidance. This is not observed as a usual practice in Sweden.
6. There was a very strong interaction between the business schools and the corporate world and the alumni and this was actively used by teachers for their students and their class content. Apart from inviting a number of guest lecturers, I knew of at least 4 business competitions organised by American companies that hosted students from all over the US and there was always a W. P. Carey Business team participating in these events. The teams were always accompanied by a teacher of the course and often the teams were required to go to other towns near or far. This teacher led team participation obviously showed positive results and in my knowledge the ASU team won some place in the top three ranks. The presence of competitions is on a rise in Sweden but not as high as I have seen in ASU.
7. W. P. Carey had a very functional and active consultancy arm called the **Centre for Services Leadership** through which various teachers could share their expertise with the corporate world and run executive development programs. This definitely meant that the teachers got very good opportunities to involve in self-development work to create valuable knowledge intensive material for the participants of the CSL programs.

**As a researcher** – This was very different from my home university – much more facilitated, positive and collaborative in content and spirit. W. P. Carey was home to the **Robert B. Cialdini behavioural research lab** which conducted various research projects in partnership with teachers, PhD students and graduate students. This inclusive and highly research-oriented approach, supported by a well facilitated, privately funded facility meant that researchers were well supported in their academic quests. This was obvious as most faculty were Endowed professors working on various corporate projects and consulted for by prestigious companies all over the world. Internally too, there was a lot of collaboration between teachers and especially important was how the professors of the faculty were very approachable and open to giving advice on research applications and critical feedback. I was able to attend a number of research seminars and also a Teaching and Learning workshop where all faculty shared their unique teaching and research methods with the rest of the group for mutual learning and skills development.



Fig 8. Cialdini lab

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

**Pedagogically** I think the quality of theoretical content is also good in Sweden but as far as the business discipline is concerned it is more the degree of corporate involvement that makes a big difference in the way the theory finds a parallel in practice and lends a more active, real life edge to learning content for the students. As explained before many classes had corporate guests that brought in a real-life corporate context connected to the topic being discussed.

This also meant that:

1. The teachers had a great network with the corporate world for them to be able to procure such guest lecturers
2. Some of the guests were alumni and they contributed back to the department through their lectures, so it was obvious that alumni engagement was strong. This was also reflected through the corporate donations that are a regular part of ASU fund gathering as well as the huge turnover of alumni during homecoming event in November.
3. Pedagogy was also strengthened by the inclusion of local governance agents such as city office representatives, legal offices and community development teams who spoke in tandem with the topics discussed but presented a more socio-cultural side to the issue rather than a purely commercial one as presented by the companies.
4. A good number of faculty at W.P. Carey either have a corporate background having worked there before joining academics, are involved in consultancy services from ASU or have corporate endowed projects. These combinations provide the faculty with a vast array of business examples from various sectors and corporate contacts that are used eventually during class teaching.

These things must be strengthened in Sweden. As I see now, the business faculty does not have a very strong corporate arm for support to either the institution or the faculty, making most teaching very academic rather than practical and hands-on. Also, most teaching faculty does not have a corporate experience that can be used actively in class leading to most teaching being research based rather than practical knowledge.

**Research wise**, W. P. Carey did exhibit a strong research arm as well. As explained above, access to research facilitations, research labs, data bases are further strengthened by active





research collaborative atmosphere between faculty leading to publications in leading academic journals and possibility for collaborative corporate funded research projects. In my experience a lot of research activities in Sweden lack group work or collaborative action. Much of the research happens behind closed doors of the researcher's office and there seems to be an undercurrent of insecurity when sharing skills and knowledge. This is rather unhealthy in terms of mutual and holistic development of everyone and must be avoided at all teaching institutes. There is a huge variety of courses and programs offered in the university at all levels from undergraduate to doctoral and a big range of management development programs for working executives. Having a strong alignment with the job market is a strong priority for the university as is reflected in the strong corporate involvement in pedagogy, events, grand scale career fairs and recruitment interviews. There are 57 undergraduate degrees in the business school, 84 graduate degrees as a basis. This is topped by other interesting program choices such as Accelerated programs, joint programs, concurrent programs and online programs. Some of these business degrees are created collaboratively with other schools on the ASU campuses. The students are therefore more open to creating their own combinations of courses and diplomas that suit their present or future employments. An interesting feature is the Me3 simulation game that helps students design their basket of subject areas and related combinations of degrees for their studies. There was no major difference observed in regards to exams conducted.

Backoffice: One of the amazing things of working with W.P. Carey was their support office. In all departments there was always a front office where you would be greeted by amazing people, in our case it was Karen and Heidi. They were magicians, who knew everything, navigated through so much stuff, processes and always helping with a warm smile.

## Recommendations

### Academic:

I would recommend that it is very important for scholars to have a very good level of correspondence with their peers in the university where they are going and to make the most use of the planning trip opportunity. Planning trips should be done maximum by April because in May and June it is peak season for courses and grading; and then there is barely any activity until end of August.

### Other arrangements:

- Housing: While planning trips could be good to finalise academic matters, other matters such as housing will materialise only in June – July when housing agencies are able to tell you of the available options for lease/rent. This was the toughest parameter for us to solve as we could not get proper information on university housing to begin with and later we were challenged with finding houses that would fit the stipulated budget from STINT. It is difficult to get leases on houses in the fall season for 4-5 months and then zoning down to a suitable combination of good house, close to good schools and close to campus could become rather challenging.
- Schools: For those with families having access to the right schools in important and one may want to deliberate a bit on having the right school district. It is not recommended that kids walk to school unless they live very close by and mostly students are either driven to school by parents or by the school bus. When it comes to the bus facility, bear in mind that all schools have in-boundary and out-boundary routes and applications have to be sent separately to the transport department for school buses of the particular



district. You may choose your home after you have selected a school but the admission to the school will be done only when you are able to provide a postal address for your residence. It is also important to bear in mind that no school will provide admission unless you have provided them the details of your kid's immunisation records. It is recommended to carry a complete copy of your child's immunisation record with you to ensure school admission.

- Driving: Getting a driver's license is easy and I would recommend getting one if you are going to rely on personal transport to get to work. There are 3<sup>rd</sup> party agencies but the easiest and most economical way is to get the license from DOT – Department of Transportation. The total cost of the exam and driving test is barely 7 to 10 dollars which is a steal as compared to about 30 – 50 dollars charged by third parties. Having a driver's license also helps you get lower insurance and other fees when renting a car or getting a car on lease. We mostly rented cars on Turo.com and the general experience has been good.
- Bank account: The host university could be a good support in getting a bank account as most banks require you to have an SSN. It is recommended that you open an account in a bank branch on campus to gain access to a debit card for handling local transactions. It is important to note that hotel addresses and Airbnb addresses are not considered as valid for opening a bank account. So, one should prefer to have accommodation from rental agencies.
- Medical facilities: The STINT participants are protected by the Kammarkollegiet insurance which is a big and generous cover for the participant and family members. However, it is a big and time-consuming process when gaining access to medical facilities. The medical units in the US will allow medical access only when they get clearance from the American agency handling these insurance claims. The process begins with contacting the kammarkollegiet agency in Sweden/Denmark who then forwards the case to United American insurance agency who then sends a fax of clearance to the medical unit. I had to wait anywhere between 60 to 90 minutes to gain insurance clearance after which I was allowed to see a care provider. This system should be made more streamlined and avoid situations of unnecessary waiting bordering to panic if the medical condition is serious. What we did appreciate though is that after claim was presented we got a call from a Swedish doctor to inquire if we got the right medical attention and if we were unsatisfied they would make alternate arrangements to make sure that we were serviced well.

### **Any specific recommendations to future visiting scholars to ASU**

Points of value: My experience with colleagues and the overall system at ASU has been pleasurable overall. The peers, academic and administrative contacts were very open to meeting us, welcoming and interested in my visit. I was allocated an office of my own with my name on it, given access to the ASU online account, email system and to Campus – an online portal for class information. I learnt a lot of new things and systems from attending various events in the department and on campus and helped me forge some great relationships and begin new networks, both for teaching and research.

Participants going to ASU should try to go beyond their departments and faculties and invest some time to explore the activities of other schools on campus. ASU is a huge, multilocation campus university and there are numerous other programs and courses where the participant



could find contacts and create networks. It is advised that they should be in close connection with the STINT contact at ASU- Ms. Shelley Stephenson on giving references and making introductions so you can get access to new departments and people of interest. Apart from this there are numerous events going on at different levels at all times. Some interesting events are held by the International student and scholars centre (ISSC), the student bodies and clubs. There are some learning workshops conducted by the libraries on campus and these are open to attend by all and any scholars from various disciplines. ASU has the innate capacity of keeping its attendees extremely engaged at all levels and it is suggested that while on the sabbatical one must try to profit from it as much as possible.

Points of concern: One major hiccup though, which I felt during the initial few weeks of my stay, was that the department did not seem to be very clear about how to use me in their system around my visit. Although my engagement with the co-teaching and class rooms pedagogy was set in schedule, there was lack of a general inclusivity in their everyday systems in the department. I had to specifically draw attention to the fact that I would like to be involved /present as an observer in their faculty meetings and other events if possible. However, once this wish was made clear the department head went all ahead to provide me relevant details of events, invitations to faculty celebrations, workshops, department meetings, research seminars for faculty members etc.

My suggestion to STINT is that when they are in communication with universities they must try to ensure that the concerned stakeholders at the host universities are able to understand and appreciate why this sabbatical is happening and how the incoming sabbatical fellow can be engaged in the best possible manner.

ASU does not provide any housing assistance and this is a major area of concern that participants should try to solve as much as possible by their own efforts.

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

- *For me as an individual* – There is a lot on both research level as well as pedagogically that can be developed for myself as an individual. The networks that I have created while at ASU has great potential of growth and already I have initiated a research project with a team with 2 researchers from the department. Pedagogically I can use some of the teaching methodology and content management technique that I have learnt from peers at W.P. Carey.

- *For the department* – Teaching methodology, different techniques and possible teaching-based innovations are important for the department. I will share the information that I got from attending the Learning and teaching workshop at ASU with colleagues at LNU. I have already discussed how we at the department can also be inspired to conduct such workshops and teach each other the skills that make lessons interesting for all. On the research front I am introducing the networks and contacts I have developed at W.P. Carey with the department and hopefully there will be opportunities for mutual collaboration between the two institutes for teaching and research.

- *For my home institution* – During my stay with ASU, the top management of LNU had made a visit and I had spent the day with them (11<sup>th</sup> November) to show around at the Tempe campus; during which we had interacted at various levels on how LNU can be inspired by the scale and ambition of ASU. Back home, apart from sharing my knowledge and insight through experiences in different forums, I will be speaking about this specifically at the Internationalisation board of which I am already a member. The discussion is expected to raise





interest and questions from different faculties for possible contacts at ASU, more information about courses, programs, systems and overall attitude of achieving a scale as big as ASU.

There are many plans that I am working out with my prefect and we plan to implement them during the course of 2020.

- *In the Swedish research and education system* – I think that the Swedish research and education system needs to be altered to some extent as far as the scholarly engagement of researchers and teachers with each other is concerned. Team work is a strong asset at ASU and through this they are able to manage the scale that they have produced. I came across strategic management of growth in 2 examples which were inspiring- one, ASU had the reputation of being a party university a decade ago when they realised that something needed to be to change the profile and these changes needed to be brought in rapidly, smartly and innovatively. With constant engagement and commitment and a well-defined and communicated charter, ASU is today the ‘Most Innovative University in the US’ – a reputation that it has held for the last 5 years. The second example was how a one-time program has developed into an independent school at ASU in the course of 12 years through being innovative in course development and through committed team work.

- *Continued relationship with the host institution* – Research can be a strong tool and I have initiated that step with a joint research on sustainable behaviour with researchers at W.P. Carey. There is a lot of interest also from other faculties at ASU for possible collaborations with SFIS and the Innovation and Venture development program.

Overall:

It was a great experience at ASU, in my city Mesa and in the state of Arizona. People are really warm and welcoming, they are ready to lend a helpful hand and be supportive. Opening my day with the local news on Good Morning Arizona and a cup of hot chai or tea, going to work and learning something new every day has been awesome- as always time flew and we were back. But there is so much to share now and so much to develop with new friends and new networks and of course precious memories that will be forever.....

