

Grants for Teaching Sabbaticals | Final report



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Fall 2019



Preparation and planning

I noticed the announcement for this new STINT teaching sabbatical grant on our internal staff and faculty platform at Linnaeus University in late December 2018. Since this call and its specifications seemed different from the original STINT's teaching sabbatical, after the holidays, in January 2019, I contacted my amazing colleagues at the Office of External Relations at Linnaeus University (LNU) to get more details on the call. Following several meetings with them and looking more into the information provided by STINT, I realized that the main difference between the two programs is the flexible length of stay, that in this one I am responsible for choosing the host university myself and instead of applying for leave of absence at LNU, STINT will provide LNU with the budget for hiring a lecturer to cover my teaching and other tasks during the time I would spend on this sabbatical. Moreover, the budget estimation was also my responsibility for this call, and there was no fixed budget for this sabbatical.

The next step for me was going through the list of universities that LNU has been collaborating and partnering with different programs. Subsequently, I did my research on our partner universities and their business schools' faculty members, the courses they were offering, their research background, their involvement in the AACSB accreditation (as the School of Business and Economics at LNU is now going through the accreditation process) and other relevant considerations. Eventually, I chose a few of the universities, and with great help from my colleagues at LNU's office of external relations, I contacted either the head of their marketing department or their dean of the business school. Finally, Kennesaw State University (KSU) in Georgia, United States, became my chosen institution for this sabbatical. KSU is a leader in innovative teaching and learning, one of the 50 largest public institutions in the U.S. with 13 colleges offering more than 150 undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees. They have nearly 38,000 students with a very diverse and international background coming from different parts of the U.S. and 92 countries across the globe. The Michael J. Coles College of Business and Department of Marketing and Professional Sales where I spent my STINT teaching sabbatical at is the largest College at KSU with more than 6600 students and is the third-largest business school in the state of Georgia as well as being among the top 2 percent of business schools worldwide that maintain accreditation in both business and accounting by AACSB International.

With the head of the Marketing and Professional Sales Department at KSU, the dean of the School of Business and Economics, and the head of the Marketing Department at LNU supporting my application, I submitted it to STINT in March 2019. Later in May 2019, I received the good news that STINT granted me the funds for this teaching sabbatical.

Now it was time to look for my home for the four months that I would be spending on the sabbatical. From the beginning of the process, the head of the Marketing and Sales Department at KSU and the faculty members and staff were extremely helpful, warm and welcoming and they did their best in making sure that I have a place close to the university, while I'm in Kennesaw. However, most of the housing agencies that the university worked with had a minimum 9-month leasing contract, which obviously was not an option for me. Time was passing very quickly, and I hadn't found any place to stay at till July. I decided to rent a long-term option via Airbnb, a place in a reasonably close distance to KSU as I wouldn't have a car during my stay, and there was a Big



Owl Bus (KSU's campus shuttle) station close to the place that I booked. I arrived in Kennesaw on August 7, a few days before the semester starts, and my 4-month adventure began.



Fig 1. My KSU ID card



Fig 2. BOB, My ride to/from campus



Fig 3. KSU campus entrance



Fig 4. Coles College of Business main hall

Tasks and responsibilities

During my sabbatical, I was involved in co-teaching and guest lecturing in the following courses:

- International Marketing - 2 sections
- Consumer Behavior
- International Sales Management
- PhD seminars in qualitative research methods and sustainable marketing

As at LNU we have teaching teams for courses, and I found this method very effective for students and also a continuous learning opportunity for myself as a lecturer, I welcomed the idea of co-teaching and guest lecturing at KSU too. This gave me a chance to observe and experience different teaching methods utilized by the faculty members at Coles College of Business first-hand. This eventually provided me with the knowledge to compare and understand different teaching



methods, alternative student engagement and teaching effectiveness strategies, the relationship between research and teaching, examination and grading, pedagogical differences between LNU and KSU, and reasons behind them and use of technology and innovation in teaching. My teaching material was both based on the already designed ones by the faculty members I worked with and also designed by myself after discussing what would fit best in the course syllabus and what I could bring to the class being a lecturer from Sweden and having my research focus on sustainability.



Fig 5. Giving a lecture about Sweden in international marketing



Fig 6. PhD seminar



Fig 7. Students final presentation for international marketing

Activities during the stay abroad

My time at KSU was not limited to teaching, and I participated in several activities, events and meetings at different occasions at the Department of Marketing and Professional Sales, Cole's College of Business and also at KSU including the following:

Meetings

- Welcome-back faculty meeting at Cole's College of Business in August where I was introduced to the members of the faculty at the Coles College by the head of Marketing and Professional Sales Department.
- Bi-weekly faculty meetings at the Department of Marketing and Professional Sales: The meetings were held every two weeks and were limited to 1 hour. One faculty member was responsible for tracking the time and making sure we don't go beyond the announced time;



which, made the meetings very effective where the main concerns were discussed, and decisions were made collectively.

- Coles College of Business luncheon with the dean for new employees in September
- Coles College of Business faculty enrichment day at the Coca-Cola Co. in September: I joined other members of faculty and Kennesaw Marketing Association at the College of Business on a visit and meeting at Coca-Cola headquarters in Atlanta, GA. We had a tour of the company, a few presentations, and Q&A sessions on the company's branding strategies and consumer behavior analysis with senior managers and V.P.s.



Fig 8. Invitation to Coca-Cola company

- Several meetings with AACSB Assurance of Learning (AoL) director at Coles College Business: My colleagues at the AoL committee at LNU joined me on Skype to ask questions and use the College's experience of being accredited for more than a decade in our path towards being AACSB certified soon

Events, competitions, and Ceremonies

- KSU Fall 2019 kick-off and brand launch ceremony in August: It was a unique experience taking part in this ceremony in which KSU's new branding strategy, including their new logo and "Find Your Wings" campaign, was unveiled. As a marketing educator, I used it as a learning opportunity to observe how a large higher education institution like KSU works on its branding strategies and strategic communications and marketing plans. This rebranding process started in 2018 to discover and craft KSU's story by listening to thoughts and feedback from more than 6,800 KSU and community constituents, including alumni, faculty, students, staff, and community members. The results of input from a wide variety of people with interest in KSU were a series of statements – Mission, Vision and Values and five brand pillars and a new campaign launched around the new brand identity – "Find Your Wings". The Kennesaw State Owls fields 17 varsity athletics teams,



competing for KSU. This "Find Your Wings" campaign utilized their signature owl wings, which is part of KSU's spirit mark and reflecting their brand story and the idea that KSU Owls dare to climb higher and ascend.



Fig 9. KSU "Find Your Wings" campaign



Fig10. Fall 2019 kick-off and brand launch ceremony

- Homecoming ceremony and football game in October: Homecoming is a traditional celebration usually happening during one week at many U.S. universities when they invite their alumni to return to campus, or "come home". That festive homecoming week included a parade, concert, bonfire, and at the end, KSU's alumni joined current students in watching an Owls' home American football game. During that week, I saw many KSU alumni in different parts of the campus such as the KSU brand store, restaurants, library, etc. some with their families and even their grandchildren.



Fig 11. My first-ever American football ticket



Fig 12. Homecoming parade



Fig 13. Alumni Lunch before homecoming game



Fig 14. Homecoming football game



- The Sales and Marketing Career Fair: This career day is an opportunity for business students to network with alumni and corporate partners to get hiring tips, ideas about the current job market and employment climate, get their resumes reviewed and learn about different career paths.
- Lunch 'N Learn events by the Center for Profession Selling (CPS): This was another networking opportunity, taking place several times during the semester, for students at Coles College of Business where during lunch, simple sandwiches provided by the center, students could meet representatives from one company that was working closely with the school and ask questions about their job opportunities, a possible position they can get at their company after graduation, their recruitment and training process, internship opportunities and get feedback on their resumes. What got my attention specifically was that in most cases in these Lunch 'N Learn events company representatives included a KSU alumni member who has been working in that company which made it more convenient and relevant for students to ask their questions as they could see a real example of how after graduation they can get hired by that company.



Fig 15. A Lunch 'N Learn session

- Fall Classic and Junior/Senior Showcase sales competitions: The CPS at the department of marketing and professional sales holds several sales competitions throughout the year, with the major one being the National Collegiate Sales Competition (NCSC) where sales students from national and international universities take part. I was there for two of their internal competitions in which the participants' complete simulated sales calls for the event sponsor, usually being one of their corporate partners. The competition is a major part of determining who receives the coveted KSU Sales Cup in December every year. I volunteered to help with the organization of the day during the Fall classic competition, which was a great experience.
- Fall marketing banquet held by Kennesaw Marketing Association, honoring marketing major graduates and introducing new members.

Research

- Initiating a research project on American students' perceptions and understanding of sustainable consumption.



- Co-authoring a research paper together with one of the faculty members at KSU's department of marketing and professional sales and submitting it to Taylor & Francis publishing journals by the end of the sabbatical. It was accepted for publication later in 2020.
- Initiating a research project with two of the faculty members KSU's department of marketing and professional sales on comparing sustainable consumer behavior and preferences in the U.S. and Sweden using a specific qualitative data collection and analysis technique which we worked on during the Ph.D. seminars I participated at KSU

Workshops

- Online Course Facilitation Program: This was a three-week course that I completed and received its certificate in October, focusing on effective online teaching techniques and methods through KSU's D2L Brightspace learning environment. By taking part in this course and successfully its assignments, I gained knowledge on online course facilitation and became familiar with best practices for communicating with students to effectively facilitate an online course.



Fig 16. My OCFP Certificate

- Student Disability Services (SDS) workshop
- Sustainable fashion workshop and panel discussion in October: This panel discussion was held as part of KSU's sustainability initiative and OwlSwap programs aiming to promote sustainability through inclusive events and educational opportunities and supporting the local community. Here you can find more information about OwlSwap programs: <https://sustainability.kennesaw.edu/owlswap/index.php>
- Improving Academic Integrity through Better Assessment Design and Using Available Technologies to Improve Academic Integrity workshops: These two were very informative workshops in understanding critical issues of academic integrity among students and how higher education institutions can improve that.



Individual trips and visits

- During my stay in Kennesaw, I also a few days trips to natural reservoirs and national parks in Georgia. I also traveled to Atlanta to visit the city's key attractions, historical places, and memorials such as the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park, the CNN headquarters, The Jimmy Carter Library, and Museum and The National Center for Civil and Human Rights.



Fig 17. Visiting CNN headquarters

- Attending my first ever Thanksgiving traditional dinner at one of my amazing KSU colleague's home.



Fig 18 & 19. Deep fried turkey and Thanksgiving dinner

Important lessons

- Some of my teaching during this sabbatical involved giving lectures on the already existing material that the course's main lecturer provided me with and was already in the syllabus. But what I enjoyed the most was giving lectures and designing class activities and assignments on business, marketing, sales, and consumer behavior from Swedish perspective and presenting my research experience on sustainability to the students and holding a discussion on those topics. This was something that students enjoyed to a great extent and also indicated it in course evaluations at the end of the semester. What I learned from this experience was how much having guest lecturers with diverse backgrounds and from different disciplines, and nationalities could widen students' perspective towards a business concept and how much they can learn from it.



Here are a few examples from students' evaluations reflecting on my lectures about business in Sweden and sustainability:

- *A part of the class that I enjoyed very much was when we had a professor Sattari from Linnaeus University in Sweden. She and spoke to us about the economy of Sweden, some of the worldwide known brands that are from Sweden, the welfare, and starting a business in Sweden. In another one of our classes, she spoke to us about being more aware of how to keep the planet healthy. To me, it was very interesting how to be able to implement sustainability into a and our everyday lives.*
 - *The lectures by Dr. Sattari were my favorite. She really explained how a country could succeed in ideas that in the U.S., we think are crazy.*
 - *I also really enjoyed it when Dr. Setayesh Sattari came to class and talked to us about Sweden. I was not aware that Sweden was such an environmentally conscious country that valued second-hand shopping and reusing so much. Faculty-led conversations such as this have helped broaden my view on how issues we have in America are handled in other countries.*
 - *Something that was new and wonderful for me in this class, was the inclusion of international professors and students. This refers to the German professors and students, as well as Dr. Setayesh Sattari who was able to teach us about many aspects of Sweden.*
- Taking the Online Course Facilitation Program and getting certified in online teaching during this sabbatical was, for sure, one of the highlights of my time at KSU. I didn't have much online teaching experience before, and this was a major step for me to become an effective distance/online lecturer as well. KSU has a significant part of its teaching given online and being involved in this program and collaborating with colleagues who are experts in online teaching was a major learning experience for me.
 - At the school of business and economics at LNU, we are in the process of AACSB accreditation. As a member of the Assurance of Learning (AoL) committee, this sabbatical at a long-accredited business school such as Coles College of Business and meeting and using their AoL director's experience has been extremely valuable for us in this committee at LNU in adapting our education and teaching methods to what is required by AACSB.
 - I found the strong collaboration and interactions between KSU, especially Coles College of Business, the corporate world, and the alumni very effective for students learning and growth process as they had real-world experience through these collaborations. These relationships with alumni and support from businesses also helped the school to have more and better resources to spend on students' learning and employability after graduation. The sales competitions, merchandising, and the homecoming week were a few examples of these collaborations. Active teaching and hands-on projects in our courses are what we aim for in our programs at the marketing department at LNU, and the experience at KSU gave me more insights into implementing these methods more effectively.
 - The research collaboration between the faculty members of the College was also something that I found very effective and efficient. This way, the faculty complemented each other's research skills and competences, and the end result would be a strong piece of research. The research centers at KSU, mostly supported privately, played a significant role in promoting high-quality research.



- Effective and efficient meetings were another learning point for me at KSU. Meeting times were strictly considered important, and this made meetings more to the point of decision making and relevant discussions.

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

- Pedagogically the two universities are very similar. For the courses that I was involved in at KSU even the course literature was the same or very similar at LNU. The main difference between the two institutions in terms of pedagogy is that at KSU there is a higher degree of involvement from community partners, businesses and corporations, and alumni in teaching. For instance, the faculty members at Coles College of Business usually had alumni as guest speakers in their classes, and the CPS had different corporate sponsorship levels to support their center and their student activities and learning events (<https://coles.kennesaw.edu/salescenter/docs/CPS-Corporate-Partner-Levels.pdf>). Many members of the faculty, both fulltime and adjuncts, had corporate experiences, were business consultants or entrepreneurs running their own business. It was also evident that the faculty use their own research experience and findings in their teaching to a large extend. In sum, the more hands-on real business world experience was evident in the pedagogical design of the courses I was involved in or observed. This would result in higher employability of the graduates and matching the educational programs with the business labor market needs.
- Another difference that I observed during this sabbatical was students' involvement in different activities and tasks in the College. Students played important roles in designing and managing events, competitions, workshops, and even in assisting lecturers and researchers. They were both paid and volunteer work that were advertised regularly on students' internal platforms.
- One other major difference between the two universities is how each semester is designed. At LNU we usually have courses given in periods, and each semester can have 2 to 4 periods in which students take only one course at a time depending on whether it's an undergraduate or graduate course. We also don't have specific class days each week, and the schedule is designed based on the needs of the class by the lecturer before the class starts. But at KSU, students took several courses in a semester and studied them parallel. Also, for each course, students have certain class time and days throughout each semester; which, is usually two times a week (e.g. Mondays and Wednesdays or Tuesdays and Thursdays) for 1 hour 15 minutes. The class sessions are assigned to different activities such as lecture, guest lecture, group assignment, exam, etc., indicated in the syllabus at the beginning of the semester.
- What I found interesting with regard to course content was that at the department of marketing at LNU we include sustainability-related topics in every course we teach no matter what subject the course focuses on. This for sure has made our students more aware of environmental and social challenges and issues the world is facing today. When I had



my lectures on sustainability at KSU I realized that this is extra-curricular for some of the students.

- The digital platform, D2L Brightspace, was used extensively for courses for all communications, assignments, exams, submissions between the students and the lecturers at KSU. We also use Moodle at LNU, which is a great tool, but we don't use it as extensively as KSU.
- From the examination perspective, we have very similar forms at LNU. The main difference, though, is that class attendance and participation are graded in every class at Coles College of Business. Students cannot miss more than a certain number of sessions (3 was a typical number) of the class, and they had to sign their attendance list during each class session.
- KSU also offers a wide range of workshops and seminars for faculty competence development, which are announced regularly throughout the semester, some of them being mandatory to attend. I took part in a few of them as stated earlier and depending on research and teaching interest and focus, each faculty member could find a few workshops and courses each semester to attend and learn something new to enhance their pedagogical skills.
- Another interesting observation for me was the difference in using formal titles for professors and faculty. In Sweden, everybody, including my students, calls me Setayesh, but there I was Dr. Sattari or Prof. Sattari, for my students. My colleagues called me Setayesh when it was just us but again Dr. Sattari in front of students.

Recommendations

If I were to give some tips to future STINT teaching sabbatical fellows it would be the following:

- Everybody at KSU, especially people at the Coles College of Business are fantastic to work with. If you get a chance to spend your sabbatical there definitely go for it.
- Make sure that you have a clear plan of what you are going to teach and preferably what research project you want to initiate in advance before going to your host university. Try to look into their course catalog and their research background, get in touch with the faculty members you want to co-teach, or conduct research with and plan as much as you can before you get there. The semester passes very quickly, and the more prepared you are the more you can learn and be effective and efficient in your responsibilities and learning.
- I am happy that I chose to spend a whole semester on this sabbatical. My learning process wouldn't be complete if I were to spend less than this there. I'd suggest future STINT fellows spend a full semester at their host university too.
- Although leaving and working abroad alone is a great learning and growth opportunity, but you may find it difficult sometimes, especially if things go wrong and you don't have



your family members close to you. So, if you decide to go on this sabbatical without your family, as I did, be 100% sure that you are ready for that adventure.

- If your host institution is in the U.S., make sure you arrange for renting a car. American cities, even small ones, are very different from Sweden, and you can hardly get anywhere without a car. For me, it was a challenge as I thought I could walk and cycle everywhere like I do in Sweden, but Georgia weather in August and September is hardly breathable due to the heat and humidity, let alone walking or cycling in it.
- Make sure that you get your medical insurance card from your home university before you leave. Even a simple doctor visit in the U.S. can be very expensive without insurance.
- Although your main responsibility may be teaching in certain courses but try to go beyond that and participate in any social, pedagogical, scholarly activity and event that you find interesting, you won't regret it!
- Know that for this specific STINT teaching sabbatical all of the budget is paid to your home university and the allowance (traktamente) that you apply for may be paid back to you after you finish your sabbatical and return home (in my case it was after 4 months), so plan for it accordingly.
- Ensure your housing quite in advance of starting your sabbatical. If you can, choose a host university that provides you with guest housing as it may be hard to find reasonably priced housing for a short period of time unless, like me, you go with services such as Airbnb. One other hiccup for me with regard to housing was that I estimated the cost of it in the budget based on what I found in the time of application in March, and by the time I finalized my booking in July, there was quite a difference in the price. So, do your budgeting considering that too.

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

As an individual, learning to be an excellent educator has always been a continuous process for me since I aim to continually make efforts to bring new ideas and methods into the classroom, get students to try and learn from them, and improve the learning process as a whole. Accordingly, from personal development perspective, this STINT teaching sabbatical added significant values to my existing and future role as an educator by bringing in new ideas, methods, and perspectives to what I can offer to students.

I believe that a good education is not complete without a connection to practice as it makes students ready for the job market and connects their intellectual and theoretical horizons to practice. This is something that we are also striving to achieve in our faculty at LNU. Observing how well KSU performs when it comes to university-industry collaboration, I intend to apply that knowledge in our programs at LNU.

Moreover, this sabbatical could eventually stimulate the exchange of knowledge, experience, and culture between KSU and LNU. When talking to students and faculty at Coles College of Business, the majority of them were very enthusiastic in studying, teaching and conducting research in a



Swedish institution which means that we at LNU can attract more international students and enrich our courses by applying international and multicultural perspectives.

This sabbatical also provided me with a precious opportunity to expand my network of international contacts and educators for current and future collaborations and sharing of knowledge, resources, and expertise. This would again be contributing to the internationalization of LNU by strengthening our school and university's international cooperation and networks among both faculty members and students of the two universities. I hope that this international cooperation between teaching staff of LNU and KSU would be sustainable over time and will result in positive outcomes such as guest lectures, joint courses, publications, teachers and students' exchanges and even double degree programs. One important fact that some of the faculty members who showed interest in visiting LNU for their sabbatical shared with me was the difference between the American and Swedish semester systems. As I explained earlier, at KSU students and teachers meet at certain times on certain days every week throughout the semester and if Swedish higher education wants to attract American educators for teaching sabbaticals in Sweden the grants should cover the whole semester and not only short periods as they cannot leave teaching for a week or two during a semester in their home universities.

As a member of the Assurance of Learning (AoL) committee in our school during the accreditation process, this sabbatical was extremely invaluable for other members of the committee and me as we could share our concerns and ask our questions from their AoL director and find confidence in what we are doing.

At the end, while writing this report, I realized how much I have actually been able to do, learn and experience during this sabbatical at KSU, which I am looking forward to sharing with my home university and department in Sweden. It was an amazing experience. I am grateful to STINT for making this invaluable experience possible for me. My sincere thanks also go to the head of Marketing and Professional Sales Department at KSU for inviting me, to all wonderful faculty and staff members at KSU, Coles College of Business and most of all to the Marketing and Professional Sales Department for supporting me in the best of ways the whole semester. This teaching sabbatical wouldn't be possible without my wonderful colleagues' help at LNU's Office of External Relations and the support from the dean of the School of Business and Economics, the head of the Marketing department and my colleague at the department. Thank you all so much!