

## Grants for Teaching Sabbaticals | Final report

GTS2019

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Home institution: Stockholm School of Economics

Host institution: National University of Singapore (NUS) Business School

### Preparation and planning

*A brief description of how the activities at the host institution were planned.*

During the application process, NUS Business School asked for a course listing of my current and previously taught courses. I provided them with an overview highlighting my current SSE M.Sc. courses;

- Data Science Strategy
- Innovation Strategy
- Negotiation for Startups

After some deliberation, NUS Business School opted for the Negotiations for Startups course as this was easiest for them to formalize as an elective, and after some discussion on positioning and content we rebranded the course as *Strategic Negotiations*, which included a revised selection of cases and literature to emphasize broad applicability and not just focused on the startup environment.

NUS Business School were also very supportive and fast in arranging for visiting faculty designation, visa application preparations, and securing an apartment in their faculty housing, all of which were critical to the stay.

### Tasks and responsibilities

*Description of your position and work responsibilities at the host institution. Specify if the tasks were carried out individually or in cooperation with local resources.*

As Visiting Faculty and Course Director I was given an office space and same privileges and responsibilities as a regular faculty member, also with regards to teaching. After some introduction, I was fully in charge and responsible for my course. The teaching as such was carried out independently, but with full support from Department administrative staff. I took this as a sign of confidence in teaching abilities.

There was full host institutional support including IT, graduate and program office, and administrative staff. The lasting impression as compared to my home institution which is a leading but small and private business school was quite impressive, as it's clear that NUS Business School could leverage all the resources and quality of a world class national flagship university.



### **Activities during the stay abroad**

*Summary of the main activities carried out at the host institution. Please do include your participation in any other activities than (co-)teaching your own course(s).*

Main activities carried out at the host institution was teaching and grading my 7.5 ECTS elective course with 30 (max number allowed) M.Sc. students. As an added honour it turns out that for almost all the students my course was the very final course before graduation, which made for good energy in the class.

Additionally I was invited to weekly faculty seminars and also to give a research presentation. I was also invited to NUS Business School CEMS network and alumni events, which I felt was both for my benefit as well as to showcase me/international faculty.

My host faculty member and head of Department was in transition to becoming Vice Dean of Graduate Programs during my stay, and as an added sign of confidence we had a number of meetings discussing my experiences from being Program Director at SSE and M.Sc. program design with a special emphasis on how to teach entrepreneurship. NUS and NUS Business School have many available resources for aspiring entrepreneurs, but when it comes to successful entrepreneurship both in teaching and practice, SSE has a stronger track record that they were very interested in.

Outside NUS Business School it is worth mentioning that I was also invited to and attended a number of Swedish Embassy events focused on higher education and research, including hosting an event for a delegation from the Stockholm School of Entrepreneurship during the Singapore Fintech Week in November, and also the Nobel event at the Swedish Ambassador's residence, where prominent researchers from National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University were represented.

### **Important lessons**

*What knowledge of importance for your role as teacher/researcher have you gained during your stay abroad?*

One of the main experiences was teaching to an international but predominantly Asian student group. From one perspective, the students were remarkably international with French, Spanish, American, and even one Swedish student in my class. At the same time, the majority of students were Asian (Chinese) and Southeast Asian (Singaporean, Thai) which provided some contrast to my more Western dominated international class compositions at SSE. Some of the main – probably stereotypical – indications that were noted in this class were that as a group this class;

- Was relatively more difficult to get to talk in open exchange,
- Gave the impression that giving the right answer was more important than giving a personal opinion, and
- Was somewhat more respectful towards the teacher than at my home institution (which I have to admit was nice but placed a bigger effort on me as instructor to keep discussions going, whereas in Stockholm it's more common to have to cut student discussions short).



An additional reflection is that one of the live cases that we discussed in class was the US-China trade dispute, and the students seemed more politically sensitive with regards to what they said and how they expressed it in comparison to what I would have expected from using the same case at Stockholm School of Economics.

However I shouldn't give the impression that the above reflections were negative in any way, and as a group the NUS students also gave the impression of being equally or more ambitious than the same group at SSE, and the perceived respect for the teacher also resulted in very high quality assignments that were all submitted on time for deadlines(!) which is something I am not used to.

There was also a refreshing lack of (bad) excuses for missing sessions or arguments for trying to get extra or higher grade points. All in all, it made for a very pleasant teaching experience, I would say sometimes more so than at my home institution.

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

*Please discuss differences and similarities and possibilities for changes in Sweden (and abroad).*

When it comes to curriculum and courses offered the schools are actually very similar which is not surprising given the general international alignment of business school curricula in general, and as both Stockholm School of Economics and NUS Business School are part of the same educational network (CEMS) that for many years have promoted similar course offerings to facilitate student exchanges.

Courses and programs are incrementally developed every year to ensure the employability of students. For business schools this is a core function and priority, as business school rankings largely depend on student employment rates and salaries after graduation. I did get the impression that SSE might be even more responsive to industry needs, which might be a natural outcome from being a relatively small and private business school depending on corporate support, vs. being part of a national flagship university with a major endowment as well as significant public funding.

These similarities in educational offerings were also evident with regards to pedagogy and its importance, as business schools recruit faculty from the same international pool of applicants, as well as forms of examination, as the course credits need to be transferable across the different schools. Faculty development is also done in similar ways and through similar courses, and I got the impression that the resources available are larger at NUS than at SSE.

NUS Business School also applies a formal research sabbatical system; meaning that faculty can take a research sabbatical with full pay but no teaching or administrative duties every five or six years. This seems like a very beneficial system both for the institution and individual faculty members as it enables individual researchers to catch up on their research agendas especially after periods of heavy teaching or administrative duties, as well as promote ranking-relevant research for the school.



With regards to process though a special mention should be given to the NUS system of quality control with multiple checkers; after the course director enters the grades, they are double checked by an administrative staff and another faculty member (that scores and grades have been entered correctly from assessment summaries into the schoolwide grading system; i.e. not auditing the grades as such).

This actually addresses one minor but common occurrence; that some partial scores are entered incorrectly and thus adding an extra layer of quality control for final grade reporting. This seems like a good system with good cost-benefit ratio, and is something that I will present internally at SSE.

Overall with regards to administrative procedures, NUS was very effective and my course offering was designed and launched within three months without any deviations from standard operating procedures.

When it comes to the use of technology, NUS had just introduced a new educational platform with both brought opportunities and some introductory challenges. Overall I would say that SSE and NUS are aligned with regards to technology and general trends in higher business education. In the types of courses I teach technology is mainly a supporting tool for classroom teaching, and this seemed similar at NUS.

One interesting observation with regards to the status of pedagogical merits compared to research merits, is that in spite of the fact that NUS ranks higher than SSE in research rankings, they place a much stronger emphasis on education and industry experience in addition research. This is evident from their university wide tenure track system that includes three formal tracks; (1) research, (2) educator, and (3) practice.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike at SSE where tenure promotion is dependent on research, teaching, and citizenship, but a basic (high) level of research always have to be met – at NUS it is not only possible to be hired but also to be promoted all the way to full professor based on teaching or industry merits (plus a basic but much more flexible interpretation of research merits). It is an interesting case as it demonstrates that it is clearly possible and likely beneficial to have a broader range of tenure requirements without diluting research quality.

## Recommendations

*General recommendations to future participants in the programme.*

I applied in the spring for a visit during the fall – for some applicants this might not be ideal as the administrative deadlines were quite short, so the ideal timeframe under the current STINT processing times would be to apply in the spring for a visit the following spring. It is still possible but a fall application probably requires more intensive coordination and planning with the host institution than an application for the following spring.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nus.edu.sg/careers/acadappt.htm>



*Any specific recommendations to future visiting scholars to your higher education institution.*

One practical lesson specifically for Singapore is the administrative difference between Grants for Teaching Sabbaticals versus the long-standing Teaching Sabbaticals program, where the former comes with more visa administration and induces a personal tax liability (nominally 15% of the gross stay abroad funding provided by STINT), which is something that could be good to provide information on so that provisions are taken for this in the budgeting and application process by the application.

Otherwise this would risk being a very unpleasant surprise for the applicant as the formal decision from the tax authority (Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore; IRAS) comes first in April the fiscal year after the stay. An administrative option for STINT could be to put in a checkbox for this onto GTS applications specifically for Singapore (and other countries with similar tax regulations) and add a provision for the tax amount in case it is not included in the application.

Another practical insight relating to program administration is that the STINT application deadline is in March and the formal decision is taken in June – this means that for stays that are planned for the fall semester this provides a quite short timeframe to arrange for visas and practicalities; especially as fall semester courses are usually listed and students enrol already in May/June.

A reactive solution to this could be to only allow for GTS applications for the following financial year, but this would reduce the flexibility and maybe even make it harder to plan as many institutions and faculty don't necessarily have visibility over planning that far ahead.

A much more proactive option that would likely increase flexibility for potential applicants as well as host institutions and likely also increase attractiveness and the number of applications for the program would be to have an expedited and/or separate review process for applications that are aimed at the fall semester the same financial year.

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

The sabbatical was very productive for me and the institution, as I was able to (a) get teaching experience in an Asian context, (b) establish faculty relationships, and (c) identify Asian teaching cases that me and colleagues can add to our library for ongoing and future courses. The visit also helped strengthen the institutional administrative relationships between our two schools, which will add value in the continued student exchanges and discussions on future potential educational collaborations.

Singapore is a world leader in primary and higher education, and it was both humbling and inspiring to see what a small country can accomplish with coordinated long-term government investment into higher education as well as the corresponding status and career options for university teachers and researchers.

The stay has strengthened the relationship between our two schools and will tangibly result in a collaborative application for a Strategic Grants for Internationalization.