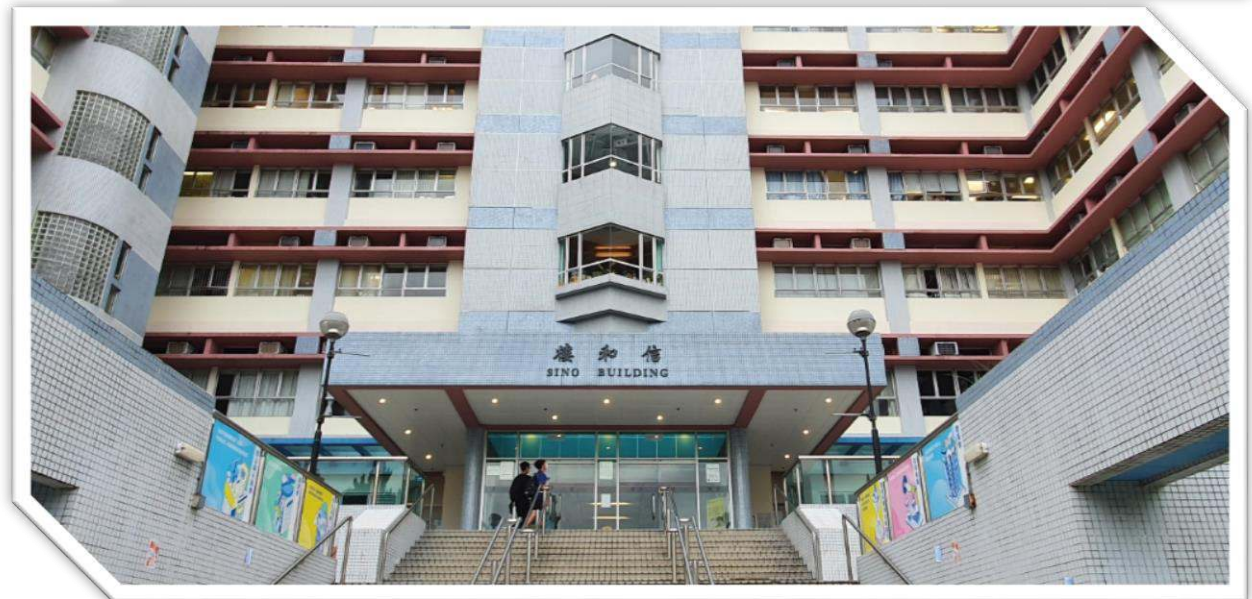
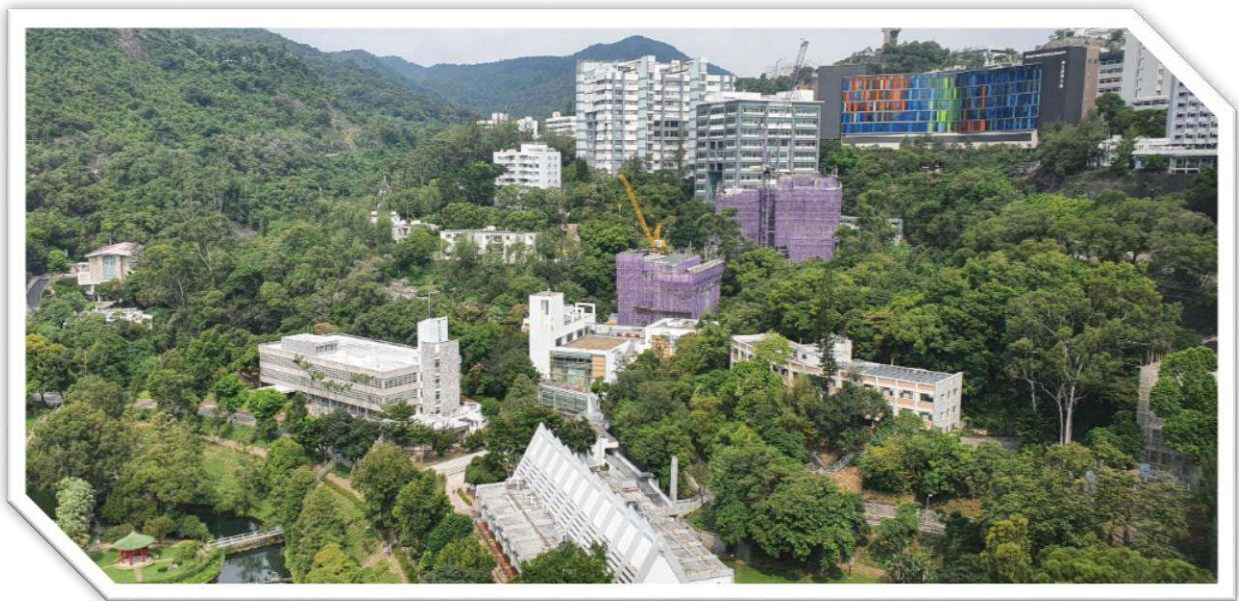


# STINT Teaching Sabbatical

Department of Psychology, Chinese University of Hong Kong

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## Preparation and planning

Everything in this report happened during the different waves of the COVID-19 pandemic which had a major influence on all parts of the process. I applied for the sabbatical during spring 2020 and was lucky to get nominated by Uppsala University. During the period thereafter, when I was waiting nervously on a decision I was suddenly contacted by the Health Psychology Department of University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). We had a couple of video calls and started to investigate different opportunities. I was well aware of that no decision was made by STINT but this contact reassured me that my chances were good. The COVID pandemic could also undo any plan at any time. Personally I believed that the pandemic would be over soon but I was proven wrong. By Christmas 2020, when the decision came, I was happy to read the first lines where it said that I was accepted as a STINT fellow, but, to my big surprise, it didn't say UCLA a bit further down. It said Chinese university of Hong Kong (CUHK). I was a bit shocked as I was mentally prepared for the UCLA. I even contacted the UCLA and was informed that due to the pandemic they were not willing to have guest teachers 2021. After thinking about it for a couple of weeks, I started to be more and more interested in my new host country and university. And in the end I was grateful for the opportunity to go to a country and a culture that I have never visited before, rather than the US where I have been before.

The next positive problem for me was that I had been accepted by three different departments at the CUHK; the departments of psychology, psychiatry and public health. In January and February I had video calls with all three. I decided to go for the Department of psychology. I had really nice discussions also with the other departments and in the School of Public Health my contact person was Benjamin Yip who grew up in Sweden and also got his PhD here. We had some contact during the spring and I was booked as an external examiner for one of his PhD-students dissertation in the summer.

The planning with the Department of psychology was done over video calls with professor Patrick Leung. I was hoping to go for a planning visit to Hong Kong during the spring but it was clear early on that it was impossible due to the pandemic and the quarantine rules in Hong Kong. We discussed different opportunities. I was striving for some co-teaching but that seemed impossible. I really wanted to get in contact with other teachers and researchers there. As you will read below, this turned out to be difficult. A couple of mandatory undergraduate courses were suggested to me but, again due to the unpredictable pandemic, we decided that I should create my own course as a "special topic". I had for some time thought about putting together a course on Cardiac Psychology as this summarizes pretty much my research experience. And now I took the opportunity to do so. I produced a course plan and fulfilled some administrative requirements and it went relatively smoothly. Rooms were booked and the course was announced as an elective undergraduate course.

In parallel to the planning of the teaching activities some practical planning progressed. Olivia Kwok, the Program Officer at CUHK's office of Academic Links contacted me and informed me about the visa-application and possible accommodation during the sabbatical. The visa-application went back and forth a couple of times via surface mail (some express service) as I wasn't able to fill it in correctly the first time. For example, as me and my partner are not married she could not get the visa for accompanying family members. I wasn't expecting them to be so picky about that. Prices for housing in Hong Kong are really high. I was considering an apartment hotel of some sort (e.g. One Dundas). It looked nice but was expensive. In the end I went for an Airbnb apartment (only slightly less expensive) in the middle of the town (Mong Kok) but also close to the metro to the CUHK. CUHK is situated in the "New Territories" which is a bit north of the more central parts of Hong Kong.

The plan was that my partner and one of our sons should come and visit me for a month or so, as they couldn't leave Sweden for the full semester. However due to the long quarantine period (at least 14 days) this was not possible.

I planned the course during summer. The format was set. 13 weeks with one lecture (2 h) and one tutorial (1 h) each week. I was a bit new to the concept of a tutorial and due to the relatively theoretical subject I planned them mainly as a seminars with literature discussion. New to me was also the very granulate grading system which I was to attach performance criteria for. By the end of July I was informed that my course had 57 applicants and that I had been assigned three teaching assistants who were master or PhD students. This formal way of working with teaching assistants was new to me as well.

Travelling in COVID-times is accompanied with some extra challenges. In my case a vaccination record, a record of a negative PCR-test done at a lab with the right accreditation, and last but not least, a booking of a quarantine hotel for at least 14 days were needed. After some difficulties I left Sweden August the 27<sup>th</sup> and after rigorous security measures at the Hong Kong airport I was directly transported to a quarantine hotel where I was to stay for 14 days.

The times of quarantine in Hong Kong varied during the spring and the summer and as I was hoping for a shorter period the planning failed and I had to do the first lecture via Zoom from my quarantine hotel room.

When I finally was let out of quarantine and came to the campus area the first time I was introduced by Olivia Kwok. She drove me around the area and showed me important places. CUHK comprise 7 colleges. My weekly lecture was booked at United College, which is the college farthest away from the metro-station, the Department of psychology and high up on a hill. Shuttle buses trafficked the campus area regularly. At the department I was welcomed by Amanda Leung. She helped me with keys and an office space. There was no personnel-room for lunch or coffee. Everybody had it by themselves at their desk or at a canteen. The first day I also had a nice dim-sum-lunch with the head of the department professor Helene Fung and aforementioned professor Patrick Leung. I was asked early on about giving a presentation to the faculty members at a regular seminar. This would have been a very good start for me. However, this seminar series ran exactly when I had my weekly lectures. I finally had it, after my course had ended in December, right before I was going back to Sweden. This also meant that I couldn't attend other's seminars. This clash was the main miss in the planning of my stay. If my classes and this seminar series hadn't clashed, I think my sabbatical could have been better. I left Hong Kong December 19, just before Christmas.

## Tasks and responsibilities

Before arriving to Hong Kong, me and the host department had agreed that I should teach the elective special topic course Cardiac Psychology for 13 weeks. I never got to understand the Hong Kong university credit system. This course ran the full semester and the students took several courses of this format during one semester. I think approximately 5 or so. I guess this makes this course approximately equivalent to slightly more than 5 hp in Swedish system.

I planned the details of the teaching together with my three teaching assistants Larry, Alan and Olivia. I learned a lot from them. I was originally thinking that you could initiate discussions relatively loosely. It turned out that this was not the common way to do it. We had to plan the discussions with clear instructions. The rooms that were booked were also not ideal for group discussions. I also realized during the lectures that it was best to address questions directly to students rather than to wait for someone to respond spontaneously, and to have very clear instructions for so called bee-



hive-discussions in class. The teaching assistants helped with practical things during the course. During COVID all student's temperature should be measured and their presence should be registered digitally before each class. I didn't have to care about this as my teaching assistants did. They did also manage most of the tutorials and helped me with feedback on the exam and the group presentation instructions and also helped me correct and grade the written exam. The teaching assistants were the persons I had most contact with at the department. Out of the 57 students that showed an initial interest for the course, 34 participated throughout and was graded.

To summarize my main activities, they were the following:

- developing a course plan with corresponding learning goals, curriculum, examination requirements, and teaching formats and exercises
- weekly teaching preparations and meetings with teaching assistants
- 2-3 hours of face-to-face teaching per week for 13 weeks
- some student supervision after mid-term exams and before group presentations
- reading and grading mid-term exams and group presentations
- final course grading of students.



## Activities during the Teaching Sabbatical

My main activity was the course mentioned above. Here I will describe other activities.

After being introduced to Benjamin Yip at the Department of Public Health, CUHK, I was asked to serve as one of two examiners at a PhD defence. The procedures are different from the Swedish system. There is no opponent and no examination board. The two examiners, one internal and one external, shares the responsibilities of both discussing the thesis and agreeing on the final decision. The defence was conducted via Zoom the 28<sup>th</sup> of July. It was an interesting experience for me reading a Hong Kong thesis and discussing it together with a CUHK colleague. Although science is a worldwide activity and shares methods and ideals globally, some differences in focus and style can be observed.

I visited one of the research groups for clinical psychology, led by professor Winnie Mak, and gave a presentation of my research. Professor Mak and I share several research interests, for example e-mental health. We have had some contact since then regarding potential collaborations.



I experienced some difficulties getting in contact with my colleagues at the department. Maybe due to COVID there were no regular meetings at the department, not even administrative ones. No shared coffee- or lunch-room made it also a bit more complicated. I managed however, to get lunch appointments several times with some colleagues. I also visited several lectures given by two professors.

In December I could finally give my presentation at the faculty's seminar series. It was a well visited occasion in a blended format and several interesting questions were asked. After this lecture I had a sort-of farewell lunch with 5 faculty members during which we continued the discussion.

At the CUHK there is a Centre for Learning Enhancement And Research, aka CLEAR. They arrange workshops, seminars and courses for teachers at the CUHK. I visited one workshop called Design Thinking for Course Design. I was already a bit familiar to the Design Thinking-approach but was very interested in how it could be applied in course design. The workshop was led by professor Carmen Wong from the Jockey Club School of Public Health & Primary Care. She was originally trained as a physician and as I work in the medical faculty back here in Sweden, I felt a bit at home.



## Important lessons

My sabbatical was very much influenced by the pandemic. I was teaching wearing a mask, as where the students. You had to wear a mask everywhere in Hong Kong at the time and the compliance was 100% as far as I could see. Most places were open but as there were very few international short-term tourists in Hong Kong at the time some very tourist dependant places were not.

The social and political situation in Hong Kong in the fall of 2019 was still a big topic. At the CUHK the protests were quite violent. Many people, I guess most, are frighten by the development where mainland China increase their influence on Hong Kong, but many were also frightened by the violent protests at campus. As a result of the protests you now have to register yourself and pass security personnel when entering the campus area. In the middle of the term I was informed that one of my students was suspended because she had been involved in protests the previous year. CUHK are generally known to protect and support their students, but this time, I guess, they couldn't. I personally don't know exactly what this student had done. During the fall 2021, when I was in Hong Kong, I didn't see any demonstrations or the like. At this time you could read much in international media about a statue at the University of Hong Kong that commemorates the 1989 Tiananmen



Square massacre that was going to be removed. In December, the day before Christmas when I was already back in Sweden, it was finally removed. This gathered much attention. Somewhat less attention was given to the fact that the authorities shortly afterwards also removed other statues. Among them was the “Freedom of Democracy”, a statue resembling a miniature of the New York Statue of liberty, situated immediately in front of the metro station at the CUHK campus. It welcomed me every day when I arrived at campus during my sabbatical. Even though it was removed after I left it made me sad.

The visit to Hong Kong nuanced my view of China and made me aware of how western-centred we are in Sweden in our teaching. During my lectures I repeatedly hesitated when stating something, for example prevalence figures, and had to check if what I said really were globally true. Swedish students and scholars are often satisfied if something is true for Europe and the US and we normally show very little interest in the biggest countries in the world. Looking from a population perspective on the world, we in Europe are really at the outskirts. China and Hong Kong is in the centre. The head start the western world have had in science, technology and economy is now caught up by China at speed. The extremely fast economic development in China has also contributed largely to making the world as a whole more equal and less poor. So while being on one hand frightened by the repressive and zero-tolerance style by which threats to stability are solved, you can also be impressed by the fast economic development, which is important for health and wellbeing, in China.

The main lessons learned in my sabbatical had to do with the course I taught. I got the opportunity to develop it and test it. I now feel much better prepared teaching on the matter. I experienced higher demands for clarity and specificity at the CUHK than I am used to and I think that has improved my teaching as well. The students at the CUHK are a bit more ambitious and a bit younger than how I experience Uppsala students. They were very intelligent when answering questions but did so less willingly and spontaneously than Uppsala students do. Experiencing different styles among students has been positive for my teaching.

## Comparison between the host and the home institution

Teaching higher education is a global activity and universities all over the world welcome scholars from other countries. So, there is a continuous international bench-marking when it comes to higher education teaching. This means that many things are similar in different parts of the world. The University of Hong Kong, not the CUHK, was rated as the most international university in the world 2022 by Times Higher Education. Even though this was not CUHK (position 49 in the world ranking) it indicate the international environment of Hong Kong universities. However, even though many similarities exists throughout the world’s universities, differences also exists. The Hong Kong universities are mainly inspired by the British university system of which they use to be a part.

For people in China education is of the uttermost importance. It is a way to save you from poverty. The competition is enormous. In Sweden I haven’t experienced this. Getting accepted at a university, especially a good one, can be the most important day of your life. The grades are also very important. This means that treating every student equally, and to have specific and objectively measurable grading criteria becomes very important. The pressure can also be too much and depression and suicide is relatively common among Chinese students.

When it comes to the pedagogy we are relatively used to have a lot of discussions in Sweden. At the CUHK, according to my experience, this was not so much in focus. Teaching was more about learning details than to elaborate on different perspectives. I guess you can say that at CUHK the students expected the teacher to have the truth and they treat knowledge as stable and factual. In Sweden

students are encouraged to be more sceptical and think of knowledge as relative. I think that there are problems with both perspectives.

Regarding the curriculum the main difference seem to be that students take more courses in parallel at the CUHK. In Sweden we usually take one course, or few courses, at the same time.

I was a bit surprised by the fixed format I was expected to squeeze my course into. 2 h lecture and 1 h tutorial per week in 13 weeks. At first I didn't know what to do with the tutorials. This format was not negotiable. I was also somewhat controlled from the administration. If I had to cancel something (which I did due to a public holiday), I needed to get that change approved and to consider replacement activities that also should be approved. In Sweden this would, at least to my experience, be my own responsibility.

The teaching was conducted live despite the pandemic. I taught in mask and the students also wore them. We had one student that had filed a special need request due to mental illness that had gone through some administrative procedures and was approved resulting in that we were obliged to record each session and share the recording with her. CUHK uses the Blackboard system which made sharing material and submission of assignments easy. Blackboard at CUHK (maybe everywhere, I don't know) includes a recording application called Panopto. It records the camera and the slides in a comprehensive way. This worked well. I hadn't used that system before.

Similar to how I experience the situation in Uppsala, research has a higher status at CUHK than education. Most teachers seem to prefer research and teach just to earn their wages. I would guess that this is the situation in many countries. The professors are also annually closely followed up and evaluated on their research merits. They were, at least to my understanding, less evaluated for education activities.

## Recommendations

My recommendations for future sabbaticals at CUHK would be the following:

- Start communicating with your host department as early as possible in order to reach an agreement about assignments, tasks, and responsibilities that works for everyone involved. Co-teaching may be difficult to arrange, but if possible it might lower the risk of just doing your normal teaching somewhere else than at your home university.
- To have a faculty presentation at your host department very early, getting everyone to know your interests and merits, would be very good. If there is a regular seminar series where faculty members present, it is recommended that you follow that to get to know your colleagues.
- Inform yourself about the teaching at the host department before your initial visit and try to identify CUHK colleagues that might share teaching or research interests with you.
- Evaluate your teaching material from a global or eastern perspective. We Swedes are usually blind to the Eurocentric or west-centric view we have on the world.
- Don't expect to be approached by your colleagues or other scholars at CUHK. Everyone is welcoming and helpful, but they are also working with their own things and might not reach out to you while you are there. So, be active and approach them. Rather sooner than later.
- The shared social lunch and fika-culture we have in Sweden is very rare internationally and you don't find it at the CUHK. However, you can arrange to have coffee and/or lunch with someone. It is usually appreciated.



- When staying in Hong Kong you don't want to be too far away from the city centre (I would guess). I lived between, and close to, two metro stations, one of which took me directly to the CUHK. I thought that was really good.

## Action plan

Generally I think I have trained my skill as a teacher. I am now also more aware of my west-centric perspective and I think I will be more humble in my teaching in the future. That is one ambition at least.

The most salient result of the sabbatical is that I will run a similar course as I did at the CUHK here in Uppsala this fall. I have learnt a lot from the Hong Kong experience of the course and have a good plan for how to keep the positive parts and improve the weaker.

In Uppsala I work with some international courses and also in some European collaborations/networks. I will try to share the international course catalogue with the Department of Psychology at the CUHK and explore the opportunities for Chinese students to participate.

I didn't collaborated closely with any colleague at the CUHK. Nor did I make any close friends. I have preliminary ideas of research collaborations with Benjamin Yip at the School of public health and professor Winnie Mak at the Department of psychology, but these are very preliminary and may not turn out to anything.

