

STINT TEACHING SABBATICAL - FINAL REPORT
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The lecture room building at the University Science Centre

PREPARATION AND PLANNING

The day before Christmas Eve 2020 I received some very good news, namely a mail from STINT saying that I have been granted a fellowship at Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). This was truly a fantastic Christmas present. Hong Kong is a city I have visited before and I have always dreamt of a possibility to spend a longer term there. In addition, I also knew that CUHK was a highly ranked university where I would have a great opportunity to learn from their pedagogic methods and develop my teaching skills.

Early in January I contacted the Programme Officer Olivia Kwok and Executive Officer at the School of Life Sciences Lauren Lee at the host university and we decided to have initial meetings online due to the pandemic. I was set in contact with professors KH Chu and Jerome Hui at the School of Life Sciences and we had our first online meeting in late January. Before the meeting I was screening the existing courses offered at CUHK and I also worked out some ideas about designing a novel course that could potentially fit in. After some discussions we preliminary decided that I should teach on two different courses, a third year course, Invertebrate Form and Function and a fourth year course, Evolutionary Biology. However, later in the spring I was asked if it was OK with me to only teach on the Invertebrate Form and Function course as they thought it would be too demanding with two courses. During the spring I had additional discussions with Prof Chu about how we should organize the course.

There was of course a great deal of uncertainty about the entire visit due to the ongoing pandemic. During the spring I followed the progression of the pandemic and for a while it seemed very unlikely that the sabbatical was going to take place in 2021. Furthermore, going to Hong Kong and performing teaching online, which was demanded during the spring term, seemed rather pointless.

However, the situation became somewhat better and the president of CUHK announced late in the spring that teaching in the autumn semester was planned to be face to face, which was a prerequisite for me to make the decision to travel.

The visa application was rather complicated, especially as all certificates had to be translated to English (or Chinese) and the translation had to be done by an authorised translator (which was very expensive). However, CUHK was very helpful in assisting the application and eventually the visa was granted and I could arrange flight tickets, accommodation and more.

As there was no possibility to perform the planning trip to Hong Kong, I had to arrange accommodation online. This wasn't a major problem, especially as I didn't plan to bring my family. After a lot of research I decided to go for an AirBnB apartment in Sham Shui Po, an old working-class district in Kowloon. The reason for this decision was several factors as distance and communication to CUHK, the neighbourhood which I was familiar with from an earlier visit, and of course the cost (Hong Kong has outrageously high living costs). I can highly recommend Sham Shui Po, its a very interesting district with a plethora of very good (and rather cheap) restaurants, wet markets and cool coffee shops.

Due the pandemic, travel to Hong Kong was difficult but not impossible. No tourists were allowed and the work visa was required for entry. Hong Kong has applied a very complicated system of ranking countries in different categories depending on the current

virus situation in each country. This means that I had to check the current condition for Swedes daily.

When it was time for me to travel the restrictions were a bit improved. If I could prove that I was fully vaccinated (EU-certificate was not valid) with an approved (by HK) vaccine, the quarantine period was reduced to two weeks in a designated hotel. I was departing already on July 28 as I expected to be quarantined for three weeks, which was the case at the time of booking. When arriving at the airport in HK a long, complex but highly efficient procedure waited with document checking and PCR testing. After about five hours I was finally transported to the designated quarantine hotel on HK island. The 14 days of quarantine consisted of daily health controls and three additional PCR tests. It was absolutely prohibited to leave the room during this period, a penalty of six months imprisonment and 25 000 HK\$ in fine awaited if breaking the rules. Food was delivered outside the door three times daily and the only drinks provided was bottled water (I'm so happy I brought instant coffee from home). The food provided was, however, hardly edible. Luckily, after a few days I discovered that I was allowed to order food delivered to my room from outside, which gave me an almost unlimited access the fabulous gastronomy of HK. This really made the quarantine stay so much more pleasant and durable.

After the release from the quarantine hotel I had a week of self monitoring with another two compulsory virus tests at a hospital. During the time in quarantine I was reflecting a lot about the differences in handling the pandemic. In a way Sweden and Hong Kong represent two extremes on a scale. Which strategy will turn out to be the best in the long run remains to be seen.

At the time I arrived in HK many of the earlier restrictions were loosened apart from mandatory mask wearing, temperature controls and checking in at locations by an app (LeaveHomeSafe). Restaurants, bars, coffee shops, gyms, museums and else were back in business, albeit allowing only restricted numbers of visitors.

Sadly, during the autumn my brother became very ill and passed away. Due to this terrible news I had to leave HK for the funeral in the middle of November. At that time HK had again changed the quarantine rules for visitors from Sweden and I was required to stay another three weeks in a designated hotel and go through all the procedures again, if I would return to HK. Instead I made a deal with the School of Life Sciences and with STINT that I could continue teaching online and do all the administrative work from Sweden, which I'm really grateful for.

THE CITY

Hong Kong is an extremely dense and crowded city, a city with most skyscrapers in the world due to the limited space for living. This may not be appealing for everyone but certainly for me. My greatest interest is photography, especially urban, architectural and street photography. As such, Hong Kong is the ultimate place to be with its fantastic colourful architecture, mysterious alleyways and interesting people. In addition, Hong Kong is a gastronomic paradise. With more than 15.000 licensed restaurants there is basically something for everyone. The Cantonese cuisine is of course epic but the city has so much more culinary opportunities to offer. Especially Asian food as Shanghai-style, Sechuan, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, Thai and much, much more.

You may think such a dense city has nothing to offer when it comes to natural beauty and outdoors activities. Nothing can be more wrong. The populated areas are actually focused to a minor part of HK. In fact, a major part of HK consists mountainous areas, forest and beaches. Many islands are not even populated and some have small villages that are so far from the ubiquitous picture of HK that you may think you have ended up in different part of the world. Hong Kong also have numerous parks and recreation areas where people gather to perform quigong, skateboarding, using the outdoor gyms, playing table tennis or board games.

As a sensory biologist with particular interest in the sense of smell, Hong Kong is particularly interesting as it consists of a dense soup of odorous molecules, for the good and for the bad. A very special experience is a visit to one of the many wet markets. The mixture of odours from fresh meat, dried fish, living animals and the ubiquitous durian will forever haunt me.

THE UNIVERSITY

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) is located in Sha Tin in the Northern Territories, which can easily be reached by the MTR or buses. The campus location is truly beautiful. Hilly and forestry surroundings with the sea close by. The architecture at CUHK is rather spectacular with a mixture of brand new glossy buildings and really cool brutalist buildings from the seventies. In addition, the campus is well equipped with sport facilities including two football fields with surrounding running tracks, a 50 m swimming pool and plenty of tennis courts. There is also a large number of cheap eateries all over the campus.

CUHK was established in 1963 by a fusion of three existing colleges as the first university in HK with teaching in Chinese. Since then another six colleges have been added and the university has basically moved to teaching in English. Today, CHUK is a multicultural university with more than 20 000 under- and postgraduate students from all over the world. In the latest world ranking of universities from QS, CUHK became number 39.

The faculty of Science consists of five departments, including the School of Life Sciences, which offered the courses I taught in. The School of Life Sciences has about 50 employed teachers, 80 post docs and 150 PhD students. To my surprise, the department also had about 80 T/A staff members, who were extremely helpful. I got a lot of help from the staff with everything from copying, scanning, computer problems to bringing animal specimens to my lectures.

Of course the pandemic had an impact on the everyday life in HK. Wearing mask was mandatory at all times when leaving home, except when eating and drinking. An annoying thing was that we were also forced to wear mask when teaching, which was a rather strange experience. I think face expressions are important when teaching and this part was thus lost. I usually observe facial expressions of students when I'm teaching to see how well they follow me. The use of different mask types was a topic frequently discussed among the teachers and some types of 3D-masks actually facilitated teaching.

TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

After some discussion we decided that I should co-teach in a course called Invertebrate Form and Function and in addition give a few lectures in an evolutionary biology course. Me and Prof Chu discussed the content and schedule for the invertebrate course in more detail and we agreed that he gave the first few lectures and was responsible for the mid term examination and that I was responsible for the major part of the course, most lectures and the final examination. I was familiar with several of the invertebrate groups, having given lectures on them in Sweden, while other groups were new to me, which meant a lot of reading and research. I also started planning lectures for the evolutionary course but in the beginning of the summer I received a mail from Jerome Hui who was responsible for the course where he asked if it was ok for me not to teach in that course as he thought I had sufficient with teaching already.

Even though contents of courses are rather similar to Swedish courses, the way they are given is fundamentally different. All courses at CUHK run an entire term with lectures once or twice a week. Most students take 6-7 courses in parallel. Furthermore, all courses are examined both by a mid term examination and a larger final examination at the end of the term.

The content of the course “Invertebrate Form and Function” was similar to invertebrate zoology courses run at Swedish universities but entirely theoretical. At CUHK courses are generally given as either practical or theoretical. As I had a huge interest in how practical biology courses were performed I asked if I could participate in some of them. I was then invited to participate in one field course (Field and Environmental Biology) and one laboratory course (Biodiversity Laboratory). The field course had excursions every Saturday and I joined several of them. This was a great opportunity both to see how field studies are performed in HK and also to learn about the biodiversity in HK, especially the invertebrate fauna that I’m teaching. It was especially rewarding to join the marine excursions, one to a rocky shore and one by boat to a bay off HK. I have previously done some teaching at Tjärnö marine field station in Sweden and I was curious to compare both the marine fauna and also how these practical courses were performed. During these field trips I also had plenty of time to discuss with students as they were much more willing to talk when they were not in the class room.



Field trips to a rocky shore and to a bay off HK

In the laboratory course the students studied the morphology of dead and live invertebrate specimens and dissected different species. Even though they used different species, I was familiar with the dissection technique of related animals. Thus I could assist during the dissections and got an opportunity to discuss with students. Several of the students taking this course were the same I was teaching in the theoretical course. I'm not used to assessing laboratory work as at SU we only let students pass or fail. Assessment of higher order learning of skills is rather complicated but at least at this laboratory course, detailed matrices were worked out and the performance of the students were assessed by several assisting teachers. Especially dissection is a true craftsmanship, and I was very pleased to notice that this type of skill, just like carpentry or artistic drawing, could be successfully graded. With the grading matrix the students knew exactly what they were required to do to accomplish different grading levels. I will perhaps try this at SU as we have discussed to start up an advanced methodology course where different practical skills could be assessed. The laboratory course ran in parallel with my course and the students were to study different invertebrate groups that I have lectured on. Hence, I discussed the organisation of the laboratories with the course leader to make sure that the two courses were optimally aligned, i.e. that a laboratory with a specific animal group followed upon a lecture on the same group.



Laborations in the Biodiversity Laboratory course

The rationale for not integrating laboratory courses and theoretical courses was that many students who are not going to continue within the field of biology were less motivated to do the practical courses. Even though I understand the argument I believe that combining theory with practice is by far the most efficient way to learn. Anyhow, it was interesting to participate in the practical courses and to observe how the courses were organized and how students performed.

In my class I had about 50 students and most of them frequently attended my lectures. Due to the mandatory mask wearing it was rather difficult to recognise the students and it became somewhat embarrassing sometimes when I didn't know who I previously talked to.

Even though I tried to engage the students to ask questions during the lectures and that I in turn tried to challenge them with questions there was very little response. From what I heard from other teachers this is the standard. Students are afraid of asking questions as they don't want to risk losing face. I guess it's also a matter of language barriers. During the field and laboratory courses I noted that when the students could discuss in Cantonese with their teachers they were much more talkative. However, many students contacted me after lectures or by mail and asked very relevant and clever questions.

In addition, the students were supposed to read a scientific article in conjunction with every lecture. The articles were not discussed at seminars as would be expected but instead students contacted me if there were anything they didn't understand. Reading of articles was assessed by adding bonus questions in the final examination and the more ambitious students had a chance to receive extra marks. I generated a list of articles that I hope was at a level for the students to understand and appreciate, and inspiring and not too technical. Furthermore, I added a number of YouTube videos that I thought could inspire the students.

As I unfortunately had to leave HK in the middle of November I switched from face-to-face teaching to online teaching. The transition was very smooth. All students were already familiar with this type of teaching as they had it full time for over a year. Indeed, I found the students to be more active during the online lectures. I got plenty of questions in the chat, that I encouraged them to use, during the lectures, which I really appreciated. It seems that this method of asking questions suits the shy students much better. The only drawback, for me, was that the lectures started at 3 am.

After the final lecture, the students had about two weeks to prepare for the final examination. As they had to do several examinations within a few days I can imagine how busy and stressed they were. During this period I received quite a few mails from students asking about things I brought up in my lectures. I constructed the final examination in a similar manner as had been done previous years to keep some continuity. The exam consisted of several different parts with different types of questions. One thing I really liked with this examination form was the inclusion of some optional questions, they could choose which questions to answer. I think this is a great idea and something I will implement at home. I was also happy to see that all questions I provided were answered by some students. In addition, a number of bonus questions were added that referred to the scientific articles they were supposed to read. The students performed well at the examination and out of 51 students only 4 failed. 68% of the students got the 2 higher grades (a grading scale A to D is used for students who passed).

ACTIVITIES DURING THE TEACHING SABBATICAL

Besides teaching the invertebrate course and participating in the practical courses I attended weekly faculty lunch meetings where research was presented by members, which was very interesting. I also visited the Marine Science lab and got the chance to observe ongoing experiments and discuss projects with researchers. Moreover, I had several lunch meetings with some of the teachers at the School of Life Sciences and it was interesting to discuss more general aspects of teaching and differences/similarities in our respective system.

IMPORTANT LESSONS

I think co-teaching is the best option during a teaching sabbatical as it is rather difficult otherwise to set the level of teaching when you're less familiar with the background of the students. By attending a few lectures before I started I became confident that my own lectures would be appropriate. Also, it was rather difficult to get in contact with other teachers as many were busy with other duties. Having a co-teacher was perfect in order to

have someone to discuss teaching in general, issues concerning the course and how to handle student-oriented problems. It was also invaluable when constructing the final exam and performing the subsequent grading to make sure that I demanded reasonable efforts from the students.

As a teacher I think I have become more confident during the sabbatical. My pedagogy seemed to work well at another institution and environment. I think the level of my lectures fitted the third year students well.

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE HOST AND THE HOME INSTITUTIONS (IN SWEDEN)

CUHK and SU have many similarities regarding the size of the universities and the programmes offered. Furthermore, the bachelor biology program at CUHK, which I was involved in, is rather similar, content wise, to biology programs at Swedish universities. However, I found major differences in the way courses are administered. First of all, all courses are given during a whole term with a few lectures every week. This means that students take several courses simultaneously. These courses may be either mandatory courses within a specific programme or elective courses. Examination for all courses take place at the end of the term, which means the the students have a very busy period of preparing these examinations. The university doesn't offer a possibility to remake a failed examination. Thus students who failed have to re-register for the same course again at the next occasion. However, if the students had valid reason for not attending the final examination we were obliged to offer them a make-up examination.

The second major difference was the separation of theoretical and practical courses. At SU we usually integrate theoretical lectures with laborations, field trips and else. Furthermore, at SU, the practical parts of a course are normally not graded, we just let students pass if they participate in the mandatory parts of the course and the final grade of a course is based on the theoretical performance. However, as the practical courses are separated from the theoretical courses at CUHK, these are also graded. Assessing practical work is rather difficult but at least in the courses I participated in, detailed matrices had been worked out in order to be able to grade the students. The practical courses also had a large number of assisting teachers to help with the grading task.

The School of Life Sciences offer six different 4-year undergraduate programmes, each consisting of fa large number of both required and elective courses. Many courses where shared among the six programmes. The programmes are oriented towards an academic rather than a professional degree, much like at SU.

Teaching at the Invertebrate course was conducted face to face in a class of about 50 students. Lecture time was usually 2x45 minutes and it was important to keep time as many students had other lectures to attend to afterwards. As I had many lectures that followed each other I could easily break at the exact time and seamlessly continue at the next occasion.

As CUHK has a very large number of T/A staff it was not a problem to get help with the technology at the first lecture, which I needed. At SU I'm used to have material to demonstrate to the students (preserved animal specimens, shells and more) and also used to bring it myself. At CUHK I asked for this and an assistant gladly helped and

brought collections of animal specimens for each lecture, which was highly appreciated. Also, the staff helped me with a range of things as copying, scanning and more. Thus, much of work that I'm used to do myself in Sweden was allocated to different staff members at CUHK. The administration at CUHK was very effective and professional and I always felt that I could get help with whatever I needed. My impression is that CUHK is very experienced with foreign visitors, staff as well as students.

Even though the students had a course book, teachers didn't seem to carefully stick to the content during lectures, actually the lectures I attended rather complemented the book content, which is similar to how I usually lecture. Thus, after initially listening to a few lectures by my co-teacher I was confident that my lectures would work and that the level I set was appropriate.

In conjunction with my lectures I was supposed to provide the students with scientific articles. These articles were, however, not discussed at seminars, as we normally do in Sweden. Instead the students independently studied the articles and were assessed by adding bonus questions in the final examination. Even though I tried to provide articles that were not too technical it's hard to tell how well they understood the articles. The results from the bonus questions varied a lot and many students didn't bother to answer them. I wish there would have been time to discuss these articles with the students in smaller seminar groups.

Not very different from my home university, the status of teaching is regarded somewhat inferior to doing research, which is in my opinion very sad. In HK there are different types of teaching positions, which are either more oriented towards research or towards teaching and the former are regarded the most prestigious according to the teachers I discussed it with.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Do a lot of readings about the location and the host university. Hong Kong is of course a city which differs a lot from any Swedish city but if doing a lot of readings and watching YouTube clips you are likely well prepared. For me it wasn't any problems with cultural differences.

As a STINT fellow at CUHK you are very much left alone and you don't have much sociality with other teachers. To overcome this, ask around and arrange lunch meetings with other teachers as they are often very eager to talk to you if you take the initiative. Also, try to attend other courses. This was for me the best experience as it was from these courses I learned most about pedagogic differences and similarities.

If restrictions will continue and quarantine at a designated hotel is required I would strongly suggest you to bring instant coffee (or tea), milk powder, chilli sauce (or other seasonings, which will make the included food at least edible), snacks, work-out equipment (e.g. rubber band or water-fillable dumbbells), books and more.

One important item to always carry around in HK is an umbrella. Showers are very frequent and can occur without any notice. Umbrellas are also used when it's sunny as it may become scorching hot. Umbrellas can be found everywhere and there is even an umbrella repair shop in Sham Shui Po.

Lastly, try to at least learn a few words of Cantonese before your visit. At least in some districts in HK, English is rarely spoken or understood. But people are generally very friendly and patient so getting around without language knowledge is not a huge problem.

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

There were a few things at CUHK that I found to work really well and that I would like to introduce at my home university. The first thing is the reading of scientific articles in conjunction with the lectures. This is by no means any novelty to me but the fact that the reading could generate bonus marks in the examination was to me a new grip that I would like to try. This gives the more ambitious students a chance to reach a higher grade. Secondly, the use of alternative questions at the examination was obviously successful and appreciated among students. I will definitely try this at home.

Moreover, students at the practical courses were assessed by using detailed grading matrices, I like the idea of being able to assess higher order learning of skills and I would like to implement that at my home university.

I will stay in contact with CUHK and if I get the chance I would love to get back and give some guest lectures, then hopefully without being forced to wear a mask.

My plan was to initiate a collaboration with CUHK where we could mutually contribute with online lectures, demonstrations and more. I started discussions with some teachers but as I suddenly had to leave HK due to the death in my family we didn't have time to initiate the collaboration. However, I will keep in contact with teachers and the administrative staff at CUHK during the spring to continue discussion and realization of my plans as well as introduce the ideas at my home university.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Finally, I would like to acknowledge my beloved Gabriella and my daughters, Tilde and Julia, who should have accompanied me in HK but due to the pandemic and the quarantine rules couldn't make it.

