

## FINAL REPORT

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### Preparation and Planning

I connected via e-mail with both the administrative staff and the colleague in Mid-January 2023. Through these early contacts I could initiate the process of obtaining a J1-visa, and planning for my teaching. Professor Jessica Collett was my prime faculty contact, and together we started visioning around the topics that I could bring into the collegium. Quite early on we decided on me setting up one individual course, focusing on qualitative methodologies, at the post-graduate level.

It was, however, during my pre-visit in April, when I was able to connect with Professor Jessica Collett and the Chair, Professor Abigail Tanguy, that we set the final direction for the course that I was to set up. As presented by Professor Tanguy, post-graduate students are in need of a course, and training, in qualitative interviewing. Many students want to use this method for their thesis but have not had proper teaching in the matter. Thus, this would be a (one-time only) substantive addition to the number of courses offered by the department.

In May and June, I planned the course, setting up an introduction to the course for students to read when enrolling, and planning the content of the course. It was to be a ten-week course, based on one three hour-meeting per week. Most meetings were to be a combination of lectures and workshops. A specific time slot for these meetings/lectures was also suggested to me, which ended up being Friday afternoons. In addition, it was also suggested that I should offer office hours, for students to come by. All in all, this meant that I already in May knew how my work in the fall was to be structured.

In communication with Professor Collett, I also began planning what each week of teaching should focus upon, setting up the basics for a coming course-syllabus. Professor Collett provided me with some examples how courses, and course-syllabi, generally are structured. This was very helpful as the structure for teaching and schedules strongly differ between Sweden and the US. When higher-education teaching in Sweden is structured around five-week courses, during which time the teacher often has exclusive “right” to students’ time and exams are held at the end of that period, students in the US take several parallel courses that are examined at the end of the quarter/semester. When counting the actual hours students met me as a teacher, differences were quite small. However, the difference in course structure demanded another for another form of schedule. Foremost, stretching out the course over time made it possible to plan for a more gradual learning process.

In the early preparing I initiated the reading-list for the course, which involved reading/looking into other courses in qualitative methods at the department, so that I would have an idea of the types of knowledge that students potentially would have. Additionally, this phase also demanded some time for my own reading to select titles for my reading list. Even though I regularly teach on qualitative methods in Sweden, I now had to find relevant texts in English. During late spring I also planned in quite some detail the content of each lecture/meeting and wrote most of the two first lectures. However, I intentionally left much of the writing of lectures to the fall, when I actually would know much better what students would be in need of.

All in all, I came somewhat prepared for my teaching. I knew what the department hoped that I would do, under which circumstances. Through administrative help I also received the J1-visa in early June. The most troubling part before my leaving for UCLA, was planning for

housing. UCLA administration was very helpful but could not provide housing for visiting faculty, and as I learnt when visiting LA in April, leasing in LA is generally done on the spot, not months ahead. Thus, a few days before leaving Stockholm I rented an apartment over Internet, sending over a substantial deposit. Fortunately enough, it turned out to be lovely, close to campus, and leased to me by a highly reliable property owner.



### *Activities during the teaching sabbatical*

My main activity during the sabbatical consisted in giving the course 285B, Friday afternoons. The group consisted of ten highly motivated and skilled students at post-graduate level, out of which four were PhD-students. It was thus privileged with a small and well-educated group of students, which all wanted to draw on qualitative interviewing for their thesis. We met on Friday afternoons, during which I commonly first presented a theoretical perspective on some aspect of the research process seen from qualitative interviewing, and students later discussed their own material and experiences. I was amazed by the level of interest and knowledge in the group and had to level-up my planned lectures. For a number of these students, I also provided regular consultations on methodological matters for their thesis.

In addition to the regular teaching, I also participated in the 237 seminar for comparative social analysis. A seminar series at which students at advanced level present and/or comment

their own and the research of others. The seminar had a specific format, with no actual presenting other than the sending of a text, and questions raised to the author. There was thus no assigned commentator, which implied that all participants were required to have read the text and pose questions. The was held every second week, and faculty regularly participated together with students. At the 237-seminar I made contacts with several students who as part of their education were active as teaching assistants. The system was explained to me in some detail, and I was astonished by its high aims for getting all students do well in their studies. Together with a couple of teaching assistants, I was planning to auscultate a number of their classes.

However, my teaching in practice took a full stop in mid-November when students at advanced level at Universities of California (including the LA campus) went on strike. During five weeks, some 10 000 students at ULCA were striking for better wages. As my students were post-graduates they were all employed, some as teaching assistants, and all of them therefore also chose to include studying in solidarity with those teaching assistants. In practice that meant that I could only meet my students at the picket line. They avoided e-mail contacts and avoided to participate in classes or any planned activities. Still, at the end of the quarter, and the end of the strike, they all sent in final papers that I could comment and grade. The auscultations of teaching assistants were, therefore, never realized.

During the whole semester, I had regular meetings with faculty. Foremost, I would sit down with Professors Collett and Tanguy, who would kindly advise me regarding the myriad of practical matters that one can never plan for – as a strike and how not to unintentionally cross the picket line! In addition, we were two STINT scholars at UCLA this fall. Together with Tom Nilsson from Malmö University I discussed much of what may seem unusual for a Swedish visitor.

### **Important lessons**

During the semester at UCLA the role of political context became apparent. Students at UCLA, living and (mostly) preparing for a life in the US were working hard, were always well-prepared and sent in accomplished assignments. I interpreted this ambitious and very competent way of studying as a reflection of a country in which much of your later options depend upon your university results, and the lack of well-developed welfare. If you have managed to enter one of the best universities (such as the UCLA), and you do well, you may

enter the life of a high-wage middle-class life. In Sweden, however, the context is the well-fare state, less competitive universities and less competition for later life-chances. As long as they obtain a degree, many students in Sweden, will have a good job, irrespective if they do well or not as students. Although I self-evidently was in complete awe for my UCLA-students, I was also happy to meet regular Swedish (sociology) students, who do not have to prove themselves because of living in another context.

During the semester at UCLA, I had ample time to experiment with teaching methods. Foremost, I attempted to work with “workshops” as a form for learning. In the workshop, students were given the opportunity to work with their own data, and get this work reflected by fellow-students and me. Interviewing, and qualitative methods generally, is very much a matter of crafting, constructing knowledge in the interface between your experiences from your field of study and theory. As such, interviewing needs to be taught as process, not merely by lectures. The ten weeks long quarter functioned extremely well for this kind of process-thinking. Whereas in Sweden, I would have to have students doing their empirical experiences in combination with general theoretical lessons in only five weeks time, the process is easily cramped. The longer sequence of meetings also made it possible to be more open to discussions as they appeared. For my teachings at advance level in Stockholm, I will attempt to give courses at half the speed, prolonging it over two teaching periods.

Relations between me as teacher and students were quite different from what I am used to in Sweden. UCLA-students seemed to hold me in great esteem, showing something of a distance from me as professor. In Stockholm this sense is rarer. There is a casual and open atmosphere Stockholm, which I enjoy, making conversations and reflections from various perspectives relatively easy. But the esteem, and the hierarchy that students expected and suggested, made it easy for me to lecture.

### **Comparisons between the host and home departments**

#### *Pedagogy and its importance*

From my time at UCLA, I very much experienced that both teachers and students are very much alike, irrespective of contexts. This goes especially for teachers. The ambition and generosity towards students – and me as a visitor – from teachers at UCLA reassembles my experiences from Sweden. Teachers are dedicated to what they are doing, even if research



may be of high (or highest) importance to them/us. They are greatly committed to develop pedagogy and didactics.

Apart from this apparent resemblance, context matters. With longer teaching periods, and final exams at the same time for parallel courses, pedagogics needs to be customized, as I described above. Furthermore, the teaching assistant system is clearly working well for both students and professors. It may be, that the system is a consequence of universities competing for students, and that they therefore take extraordinary care of their students. Irrespective of the reason, for students the system entails an additional path for learning. Pedagogical ambitions may therefore be set quite high. For professors, the system is also beneficial, as it relieves them from some of the more tedious burdens of teaching (eg., examining and grading). As a consequence, time and energy, which over the years come to be more precious, can be saved for lectures and workshops.

#### *Curriculum and courses offered – How teaching is conducted*

Apart from professors working together with teaching assistants, teaching seemed individually organized. I could not find signs of the teaching teams that we often implement at Södertörn. Also, I felt that I had an extended freedom how to develop my course, including course aims, reading lists and contents. Although there commonly existed a syllabus there was no common criteria for these. I took these as examples of the university rendering authority and freedom to professors. Many times as I asked colleagues how to proceed on a specific matter, the first answer would be “this is up to you entirely”, and then a reflection or a recommendation.

As much as I appreciate this freedom – and lament the less flexible system of Swedish universities – I also value the collegial aspects of our rules and routines. Courses and classes at Södertörn seemed more planned by the collegium, and less depending on the individual professor. In addition, it may be that the less flexible organization at Swedish universities serves as to avoid arbitrariness. Having all this said, it still seemed to me that the students at UCLA were better educated than the students that I meet in Stockholm. This reflects the high ambitions and exemplar education that students at a prestigious university, such as UCLA, are offered.

### *Use of technology/IT in education*

Fortunately, UCLA makes use of, Canvas, the same learning system as we use at Södertörn. The system was recently introduced at Södertörn, and I could use the semester to delve into all its intricacies. Perhaps not that surprising, given that it is a system that structures interactions, it seemed to me, that the system is used in the same manner and ambitions.

In lecture halls, the tech system seemed recognizable. I could use it without any instructions. The only difference was the interactionable white-boards. If you use power-point, you could point to the white-board instead of the laptop. I did not hear from any of the teachers, or students, suggestions to make use of any other technology in my teaching.

### **Forms of examination**

When students started go on strike, it was soon apparent that teachers would have to change their ways of examining. Talking with colleagues on how to handle the situation, I learned of the various ways in examinations were undertaken at the department. Many avoided the weight of finals by setting up the course schedule so that examinations were undertaken along the semester. In these examples, examination was more of continuous task undertaken in the form of assignment. I also noted that the students in my class, reframed the tasks that I had given them (do an interview guide, perform the interview, transcribe the interview etc.) into assignments that could be seen as part of the examination.

The relationship and/or status of pedagogical merits compared to research merits

At the UCLA sociology department, I met a number of professors strongly committed to teaching and education. When talking to me about their own experiences I would hear testaments as to how they would strive for excellence. In this capacity, faculty at the department seemed to weigh the status of pedagogical commitments – if not merits – as highly as their commitments to research. They were also highly encouraging to the students that took part in teaching. At my first meeting with the whole of the faculty, teaching assistants were self-evidently part of it, and awards were handed to those most dedicated. At the same time, I could not that in the encouraging correspondence sent from the Chair and others, greeting individual achievements at the department, teaching is rarely mentioned.

## **Recommendations**

I would first like to congratulate those going out on coming STINT teaching sabbaticals. This is a tremendous form of meeting another university, and reflecting upon your own experiences from your “home” university. I would deeply recommend this to lecturers at universities in Sweden as a way for learning and developing.

There are many things to prepare before going on the sabbatical. A general tip is to start early. Ask colleagues from your hosting department to provide syllabi from other courses, so that you may see what students already have been reading. Look into the actual literature to see how it relates to your own teaching. I constructed a course of my own, which was a fundamentally positive experience, rendering me an opportunity to connect with students fully on my own terms. Still, this way you interact more with students than other professors, making it a bit difficult to learn from them in practice. Also, my own teaching will leave few traces at the hosting department. If possible, decide on which way you want to go. If you would like to interact more with colleagues, I would suggest trying to find a way for co-teaching.

I would also highly recommend keeping contacts with your home department at a minimum. You are on leave, and thus should not be bothered. Self-evidently, this is difficult, and increasingly so the closer you get to next semester, when you are back home. One potential way of preventing this, is to make plans for the next semester prior to leaving for the sabbatical. Perhaps you can avoid teaching the first two parts of the coming semester? Ask yourself other ways of halting other long-term planning during your sabbatical. Finally, you also need to practice the beautiful skill of saying “no, I cannot do this, I am on sabbatical”.

In relation to your host department, my experience is that colleagues are very generous and welcoming. Still, it was up to me to make most contacts. You cannot expect it to be the other way around. You are on sabbatical, and have (comparatively) lots of time, while they are in their ordinary hectic agenda and schedule. My experience was that as soon as I asked, they would find the time for a cup of coffee, while generously reflecting on for instance teaching, research and university politics.

Lastly, do plan for letting your arrival take some time. Finding somewhere to live, perhaps opening a bank account, a new cell phone subscription and generally finding your ways to go



around (buying a car, a bike, finding walking routes etc.) takes time. And it is a wonderful time!

## **Action plan**

### *Individual level*

For my teaching, the sabbatical meant trying out new ways for how trust between students and students, and between teachers and students, can be shaped and drawn upon for reinforcing good conditions for active and in-depth learning. The workshop method, where students draw upon their experiences and reflect each other's, was a valuable step to enhance this form of teaching. The prolonged teaching period – for ten weeks instead of five – expanded and reinforced the positive learning mechanisms based in trusting each enough other to explore also new theoretical understandings. In coming courses, I intend developing this method, hopefully under what in Swedish conditions would be termed “half-time-studies”. In so doing, the institutionalized system of four periods during one semester is to be better fitted to slow-working learning processes.

### *Departmental level*

I am initiating discussions at the departmental level regarding how to implement some elaborated ways of teaching assistants. As many other departments, we take assistance from doctoral students for some forms of teaching, mostly seminars and junior advising. However, I believe that we could find ways to more directly advancing knowledge and learning processes among under-graduate students by reflecting the system of teaching assistants. The idea would be to have, for instance doctoral students to lead smaller group discussions in which students can pose questions on lectures and readings. This would not be the same as the regular text seminar, but more closely relate to develop understandings of matters such as central concepts and their applications. In practice, this would entail adding, or reshuffling time for teaching. Apart from the potentially positive effect of students presenting better results, it could be cost-efficient as time for re-examinations could decrease.

### *At Södertörn University*

As a first step, the board of Södertörn university will learn about and discuss experiences from earlier STINT fellows. The intention being to diffuse some of the encounters and learning that these individuals have had. In a second step, learning outcomes and forms of

relating to students, are to be discussed in collegial forms within the university. The idea of developing forms for teaching assistants is one of my core interests in these discussions.