

STINT Teaching Sabbatical

Final report

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visited

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my profound gratitude to Stockholm University ((hereinafter referred to as SU) for the nomination, and to STINT for providing me with the opportunity to embark on a Teaching Sabbatical at UC Berkeley (hereinafter referred to as UCB). My deepest thanks go to my students, who made the experience unforgettable, as well as the faculty, staff, and graduate students at the various departments and institutes, including the Berkeley Linguistics, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, the Institute of European Studies, the Nordic Center, and the Center for Latin American Studies, for their warm reception. I am greatly appreciative of the various invitations extended to me, including receptions, dinners, baseball games, coffee gatherings, lectures, and discussions, which offered me a wealth of knowledge and opportunities to socialize with colleagues from diverse academic disciplines. I also extend my gratitude to the Berkeley International Office, the Visiting Scholar and Postdoc Affairs unit, the Center for Teaching and Learning.

Finally, my two fellow STINT-professors, Alexander Maurits (Lund University) and Marcus Nilsson (Linnaeus University). Their support, friendship, and positive attitudes during my sabbatical enhanced my overall experience and contributed to my professional and personal growth. I am deeply appreciative of the opportunities to collaborate, engage in meaningful discussions, and share experiences with them, and will always cherish the memories we made during this time.



Foto: The Campanile, UC Berkeley

HOST INSTITUTION

UCB was established in 1868, and then relocated to Berkeley in 1873. The university acknowledges that it is situated on the ancestral lands of the Chochenyo-speaking Ohlone people. The university recognizes that the land holds great significance for the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe and acknowledges that each member of the Berkeley community, including myself during my teaching sabbatical, has and continues to benefit from the utilization and occupancy of this land since its founding.

According to the U.S. News & World Report's latest global rankings, UCB was recognized as the top public university and the fourth best university worldwide in 2022. UCB offers a wide array of courses through its 14 colleges and schools, with over 35,000 students enrolled in its 350 degree programs. UCB has made a concerted effort to address the issue of increasing access to higher education and has achieved notable success, with 23% of its student population comprising first-generation college students. The university continues to strive towards broadening participation in higher education and providing opportunities for underrepresented groups to pursue higher education. UCB recognizes the importance of accessibility to education and provides a range of financial aid packages and support programs to help ensure affordability: [financial aid packages](#), [financial support for housing](#), [emergency fund](#), [food assistance program](#) and [basic needs food pantry](#). These resources aim to address the various financial challenges faced by students and provide them with the support they need to continue their education and reach their full potential.



Foto: BK app and public phone

To assist in navigating campus resources, UCB provides a [mobile app](#) for students and staff. Among other resources, there are traditional public phones (which are becoming increasingly rare in modern times), as well as regular campus shuttle services and the University of California Police Department (UCPD). Additionally, the university recognizes the achievements of its esteemed members, such as Nobel Prize winners, by providing designated parking spaces, and offering specialized amenities such as bicycle parking for former Vice-President Al Gore.

The [College of Letters and Science](#) is the largest college within the university. It comprises 38 departments with over 1,500 full-time faculty members and offers 80 different major programs to its nearly 26,000 students and. The Department of Linguistics, as a part of the Arts and Humanities division within the College of Letters and Science, is located in Dwinelle Hall, the second largest building on the UCB campus. The building, which was built in 1952, provides a spacious and dynamic work environment, and I was privileged to occupy an office space in 1212 Dwinelle Hall during my sabbatical.



Foto: Dwinelle Hall and Campus map, UC Berkeley

UCB holds a significant place in the history of Linguistics as a discipline. The first American Department of Linguistics was established at the University of California in 1901, and that same year marked the beginning of courses on general linguistics. Throughout its history, the [department](#) has attracted prominent linguists, including Edward Sapir, Dell Hymes, John Gumperz, and George Lakoff. Furthermore, the department has also played a vital role in promoting the advancement of the field through the contributions of prominent [female linguists](#) such as Robin Lakoff, Deborah Tannen, and Kira Hall, who have either worked or defended their PhD theses at Berkeley Linguistics. Today the department comprises of approximately 20 faculty members, with additional support from affiliated faculty, emeriti professors, visiting scholars, and postdoctoral researchers. In 2022, the department had approximately 100 undergraduate students in the [major program](#) (in 2022 also 13 with declared Linguistics [minors](#)) and 40 students in the [graduate program](#). The expected duration for students pursuing a graduate degree in Linguistics is between five to six years. The department's research endeavors are primarily focused on Indigenous languages, Fieldwork, Language Revitalization, Phonetics and Phonology, Syntax and Semantics, and also encompasses Sociolinguistics and Language and Cognition.

The appointment of the Chair of the Department at UCB is carried out through a nomination process initiated by the department and is typically for a period of five years. The Chair holds a crucial role in overseeing and promoting the academic excellence of the department through the facilitation of effective teaching and research. The Chair also has the responsibility of overseeing the recruitment of faculty and staff, and managing the department's financial resources in an efficient manner. The [staff](#) at Berkeley Linguistics consisted of an Administrative Manager, a Graduate Student Services Advisor, an Undergraduate Student Advisor and an Information Systems Analyst.

PREPARATION AND PLANNING

In January 2021, I started planning for a teaching sabbatical at UCB, however, due to the ongoing pandemic situation, my sabbatical was postponed from the fall term of 2021 to the fall term of 2022. In early 2021, I held a virtual meeting with the Chair of the Department of Linguistics, in which we discussed the course I would be offering, and I received relevant information regarding the background of the students, as well as guidance on the process of creating a proposal for the syllabus and reading list. Subsequently, I was introduced to several colleagues via email, and the Administrative Manager at Berkeley Linguistics and the staff at the Berkeley International Office provided the necessary documents required to apply for our visas at the US Embassy in Stockholm. During the spring term of 2021, I participated in a virtual class led by one of my UCB colleagues, and one of my PhD students presented a paper in one of the [Sociolinguistics Lab seminars](#).

In June of 2021, I was forced to reconsider my plans due to ongoing pandemic-related disruptions to the visa application process. I was eventually able to obtain the necessary J1 and J2 visas in November of 2021, due in part to the assistance of the Administrative Manager at Berkeley Linguistics and the staff at the Berkeley International Office, who provided me with the necessary documents for the visa application. During this time, I also joined the Visiting Scholar and Postdoc Affairs (VSPA) mailing list, which granted me access to valuable online information sessions, such as the Relocation and Housing meeting, which I attended twice. Thanks to the guidance and support provided by the VSPA and the Chair of Berkeley Linguistics, I was able to secure suitable housing through Sabbaticalhomes and finalize a residential agreement before my arrival in Berkeley. In preparation for my trip, I also contacted the two Swedish colleagues who were scheduled to be in Berkeley during the fall term of 2022, with the intention of meeting for coffee or lunch once we had settled in.

As a visiting international scholar at UCB, I was greeted with a centralized and professionalized process for welcoming visitors. Prior to my arrival in Berkeley, I was provided with an *Arrival Guide for 2022-2023 for international students and scholars*. To ensure compliance with health and safety protocols related to COVID-19, I was required to upload my vaccine certificates and complete several mandatory online training sessions, covering topics such as IT security and sexual harassment. Upon arrival, I was able to attend New Affiliate Orientation organized by the VSPA, which provided me with valuable information and resources. At the Linguistics Department, I met with the Chair and the Administrative Manager to gain access to important information systems, including CalCentral, bcourses/Canvas, and my e-mail account, and to receive my [Cal1 card](#). These steps were essential in ensuring a smooth and seamless transition into my role as a visiting scholar at UCB.

TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

During a teaching sabbatical, the focus of my responsibilities was primarily centered on instruction rather than research, which was a unique aspect that garnered interest among my colleagues at UCB. I was granted the opportunity to develop a course within the realm of *Topics in Language and Society*, where I taught on "Studying Linguistic and Cultural Practices in Afro-Brazilian Settings". The syllabus for this course was drafted in early 2021 and was reviewed and approved by the Department. The course was designed for upper-division undergraduate students and was scheduled for three sessions per week for 15 weeks, earning a total of 3 units for the students. The course topics, readings, activities, and assignments were organized into 15 units, one for each week, and aimed to provide students with an in-depth understanding of linguistic and cultural practices in Afro-Brazilian settings.

The course "Studying Linguistic and Cultural Practices in Afro-Brazilian Settings" aimed to provide students with an overview of Afro-Latin American studies, highlighting the interconnections between language, culture, and society. Emphasis was placed on transdisciplinary methodologies to comprehend these relationships. Class discussions encompassed sociohistorical contexts and their linguistic repercussions, as well as interdisciplinary perspectives on linguistic and cultural practices as sources of knowledge. At the start of the course in August, 19 students were enrolled, with some dropping the course and others enrolling later. By December, there were 18 students enrolled and all had submitted required assignments.

The aim of the course was to offer students an in-depth examination of Afro-Latin American studies, focusing on the intersections between language, culture, and society. To effectively deliver the course content, I sought out training opportunities offered by the Center for Teaching & Learning (CTL) at UCB, including workshops on accessibility tools, course design, and grading practices. These trainings

allowed me to effectively utilize technology and pedagogical strategies to engage students in their learning experiences.

As a visiting faculty member, I was welcomed into the UCB community and given opportunities to interact with colleagues and other members of the faculty. This allowed me to build professional relationships, foster community, and receive support from my colleagues.

One challenge I faced was navigating the unfamiliar grading system at UCB. I sought assistance from a colleague and then from a consultant from the CTL to ensure that my grading practices were fair and aligned with UCB's grading scales. After grading the final assignments, I received questions from students and sought further guidance from the CTL to ensure that my grading practices were in line with the syllabus. This underscores the importance of seeking support and guidance when navigating a new academic environment.

To continually enhance the student learning experience, I availed myself of the services offered by the CLT. Specifically, I scheduled a midterm inquiry session with the students. The CLT consultants gathered feedback to gain insight into students' perceptions of the course. Based on the feedback received, we adjusted various learning activities to better align with the needs and expectations of the students. The results of this approach were evident in the positive evaluations received from the students, which were consistent with the departmental norms at Berkeley Linguistics.

OTHER ACTIVITIES DURING MY STAY

During my teaching sabbatical at UCB, I engaged in a variety of networking opportunities that allowed me to connect with fellow scholars and professionals in the field of Afro-Latin American studies. These activities included inviting colleagues from other departments to guest lecture in my course, publishing a blog text with the Center of Latin American Studies, participating in Fieldwork Forum meetings, serving as a member of a PhD qualifying exam committee, and starting a collaborative research project on the linguistic landscape at UCB. These experiences allowed me to further my knowledge and expertise in my area of study, as well as make valuable connections with others in the field.

IMPORTANT LESSONS

In November, I experienced the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the concurrent labor strikes at UCB, which highlighted the importance of flexibility in educational systems. Despite my own illness and the widespread disruptions on campus, I was able to continue delivering my course through online teaching, with no need for additional permits or changes to the syllabus. Despite the challenges posed by the strikes, my students chose to continue the course on Zoom and I was able to successfully conclude the course as planned, albeit with some modifications to the planned activities. While it was unfortunate that I was unable to meet my colleagues in person before departing from Berkeley, the experience underscored the adaptability of instructional methods in the face of unexpected circumstances.

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE HOST AND THE HOME INSTITUTION

The comparison of the organizational structures and central support offered at SU and UCB revealed both similarities and differences. At UCB, I had access to a range of pedagogical trainings and support from the CLT, which serves a similar purpose as the Center for Excellence in University Teaching (CEUL) at SU. In my department at SU, I serve as a contact person for the central research data team. During my time at UCB, I learned about a similar team in collaboration with the university libraries and

shared this information, as well as information about the work with excellence in teaching and research ethics, with my colleagues at SU. This exchange of information was appreciated at SU because it provided insights into how support activities are organized at a top-ranked university like UCB, allowing my colleagues to reflect on the organization of such activities at my home institution.

I have the impression that UCB has a larger central support team than SU, but lacks established contact networks with individual departments, which are well established at SU. Through my exchange, I also shared relevant information with the Faculty of Humanities at SU, including an event organized by the Deans of the College of Letters and Science and UCB's Strategic Plan. Additionally, I engaged in discussions with the former chair of the Berkeley Linguistics department to gain a deeper understanding of the decision-making processes, recruitment practices, and graduate programs. The outcome of these interactions suggests that while some aspects of university operations may differ between the two institutions, others are managed in similar ways.

The comparison between my home institution and my host institution reveals notable disparities in terms of physical resources and organizational structure. One difference is that UCB owns its own buildings, whereas SU faces challenges associated with market-priced rents in rented facilities. Additionally, Berkeley Linguistics adopts a recruitment strategy that prioritizes faculty and graduate student hires from other universities, as well as advising its own students to pursue graduate programs and academic positions elsewhere, with the aim of fostering academic cross-pollination.

Culturally, there were differences in opportunities for informal interactions with colleagues. In contrast to the equipped pantries available at SU, UCB does not offer such facilities for colleagues to gather and share ideas during informal discussions. My Swedish colleagues and I believed that such spaces help create creative research environments. At UCB we realized that there are creative and excellent environments without those facilities. However, the three of us appreciated the common socializing spaces at our home institutions, where we meet the colleagues we know well, but also engage in discussions with colleagues who we would not meet outside these facilities.

Overall, the differences and similarities between SU and UCB provide valuable insights into the various aspects of academic environments, including physical resources, organizational structures, and cultural practices, and highlight the significance of considering such factors in shaping creative and innovative research environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although UCB is supposed to be a highly decentralized university, just like SU, I noticed the highly streamlined processes for accessing and utilizing resources and services offered by the central support functions at UCB. These centralized functions seem to have a clear mandate and well-defined goals, as well as a robust infrastructure in place to fulfill their roles effectively. This is in stark contrast to the situation at SU, where the availability of support services can be fragmented and somewhat disorganized. By considering UCB's approach to central support, SU can potentially improve its own administrative management, streamline access to resources, and enhance the support provided to its students, faculty, and staff.

ACTION PLAN: TOPICS TO ADDRESS AND, IF POSSIBLE, INTRODUCE IN MY HOME INSTITUTION

My teaching sabbatical provided me with numerous insights into ways in which administrative management and support functions can be improved at my home institution. During my stay, I observed several highly effective centralized support systems in place, which offer specialized assistance to students, faculty, and staff. This approach has significantly reduced administrative tasks at the department level, enabling staff members to concentrate on delivering specialized support to students.

One aspect that I found particularly noteworthy was the way course distribution was managed at UCB. The faculty organized their teaching load without being restricted by a specific number of teaching hours, and professors were responsible for a certain number of courses in their areas each year, based on their position. This is a well-organized system that eliminates unnecessary administrative tasks and allows for the allocation of resources towards teaching and research.

In addition, I believe that my department could benefit from revitalizing its research environment by introducing a system of colloquia and research groups. Replacing traditional higher seminars with one or two colloquia open to the entire department each term, followed by a socializing event, could bring about a more engaging and inspiring environment for faculty and graduate students alike. Similarly, organizing faculty and graduate students into research groups with a rotating system and in collaboration with other departments could enable graduate students to lead meetings every 2 weeks, providing them with opportunities to set the agenda and share their research findings. This approach was successful at Berkeley Linguistics, where I was impressed by the level of motivation and engagement demonstrated by graduate students during regular meetings and colloquia.

In conclusion, my visit to UCB has, among many other things, taught me the importance of centralizing support functions and reducing administrative tasks at the department level to improve the quality of teaching and research. I am hopeful that my observations will lead to positive changes at my home institution and enhance the learning experiences of our students.