



JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY

Teaching Sabbatical 2022

Ohio State University

Final report

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Introducing host

The Ohio State University (OSU) is a land grant university established in the 1870ies. These land grant universities received land thru the Morrill Act of 1862, signed by Abraham Lincoln. These land grants or “land-grab” universities are state-run universities. The heritage, founded through stealing, is problematic for these universities, and they try to come to terms with it.

OSU is a public university, as most land-grant universities are. Being a public university implies they are to provide higher education to the state they are allocated to. Practically that also means that it is “cheaper” for students from Ohio to attend OSU than it is for students elsewhere. Staff and faculty working at the university also get a reduced fee for their children to attend OSU; they pay only half the Ohio fare. OSU is also a huge university with all educational tracks, so the campus is big and versatile. Despite being a public university, it is much like a company, including the international office and the decisions made there.



Department of psychology

Psychology has been on campus for 110 years and is ranked #12 on the 2019 Shanghai rating. It has at least 50 professors and, of course, other teachers and staff.



It has nine different tracks, with many undergraduate and graduate students. Psychology is also essential in many other majors, with 165 doctoral students in the different psychology tracks. On campus, it needs two buildings: the psychology building and Lazenby hall. The track focusing on developmental disabilities is located at the Nisonger centre. Getting a sense of the entire psychology department is, therefore, tricky.

Preparations and planning

The application is the first step of the process. The first step of the process, ending up with me going to Ohio, started with the thought that I might want to do something else while our international master's program is re-organizing. The notice in the email system of the application process for the teaching sabbatical made me decide to start writing and then applying. Conduct the interview and get the notification of acceptance.

Getting early in contact with and getting responses from the contact persons is important! When receiving the acceptance note, the university, department and contact persons. It is essential to establish contact early, to make sure that they do what they are supposed to do on their part. I did this shortly after receiving the acceptance, but it took time to get started from the Host University. I never got the administrative contact person to be on board. I found other persons supporting me but not the original administrative contact person; this delayed my application for ds2019, which would delay my J-1. The need to start this process is usually already in January, and no later than February didn't start until March. I did not understand the lack of response and no additional information from the international office or my host department that something was at fault until then. With support from the academic contact person and the Dean of the psychological department, their HR person started supporting me. But this delay contributed to me getting my J-1 just in time for travel. The end of travel restrictions to the US probably also contributed to this.

Insurance may not be a major topic, but it is for us going to OSU. It is also an issue of policy both for the USA and Sweden. Being on leave makes it difficult for your home university to get extended insurance; the ex-pat insurance is also expensive, which might create an issue. On the other hand, going to OSU also include the fact that they require that you have their insurance. You are ending up with two insurances. Just getting them paid is not the end of this preparation. You will also need to identify how this insurance will be acknowledged in the USA; this takes time. I started working with this in March but only had it all

paid in July, and I had everything fixed in October for going to the doctor if I needed more than emergency care.

The Planning trip is important

A planning trip is important for several reasons. The campus had been closed until March, and much was still closed when arriving the first week of April. Some aspects of this would also continue throughout the Fall. For example, I had plans to be more at their Nisonger centre, but given the restrictions, this was primarily done in zoom. This week, I had the opportunity to have personal meetings with people and make more specific arrangements. These personal meetings supported me in getting support with practical aspects of the travel.

I also got a sense of the city; I walked, when possible, took the bus, to see the functionality. There are webpages not functional from Sweden, such as the BMV, so understanding what would be needed to obtain a drivers license, that type of planning was not possible from Sweden.

Housing is not easy to maneuver, can get a gamble. I also realized that when asking about recommendations where to live, this usually ended up in high end areas or areas needing a car to commute. Most people have their children in private schools, however, not all. Trying to maneuver what is doable, financially practically was difficult, and you were left much alone in this. At the same time previous fellowships recommendations either did not exist anymore or were already occupied due to the increased number of international visitors, there were for example three from STINT at OSU at the same time, and the pattern was similar for other programs. The mantra from international office was that you need to solve this yourself, and most information given could have been more useful for me. So, in the end I had to gamble, and it turned out OK. However, this did create unnecessary uncertainties.

I realized later that while the school system is strictly geographically enforced, when having immigrating children, not all schools have ESL (English second

language learners), so when enrolling the children, they moved them to these schools. For my son that ended up in a school with upper middle-class children, but my daughter ended up in a class primarily with Hispanic and immigrating children.

In the end, what mattered the most with the planning trip was being able to really increase the speed of the Ds2019 process through face-to-face meetings and leaving my prints at the border control. Given the surge of people applying at the embassy in Stockholm, my fingerprints and previous trips enabled me to waive my interview and, therefore, actually be able to receive my J-1 in time. Only buy your plane tickets after receiving your J-1.

Prepare payment options. Banking systems, data security is not synced between US and Europe, and this can pose problems, as it did for me, at least at the beginning. Conversations with the bank. If needing to pay for your housing might pose a problem. In what way do they want to get paid? Find a way that works with your bank. There are limits to how much cash you can withdraw each week and each month. Buying things online does not work; at least for me, Paypal helped out. You can add funds to your Paypal account and pay using that, but sometimes even that is not easy. So plan and discuss your plan with your bank.

Traveling with kids

This really needs its own preparations. Depending on the municipality you live in and the state you are going to these preparations differ.

Children in Sweden have compulsory school and American schools aren't following the Swedish curricula. Leaving Sweden and keeping their school placement in Sweden, you need to get the municipalities on board, getting an exemption from the board of education in the municipality. If placement is not of concern, you can move. If your move abroad is not planned to extend 12 months, you can keep your address. So, you move and move back. I did not

know this when starting, and it took time for me to actually find this information and know what to do.

Vaccinations for enrolling in school. US have in most part, forced vaccinations for enrolling in school. Many times, these align with the Swedish ones. There are some exemptions, chicken pox, probably is the major difference, and hepatitis A and B might be depending on where you live and where you are going. You will need to translate your children's vaccination card and get the proper signatures for this. This takes time.

There are usually programs, like public health programs, serving uninsured children or you can pay for vaccinations for the children when in US. That information was not accessible from Sweden, so I stressed a lot concerning vaccinations of children. When it comes to the children's (J-2) tuberculosis testing, this can easily be done at several pharmacies and stuff, but the information is not so readily available if you do not know what to look for.

To *enroll* children in school, an old fashion type of contract is needed. Renting long-term using for example Air BnB would need an additional contract to enroll children in school. Make sure that the host you are renting from are comfortable with this.

When arriving

Depending on your time in advance, you will need to do certain things when arriving, such as accessing the system, reporting to the international office, and getting accustomed to campus, stores, etc. Acclimatizing the context will take some time. I had a short period, just a week, to handle these things due to receiving the J-1 late. Reporting the Syllabus in the system, registering information in their learning platform, and so on need to be done that week before school starts. So not needing to do everything at once is good.

Tasks and responsibilities

Creating course

Creating courses is not the same in the US as in Sweden, and creating your course is more similar to your course plan than your course syllabus. You will receive the number of lectures and the date and class, which are fixed. So you know the number of lectures prior to school starting.

That way, you can plan your courses. If you like me to get a course with two to three weekly lessons and assignments to grade and give feedback on, your days are pretty full, given that it is a new course. So, the more planning and reading you can do before the course start, the more time you will have for other things.

Teaching

Combining an American and a Swedish perspective using that cultural aspect in your classroom is fun and appreciated by the students; they will have signed up for this class a bit to get that experience.

Something that I realized right away was their anxiety over grades. They are used to the enforced presence in class, and you could give points for attending classes. I felt that from my Swedish perspective, to allow for a relationship to form to create trust, I needed to remove some of these penalties for not attending, as many students said later on in the reflection of the class, that it became fairer and easier to focus on teaching.

I had a class in developmental psychology, 31 students honours. They had two weekly lessons, and I planned a combination of lessons and discussions. For examinations, they had three quizzes to measure their understanding of basic terms and seven reflections regarding how they interpreted specific topics during their lifespan. Such as sexual identity. They also had group discussions,

giving credit. So I had to prepare for three multiple-response tests and seven reflections with feedback, and a total of 25 lessons.



The classes are shorter without brakes, it is only 75 minutes so you can choose what to do during these sessions.

Examination and grading

Examinations and grading differ in the US and Sweden. The teacher has more freedom to plan, deliver and grade and therefore becomes more important to differentiate between classes. Also, students only have one attempt, not three, as it is in Sweden. As most things should translate into points and the percentages corresponding to different grades, this is something that the students keep track of. Keeping these up to date, especially when different tasks give different credits, might create confusion.

The American system does not have F or U like the Swedish system. So, D to E is equivalent to our F. Therefore, the grades become much more important than us, including failure; passing a course in Sweden indicates an effort, and this is not necessary for the State; you can be present and get a D or an E. The difference in grading tradition is essential to communicate when having international students. After being in the states, the Failure grade is necessary

when you can retake the exam. However, you can only have it with the possibility to re-exam.

Research environments and networking

Creating opportunities to meet different research environments could have been better supported by the host department. It was up to me to make the suggestions and find the situation. Even if you scan the homepage, it is hard to know what is out there. The host department could have better prepared this part. If I redo this, I would probably ask for that during my planning visit if they could identify different contact persons and areas for meeting people.

At OSU psychology, they did have many presentations and short lessons held by different researchers, and I also held one of these for others. I also participated in a research environment and their meeting to see how they discussed and planned research and how to include undergraduate, graduate students and PhD students in different projects. How lab environment looked in psychology and at the Nilsonger centre, an interdisciplinary centre focusing on children with intellectual disabilities.

Lessons learn and reflections

I learned several things during this, and there are things to bring forward regarding this as well; I will therefore divide lessons learned into pre-phase, i.e., planning, and during-phase, i.e., being there.

Planning

Not only plan for the three months needed for the J-1 but also calculate the two months needed for the ds2019, which means that getting all papers takes five months. It is stressful not getting this in time; without it, it might not be easy to enjoy your vacation before travelling or use the month prior to starting your J-1 to travel the states.

Discuss with your home department the *necessity of time*, both time for the planning trip and for planning the trip. If you do not get allocated time, despite this is not in the funding, it will be much extra work, and it will stress you out.

If bringing children, start communicating with schools and health care early. Start talking with the school nurse regarding vaccinations and whether they have English templates. Talk to your health centre regarding chicken pox, and ask for lab tests to prove they are immune. If not, the possibility of vaccination. Moreover, talk to the school principal and the head of the school in the municipality; they might not be as positive as you want them to be.

Plan where to live and talk to the county you are planning to live in and what schools enrol children from abroad; they might have different solutions. However, remember that this is just one semester, so if the kids are not enrolled in the best school available, they still learn. Remember that a city can consist of different counties. Include transportation in planning; you cannot assume that your Swedish driver's license is valid, as you are not a tourist.

Being there

It is hard to know what is expected before being there when planning a syllabus, but you will have time. However, make a draft and plan as much as possible, as it will be hectic upon arrival.

One thing I should have asked for during my planning trip was to shadow a teacher for a day. Also, try meeting as many as possible, so they get a personal experience of you. Students have different expectations, and the American system differs from the Swedish one.

You need to create your visit. So make sure to be a part of email lists, and look at notice boards. Try to network if possible; many situations you will stumble upon. You cannot know what you did know that you did not know.

Home again

Supporting international visitors at home, trying to be more supportive, if not practical, so informational and social. Trying to understand what information we have that might not be accessible from another country or that we know based on culture or history. Moreover, trying to create a schedule for social involvement.

Facilitating a more structured list of things to solve and how others solve it, rather than playing “go fishing” by contacting people previously being there or finding people who have relatives or friends who have fresh and relevant experiences, especially after the Pandemic. The International Office at our universities could also be more of faculty support regarding insurance, vaccinations, and things needing to be done in Sweden for leaving short term abroad.

Course development. Some aspects can be used; their system of combining a more practical Dewey philosophy with more behavioural psychology with many early rewards and feedback differs from the university education I am used to. However, in different aspects, this can be combined with the Swedish to enhance the educational situation—something to work forward with.

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