

# Final Report

## STINT Teaching Sabbatical



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## Background

I have a sincere interest related to pedagogics and administration in higher education. This includes everything from carrying out a single lecture within a single course, to the administration of courses, programs, and faculties as well as the rules and regulations regarding all these aspects. I have over the years gained some knowledge about how this is conducted in “my university”, Jönköping University, but I was eager to experience it in a different context.

Occupational Therapy (OT) is my focus, I especially wanted to gain insight into how OT is taught in a different context as well as how the education and its administration is carried out there. I thus applied to the Ohio State University (OSU) in Columbus Ohio. Their division of occupational therapy and its entry level clinical doctorate program in Occupational Therapy (OTD) is highly ranked. I also knew a little about some of the differences between the OT education in Sweden and at the OSU, such as their requirement of having an undergraduate degree before beginning the program and I was curious to learn more and gain a fuller insight.

## Preparation and planning

I was very happy when I received the decision that I had been accepted for the STINT Teaching Sabbatical (TS) at OSU, just a couple of days before Christmas in 2020. I immediately emailed the contacts I had obtained from STINT to begin the “journey” and received very positive replies almost instantly. This journey took longer than anticipated as this was during the pandemic. Briefly, I received the scholarship for a stay during the autumn 2021, and everything was planned for that semester (including all the paperwork) until we realized that it was not possible to go. We then planned for the spring semester in 2022 until also that turned out to be impossible and thereafter, we planned for autumn 2022 and “third time lucky”, the visit came about. However, although it quite suddenly became possible to make the traditional visit in spring 2022 from the perspective of the pandemic regulations, it was not possible for us due to other obligations.

Everything thus had to be conducted remotely. In retrospective, it was an advantage that only my husband would join me as our sons in their twenties, wanted to stay in Sweden, taking care of our apartment and cat. Both my husband’s employer and mine were also very supportive, which enabled us to be flexible. Regarding housing, I knew that it is not easy to find a furnished apartment in Columbus that was quite close to the campus, which is what we wanted as we were not planning to have a car. Luckily, I had a former STINT fellow colleague who could give some practical advice. It ended up in me contacting the lessor my colleague had rented from. The apartment was situated about 10-20 minutes’ walk to the campus depending on whether I walked to the building I was teaching in or the building where I had my office. We liked it a great deal.



The procedure regarding a Visa application was also a long and time-consuming experience. I had heard about this before and it was true. However, it probably became more time-consuming than in general since we had to go through the visa application process three times. However, the experience of the TS sabbatical makes every effort worth it.

The preparation for my teaching suffered somewhat from the long timespan and uncertainty about whether I could go or not. I had several online meetings with the faculty over the one and half year period between receiving the decision and until I arrived. I presented my competence and potential contributions in these meetings. The faculty were very accommodating but a final decision on what I should teach was not reached until I arrived.

### **Tasks and responsibilities**

I knew that I would prefer co-teaching to preparing and “running my own course” as I wanted to gain insight into the education abroad. I suspected that if I planned and carried out a course myself, it would end up similar to how it was at home and the teaching would not have given me any new experiences. In retrospective, I think this is true, including also that I now realize that I was not prepared for the differences between our educations although they relate to the same profession (or probably just because of that). Moreover, with the experience I gained in Columbus, I do not think it would have been an option to construct and carry out my own course even if I had wanted to, as the OTD program and its courses are determined a long time beforehand in the same way as our education in Sweden.

There was especially one course, that both suited my interest and competence well in the OTD program. It is a 2-credit course given in the first year of the education. Two credits means that the students had 2 hours per week in class and we were meeting every Monday morning. I was teaching it with the faculty that had taught it the previous years. However, the course was conducted a little differently since that teacher had moved to another part of the country. So, I was the one who met the students physically while she participated via Zoom. We both always attended but depending on the course content, it varied who was the most active and responsible for preparing the Power Points and other planning. We planned and conducted together to the same extent on about half of the occasions, while it was about 50/50 each in the other half in terms of who was responsible depending on who had the most experience of the topic at hand.

The classes at OSU consisted of more lecturing in comparison to my education in Sweden. However, I also added some more discussions than had previously been held, which was considered positive. I also appreciated co-teaching because my expertise, as well as the Swedish OT education, has a slightly different focus than the OT education in the US. The chosen arrangement made it possible for me to introduce some more of “my” perspective and content (which had been a desire when discussing the course) while still making sure that the teaching met all the requirements.



My teaching obligations were limited to this course, and I allowed it to take a lot of my time. Besides lecturing I had office hours twice a week. Most weeks the other teacher and I also had Zoom meetings to discuss and this was a good opportunity to learn more and discuss. Most weeks I also searched for additional articles of relevance to introduce for the students and discuss with them. Finally, I participated in the planning and/or grading of their assignments to various extent depending on which.

Altogether I gained a really good sense of the course and of how the education is carried out during the semester. Beside this course, the only other task that I was to take part in according to the division (which was something that I wanted) was to participate in the division meetings, held most weeks. It was either meetings for all staff and faculties or faculty meetings focusing their forthcoming renewal of their accreditation conducted by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE).

### **Activities during the Teaching Sabbatical**

The fact that this was the semester for the OTD program's reaccreditation was fortunate as it provided me with a greater insight into the OTD education. In simple terms, the reaccreditation is very similar to the process of being evaluated by the Swedish Higher Education Authority (Universitetskanslerämbetet, UKÄ) in Sweden and takes place on a regular basis. I had individual meetings with those faculty who had most responsibility for it in order to understand this process more fully. I also read documents related to the procedure as well as the (many) different criteria that are placed on occupational therapy educations.

I was thus also able to gain a greater understanding of the difference between (US) occupational therapy programs at master level and at clinical doctorate level, such as that at the OSU. Furthermore, I came to understand some of the differences between occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants (OTA) as well as the different levels of education for the latter. Finally, I read many documents related to the regulations of the education at the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, which gave me greater understanding. Another administrative change that I had the opportunity to learn more about was their procedure for recruitment and, for example, I took part in presentations from applicants to a position.

To better understand the OTD program, I also wanted to experience it. I had access to the full schedule of the fall semester for the three cohorts of students. So, I regularly approached the responsible faculty for various courses in the beginning and asked whether I could participate in some of their lectures. All were very positive, and I was informed that I was welcome e.g., to "hang around" or "come and go as I wanted". I thus participated in some of their classes or labs almost every week. I experienced many of their courses to a varying extent. Apart from practical considerations, my choice was based on two different kinds of interest from my side; a lack of sufficient knowledge about the topic or being really interested in it.

My “active approach” also resulted in faculties informing me when they thought that something “especially interesting” was going to take place in their courses, e.g., larger simulations. Further, as their Capstone was one of my interests, I followed the process of planning for this during several lectures as the actual carrying out takes place during the spring.

I also took part in several “special occasions” at the school such as the introduction day when the semester began, the white coat ceremony (when new students are given white coats as a sign of them being students in the program, with relatives, speeches etc.) and an “open house” for potential new students. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to take part (also practically) on the two “Candidates Days” for OTD in December. These are days when applicants are interviewed in multiple ways and get further information about the OSU and its education.

Moreover, I had informal meetings with several faculty members regarding their work and focus and also had a few with interested students. I was also increasingly engaged in informal discussions and/or questions with many OT students which altogether, besides being great fun, also contributed a lot to my understanding of the program, their experiences as well as to the great engagement students show in relation to various occasions when they volunteer.

Finally, at the latter part of my stay, I had the opportunity of presenting to students as well as faculties (on different occasions) about the similarities and differences between our OT education and theirs, as well as presenting my research. I am very happy that I did this so late in my stay because in the beginning I was not sufficiently aware of the differences in focus and the terminology. This was an unexpected experience for me, but very useful for the future as I now understand occupational therapy in the US more fully. By having met several people and participating throughout the different cohorts and their education, I was better prepared to speak about these topics at a later date in a way that was more easily understandable for them.

In summary, I am very pleased with how my stay turned out and I would not have wanted it in another way as the freedom I had allowed me to make my own schedule to a large extent and to prioritize in relation to my interests. I also took part in some of the pedagogic sessions at the university as well as reading books about pedagogy, recommended by faculty. My situation also allowed me time to think and reflect, which I really enjoyed. Partly also because these constantly new experiences, reflections and comparisons with my home institution made me more tired than I expected to be.

## **Important lessons**

The constant reflections from being in a similar yet different environment, as the provision of the same education in different countries implied, was a little like constantly mirroring the two educations and how they are carried out in relation to each other. By seeing how things were done at OSU, I also more clearly saw how they are done at home. This really contributed to one aim I had with the visit, anticipating that I would probably see more alternatives of “doing the right thing”. It became even clearer to me that the theoretical mindset I had about this was true and that it was not possible for me to say that one way is preferable to another per se.

My insight was more of a clearer view about what we do at home, the implicit perspectives that we take to the extent that we are not aware of, and how we perhaps can blend some of the things we usually do with some of the things conducted at OSU. Moreover, I experienced that the academic freedom that faculties have, here and at home, are similar in extent but different regarding the content. However, I realized that there is also freedom within what I previously considered to be boundaries. For example, all lectures in a course at OSU are normally conducted on the same weekday, time and place while in Jönköping we have the freedom to decide time and place. Before coming here and experiencing how much the teacher makes out of this “strict schedule” and the variations within these “boundaries” opened my eyes in relation “time slots” for scheduling (in order to use the premises) and I am now much more open to that.

Another lesson is the societal impact on our education and potential research. I was aware of the different system in the US and Sweden beforehand, but I now more fully realize that this is both bigger and smaller than I thought. Hearing constant questions based on the system e.g., related to health care that we do not have at home, has made me reflect a lot. I have also asked faculties a lot as well as tried to read and understand even more. This could be something for another sabbatical with another focus.

## **Comparison between the host and the home institution in Sweden**

When I spoke about similarities and differences between “here and there” I ended up using the made-up word “simdiffilarities” because I feel that they sometimes are intertwined. When reading about our program, which ends with a bachelor exam and the program at OSU, which requires such an exam for entry, the differences seem much bigger than they actually “feel” when being there. Both students, faculties and the various topics and issues I heard about seemed to a great extent to be as they are “at home”. I read a lot about both the “total” educational system in Sweden and the US and now know both somewhat better.

The carrying out of the programs also practically seems as two different pathways to the same destination (or at least similar); for instance, in Jönköping, we mostly run one course at a time while at OSU, the students do them in parallel. I do not consider one as better than the other, they both come with pros and cons, and I think students vary in what they believe would be their best option.

Finally, the level of student engagement at OSU is impressive. It seems like the students take a lot of pride in being involved in various “issues” and that the faculty recognize this and also encourage and “use” the students’ engagement in a good way. I experienced engagement in different organizations, research, collaborations as well as participating in the different kinds of events held by the division or by student organizations themselves. Their engagement is massive, e.g., on Candidates’ day there was about 20% of the current OTD students volunteering in various roles (registration, tour guides, Information etc.) and they conducted this in a very professional and friendly way. At the same time, they expressed that they found it fun and valuable despite it also being the time for their “finals” (i.e., assignments for each of their courses for the semester).

## Recommendations

There are several recommendations I would like to make to future STINT TS sabbaticals coming to Columbus. First, prepare for extensive time trying to understand the different procedures related to applying for visa etc. There are multiple steps and although the information is good and people very supportive when contacting them (as I guess everyone will end up doing at some point) it is time consuming. An absolute recommendation is also to prepare to spend one day conducting the online application to the embassy and to make sure that everyone who is to be going, such as a spouse, is also available that day since the information needed is immense.

Regarding housing in Columbus, if walking distance is of importance, I recommend future fellows to check which buildings they should be in and where they are situated. The campus is almost too large to understand, with distances of several kilometers. We lived in walking distance, without a car, and as Columbus also is rather flat, especially compared to Jönköping, we cycled a lot but also used public transport. All this was better than we expected but it is obvious that having a car is the normal alternative for most who have the opportunities. Public transport is quite good, and you can see much of central Columbus even if it takes a while. There are also long-distance buses from the city. The real difference to home is that there is no possibility of travelling by bus outside the city, such as to a village nearby.



A planning visit might have made things clearer to me at an earlier point and if it is important to have clarifications beforehand, I definitely recommend a visit. Moreover, then I think it is wise to try to schedule meetings during the planning visit beforehand (i.e., before leaving Sweden). The faculty are equally occupied in teaching and various meetings as faculty in Sweden.

I chose to approach faculties to ask about participating etc. and I encourage not being too shy for that. Everyone at my department was really very nice, polite, and welcoming but it is also obvious that they are very busy. As teaching takes place in different buildings there are not always many faculties in the offices.

Moreover, as there are no social meetings on a regular basis such as the Swedish fika (coffee break) or eating lunch together in a common lunchroom, there are not that many options to meet faculty “just to chat”. I thus see a potential a risk of being “left alone” a little if one is too shy and I strongly encourage future fellows to prepare for taking charge of your stay, approach faculty, ask about their interest and education, talk about your interests etc. while also recognizing their full schedule. When I did that, I was never met with anything else than friendship.



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

I already know that I will speak with my department at home regarding opportunities to blend our habits regarding teaching, pedagogics and course scheduling and content as well staffing with some of the customs I learnt from my stay. I will probably also have discussions on more levels at our university.

Moreover, I will probably more openly recognize both the freedom that we already have as well as something that we can be more aware of when it comes to teaching, learning and pedagogics. Something else that I reflect on a lot, concerns student engagement and how to increase this at my home institution.

Finally, I have already began discussions regarding continued educational collaborations between “here and there” and I assume that this might develop after I have “returned to normal” again and getting new “post STINT” reflections from that perspective.



## Acknowledgment

I want to thank “everyone” who I met (physically or by email) during my long preparation for and during my stay at the OSU! Especially, I want to thank the faculty and staff at the division of occupational therapy - altogether you made it a very pleasurable and thought-provoking experience.

Also, I want to thank the STINT foundation for this opportunity! Apart from it meeting my high expectations it also resulted in me feeling a renewed joy in relation to my working situation at home which I did not expect to experience since I was not dissatisfied before.

Moreover, I am specifically grateful for the generosity in this funding that allows family to take part. Having the opportunity to experience Columbus together with my husband contributed greatly to the depth and quality of the overall experience of being in a totally new city for an extended period of time.



In summary, my stay has resulted in me being both happier and highly motivated to rejoin my work in Sweden and to add some of my new inspiration and experiences to my work and sharing them with others.

I highly encourage others to take on this journey that a STINT teaching sabbatical implies!