

Report on the 2005 STINT visit to Smith College



A rare conjunction of my three most important benefactors: Professor Sheldon Rothblatt, Associate Dean of the Faculty Debbie Cottrell and Lecturer Gretchen Schneider 2005-09-27 outside Smith College hall.

The private university/college is certainly an appealing concept, regarded the results achieved in research and well educated graduates. Also viewed from inside it is interesting, a community formed by donors with various specific interests, to be realized by dedicated professors and students striving to meet the expectations as well as pursuing their individual interests and talents. The process of self-governance, requiring much commitment of the college faculty, is very different from a state-run university, where the link of command is more evident. In the following I will give some brief views and recommendations for the reception of future stipends, followed by a short report on my stay.

The STINT scholarship provides a generous platform for embedding a visitor into an American Liberal Arts College. The reconnaissance trip undertaken half a year in advance, is very useful for discussing the scholarly field and forms of participation. Ideally it should be followed by a dialogue gradually identifying what specific teaching tasks would be assigned to the visiting scholar. For the semester-long visit to work well, three tiers of the college should be engaged: the host faculty person, the department and the college through the *Visiting scholars committee*.

The most intense task has the host who ideally is an academic within the same field as the visitor, or if not, seriously interested in what the visitor has to contribute. In order to relieve the host the burden of the sole counterpart, faculty members within the department or program could engage themselves. For example, the visitor could be invited to visit and listen to certain classes and after such a visit be invited to give a lecture for that group of students. In my case Lecturer Gretchen Schneider opened her two classes to me, which was a great experience for me and gave a lot of opportunities to participate in advising and some lecturing. She alone had to answer to almost all my questions. However I lacked the oversight to contribute to the content planning, which might not have been expected either. I was of course rather frustrated to feel of little use, possibly deemed obsolete, especially as other teachers seemed overburdened with teaching work. My main recommendation here is that Smith thoroughly works out a scheme with the visitor for

participation in education. On the other hand I must admit that it took me some time to adjust to the foreign language and culture as well as preparing lectures, so my advice is that the teaching assignment should not be too heavy. At the outset I presented a list of possible lectures and got a rather vague answer on this. Later I realized that a studio course has few lectures and much more of assisted learning, which made my contribution fruitful in another way. The fact that students enter a course with very different previous knowledge and skills makes the instruction more personalized and the results more diverse than I am used to in larger classes. The college is definitely a good place for a searching mind. Gretchen invited a lot of professionals and citizens from the Northampton community, which gave me and the students a much broader insight into the planning debate. I never got access to the electronic Bannerweb and students names, but I dropped my efforts on this, partly because I enjoyed the relief of not having to administer a course, but also out of respect for the main teacher. I bought the advised textbooks and understand that the vast number of US college students create a market for very instructive and basic introductions in professional and academic subjects. Books of this sort are seldom produced in Sweden, where the readership is small. Also, our academia focus on research, as teaching gives little merit.

Individual members of the Smith community made cordial invitations to me which I very much appreciated. It is very good to have the opportunity to check one's impressions with a trustworthy colleague and I used this as much as possible, foremost with my host Gretchen who devoted a lot of her precious time to me, but also with others. I am especially thankful to Prof. Em. Peter and Hedy Rose whom introduced me to Smith College and saw me off the last day. In between we shared a lot of time and had many fruitful discussions.

I was given a good office room and the basic amenities computer, network access and library card were very rapidly given to me which I used right away. I've exchanged a lot of emails back home to family, friends and colleagues. I also have a lot of praise to the *Visiting scholars committee* and the *Provost's office* for the arrangements of introducing new faculty and the series of teaching luncheons. Although these discussions seldom touched the studio arts, it was very interesting for me, and evidently others, to participate. The series of lunch talks on Tuesdays and Thursdays also is a great way to spread good practices and introduce various subjects to colleagues. I am generally impressed by the elegant ways meetings were arranged, the swift response by staff to all enquiries, the respectful dialogue between faculty and students and the cordial reception of newcomers.



Transient graffiti on campus footpaths voice opinions and announce temporary events.

My wife early on decided to visit me for the full month of October, anticipating better than myself that I would feel lonely. We spent the recess in Manhattan and two weekends in Boston. Early on I made weekend tours to the hills, Tanglewood and Cape Ann. At the end of my stay I became less interested in making explorative journeys on my own. The combination of my living alone and not having a heavy workload gave some unexpected psychological effects. I was more prone to interview people and to go out for short cultural, intellectual and social diversions. I wrote more, almost parallel in a diary and as emails. I needed more reassurance from colleagues. I never arranged my apartment to be suitable for inviting visitors.

As I now return to my University College there are some expectations to be met of enlightenment and widened knowledge. Maybe people want to hear what *the next thing* in America is, as it is commonly regarded as the breeding ground for new inventions. I hope to be allowed to present my impressions in various ways. I certainly have had a remarkable experience in America, at Smith College, in Northampton. These three concepts are well intertwined in my mind, which somehow is a sign of a full bodied experience. America, increasingly disparate and diverse, Smith being refined and exclusive although earnestly striving to be, with a typical Swedish term, *socially responsible*, and Northampton so beloved and cherished by its citizens, a sort of *Paradise* as our Jenny said. I am so grateful to all new friends I've met this fall, and the end-of-semester party gave me a fine opportunity to say goodbye to many of them. I also said farewell to our students on a party hosted by Gretchen Schneider.

Details on the STINT scholarship 2005 to Smith College



Final review of ARS 386 planning task with invited guest critics.

I visited Smith College, Northampton MA during 20/8 – 17/12 2005 and partook in two Architecture courses headed by Lecturer Gretchen Schneider. The first was **Introduction to Architecture: Site and Space** with 18 students, consisting mainly of sophomores. The second was **Topics in Architecture** with 16 students consisting mainly of seniors. Gretchen discussed her proposed exercises with me, and I sometimes gave advice in formulations and arranging reviews. The studio times were three hours, two times a week, two courses and 14 weeks which in total makes 168 hours. In the studio I gave advice to individual students, participated in

discussions, gave critic at reviews and held some lectures. The topics for lectures and their audiences were:

- Streets and squares of Copenhagen (386)
- Form, scale and proportions (283 + Landscape studies)
- Design for streets and squares (283)
- Master plan studies of Copenhagen (386)
- Hammarby sjöstad waterfront development (386)
- Malmö Comprehensive plan (386 and public lecture)
- European spatial planning (information for all interested students)
- Copenhagen contemporary architecture (286 and 386)

Finally I gave a presentation for 25 faculty and students on **Urban planning in the context of a Liberal Arts college**, supplemented with some feedback on my stay.



Architects Kirin Makker and Gretchen Schneider presenting their entry to a local competition for a public arts installation.

Course descriptions below derived from <http://www.smith.edu/catalogue/>

283 Introduction to Architecture: Site and Space

How are decisions about the built environment made? What might the future be? This hands-on course introduces students to architectural design. Broad discussions include landscape, urban, and architectural contexts, while small-scale projects lead students through a full design process, from site observation and analysis to design development and presentation. At least one project will be designed, constructed, and experienced full scale, in its intended site. Prerequisite: one art history course at the 100 level. Enrollment limited to 24. **4 credits**

386 Topics in Architecture

This course uses the methods of the architecture studio to explore particular themes in the built environment, with a strong emphasis on interdisciplinary work.
Topic for 2005: Stitches and Seams; the Architecture of Edges and Connections. This advanced architecture studio will focus on public spaces of the contemporary built environment, with particular emphasis on how they connect to their surrounding cities and neighborhoods. Through readings, drawings, models, discussions, and site visits we will

examine existing and propose new designs for public spaces of our everyday world. Consideration will include not only parks and campus lawns but also sidewalks and sprawl. What is "designed" public space today? What do we drive, bike, or walk through, but don't notice? Why? How might these places be better?

Prerequisites: ARS 163, 283, 285, and two art history courses, or permission of the instructor. This course may be repeated for credit with a different topic. Enrollment limited to 12. **4 credits**

Extra-curricular events

I met with the city planning director and visited several public hearings on local planning matters. I partook in the *SDAT planning charette* in Northampton for three days, dealing with current planning issues. Experts assembled by the *American Institute of Architects* led various seminars on themes of local interest, as a preamble to a comprehensive planning process. I submitted a written statement.

I visited the *Boston Society of Architects* conference and listened to two seminars on sustainability respective public investment for cultural purposes. I also heard a lecture on architecture in the *Harvard Graduate school of Design*, and got a tour of the premises by architect Gretchen Schneider, herself a Harvard graduate. I also went on a guided tour on lower Manhattan, and spent several days in NYC with my wife. I visited a class of Prof. Architect Robert Goodman in Hampshire College, reviewing written theses on transportation and sustainability. I listened to numerous lectures by academia within Smith College, as well as many cultural events in the region. I also visited a local polling place during Election Day.



Students of ARS 283 carrying their full-scale paperwork to be tested by children (all images by author).

Written report

I found it useful to translate the facts about the College to be able to compare concepts in Sweden and America. Therefore I have written a report on Smith College in the Swedish language for the STINT foundation and my colleagues. Most of the material is derived from Smith publications and presentations, so I deem it to be of little interest to Smith faculty. Halfway through my visit I also sent a brief report to my home institution BTH, which was published on the web.