

# Teaching Sabbatical at the University of Botswana—Final Report

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## Introduction

My teaching sabbatical at the Law Department of the University of Botswana was an enriching and transformative experience. It offered opportunities for personal growth as a teacher and researcher and provided me with valuable insights that I hope to bring back to Sweden. The experience was not without its challenges, but these hurdles ultimately added depth to my understanding of the academic as well as the political, social, and economic environment in Botswana.

## Background

The University of Botswana (UB) is situated in Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana. Botswana, a landlocked country in southern Africa, enjoys a relatively high standard of living compared to many other African countries, largely due to its diamond discoveries in the late 1960s. However, challenges such as high unemployment and significant disparities in wealth persist. To achieve prosperity for all, Botswana's National Transformation Strategy (NTS) outlines moving away from resource-driven growth, to growth based on knowledge, innovation, and competitiveness.<sup>1</sup>

The University of Botswana comprises eight faculties, with the Law Department currently housed under the Faculty of Social Sciences. Plans are underway to move it to the Business Faculty as of January 2025. During my tenure, the Law Department included about four associate professors, six senior lecturers, ten lecturers, and two secretaries, but no full professors of law. The University enrolls approximately 16,000 students, and I estimate about 1,800 students are part of the Law Department based on class sizes. UB offers a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) program, which is a five-year program and a Masters of Law, which takes about 1½ years. There is no program to obtain a doctorate of law so prospective doctoral students need to apply for an education abroad.

## Preparation and planning

Preparing for the sabbatical presented some logistical challenges. At the end of January 2024, the Head of the Law Department sent me an email to welcome me to the department, inquire after my arrival date and ask what classes from an attached list I could teach. While I responded promptly to all inquiries, communication stalled after this exchange. Despite multiple reminders, including copying the Vice-Chancellor as advised, responses were

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<sup>1</sup> Botswana, Vision 2036, [VISION DESIGN 1 Final CHOICE](#).

limited. For example, when I suggested a planning trip in March or April 2024 to learn more about the university and get to know the faculty, the reply was lukewarm.

Additionally, there seemed to be some miscommunication about my arrival. I had on several occasions asked the Head of Department to send me the schedule for the semester but was told that it was not yet available. I decided therefore to make a preliminary flight reservation, and send it to them for a response. I was informed that my arrival date was fine but my return date was too early, so I changed my ticket accordingly. When I arrived on August 5, 2024 as planned, I discovered that the semester had already started the previous week, contrary to my prior understanding. Later, I learned from colleagues that they had expected me to arrive much earlier, perhaps even during the previous semester. One possible reason for this confusion could be that the position of Head of Department was held by different individuals during this period, causing information about my sabbatical to slip through the cracks.

The housing arrangements provided by UB were functional and convenient, located a 20-minute walk from campus. The rent was reasonable and the apartment was clean and modern, though it lacked certain amenities such as a washing machine and adequate kitchen supplies. For example, only two of each essential kitchen item were provided (two plates, two glasses, etc), which was challenging when my mother-in-law came to visit. Additionally, an electrical issue delayed full functionality for a few weeks, though this was eventually resolved. Despite these minor inconveniences, the apartment served as a comfortable base for my stay.

Visa arrangements were confusing and inconsistent. Before I arrived, I had been in touch with the Human Resources Department (HR) about a visa and was told that I should enter on a tourist visa and that they would apply for a lengthier visa for me once I arrived. However, Lufthansa initially refused to let me check in due to the length of my planned stay exceeding the tourist visa term. After a brief panic at the airport, I resolved this by purchasing a refundable return ticket for an earlier date. While this workaround allowed me to proceed, it highlighted the importance of clear pre-arrival guidance on visa requirements.

Despite these minor hurdles, I was warmly welcomed once I arrived in Botswana. At the airport, I was greeted by a representative from Human Resources, who assisted with essential arrangements such as setting up a mobile phone and purchasing necessary items for the apartment. Her support helped ease the transition during those first few days. The Head of the Law Department shared his office with me for the first few days until another office became available. My colleagues were accommodating and eager to assist, quickly making me feel part of the department's daily life.

## Tasks and responsibilities

During my sabbatical, I co-taught two courses: Intellectual Property Law I and Private International Law I. Both courses were elective courses taught to students in their fifth and final year of law school. While I had proposed teaching a course on cross-border intellectual

property disputes and co-developing a comparative intellectual property law course, I instead collaborated with local faculty on pre-existing syllabi. Each course ran for 15 weeks, with three lecture hours per week. Assessments included two group memos and a final written exam.

Collaboration with one colleague was exemplary. We planned lessons in advance, collaborated on exam questions, and equitably divided grading responsibilities. Their openness and willingness to engage in meaningful discussions enhanced the teaching process and ensured consistency in student assessments. Conversely, my experience with another colleague was less smooth, marked by last-minute notifications about teaching responsibilities and inconsistent adherence to our grading agreements. On the final day of class, my colleague unexpectedly failed to show up despite confirming their attendance the day before, leaving me to deliver yet another impromptu lecture. Despite these frustrations, I appreciated their professionalism and courteous demeanour in other interactions.

The differences in collaboration could stem from varied professional roles. One colleague was a senior lecturer with international academic experience, while the other was a practicing attorney, potentially balancing competing priorities. These contrasting experiences demonstrated the varying levels of engagement and preparation among faculty members.

I also supervised and examined nine law students as they worked on their final papers and moderated the examination of eight additional papers. This experience provided a fantastic opportunity to connect with the students in a more informal setting beyond the classroom. I thoroughly enjoyed our casual discussions, where I gained insight into their aspirations and future plans. What stood out to me most was their strong commitment to using their education and training to contribute meaningfully to their country.

## Activities during the Teaching Sabbatical

During my sabbatical, I had the opportunity to engage in a wide range of academic and extracurricular activities both within and outside my department.

Only two weeks after arriving, I was invited by a department colleague to hold a presentation on “Critical thinking and Article Writing: Legal writing for publication” at a seminar designed to encourage legal scholarship among faculty and students. This session allowed me to share strategies I had developed during the educational reform at the Law Department at SU when we introduced Critical Thinking in all law school curriculum

I was invited by another departmental colleague to hold a presentation at the UNCITRAL Day in Africa 2024: The Use of UNICTRAL Texts in Africa: Trends and Prospects. My presentation was on “The role of the UN Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods (CISG) in avoiding Conflict-of-laws”. This event brought together practitioners, academics, and students, emphasizing the practical implications of international legal frameworks.

I also sat in on my department colleagues' lectures covering Introduction to Law, Constitutional Law, Comparative Law, Gender and the Law, and International Investment Law to understand teaching methods and gain insights into the Botswana legal system.

One of the highlights during my tenure was a series of departmental meetings. Early in my stay, the department organized a "Meet and Greet" session where I, along with another new employee, had the opportunity to introduce ourselves and meet all the members of the department. We shared a meal of traditional Botswana food in a faculty meeting room, which was especially appreciated since many of my colleagues usually went home for lunch. The absence of a common lunchroom or frequent dining out meant this occasion provided a rare chance for social interaction with the entire department.

Another departmental meeting focused on academic matters, with faculty divided into four groups to read and edit exam questions collaboratively. This session offered valuable insights into the exam preparation process and fostered a sense of teamwork. A subsequent meeting addressed general departmental issues, such as funding for the legal clinic and hiring processes. The final departmental meeting I attended involved approving final grades for the courses, an essential step in concluding the semester. It was also my farewell party where my colleagues sang for me while we snacked on tea and cakes that I had bought at the local store.

During my stay, I was aware of only one Faculty-wide meeting, conducted over two full days via Zoom. Approximately 50 participants joined these sessions, although attendance fluctuated throughout the day. Unfortunately, the internet connection was unstable at times, which hindered full participation. As I had classes scheduled during parts of the meeting, I could only attend select sessions, including one focused on Outcome-Based Learning. This session gave me an overview of the faculty's ongoing efforts to implement new pedagogical approaches.

In addition to these departmental and faculty activities, I attended workshops on "Building Research and Innovation Ecosystems," organized by the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research & Innovation. The workshop was attended by stakeholders across the University including the new Director for Research and Innovation, the deans of the faculties, as well as external experts. These workshops facilitated valuable connections across disciplines and offered insights into the university's strategic vision. Through these engagements, I met the new Director for Research and Innovation, who later invited me to participate in further initiatives, such as providing feedback on UB's draft IP policy and participating in a workshop at the Botswana Innovation Hub.

Outside of my own faculty, I delivered a guest lecture on "IP Protection for Industrial Design" to students in the Department of Industrial Design. This interdisciplinary engagement highlighted the practical intersections of intellectual property law and design.

Furthermore, I engaged with Botswana's Intellectual Property Office and observed Court of Appeal proceedings (the highest court in Botswana), providing a deeper understanding of local legal practices.

## Important lessons

This sabbatical deepened my understanding of African perspectives on law, particularly regarding intellectual property, international treaties, and global legal systems. Experiencing these viewpoints first-hand enriched my awareness of issues like TRIPS flexibilities and technology transfer demands. Indeed, engaging with colleagues and students on these topics highlighted the practical challenges faced by developing countries in leveraging international frameworks.

I made a conscious effort to avoid the “white saviour” mentality, emphasizing mutual learning over one-sided knowledge transfer. By engaging with Setswana culture and practices, I gained a greater appreciation for Botswana’s rich traditions and societal norms. Asking questions about local customs like Lobola (bride price) and the Kgotla system helped me better understand the cultural context my students and colleagues navigate daily.

One memorable moment occurred when I attended my colleague’s Constitutional Law class. Initially, I sat among the students in the lecture hall, but as the room filled up, my colleague politely asked me to move to one of the loose chairs along the wall. Without hesitation, I complied. About twenty minutes into the lecture, my colleague began discussing the United States civil rights movement, specifically the story of Rosa Parks and her refusal to give up her seat on a bus for a white person. At that moment, my colleague and I exchanged knowing smiles about the unintended parallel to my earlier seating adjustment. This interaction served as a poignant and humorous reminder of how actions need to be interpreted in their cultural and historical contexts.

Flexibility and patience were essential. Protocols often dictated the pace of progress, requiring adaptability. I also noted differences in time management, as classes and meetings sometimes started late, reflecting a more relaxed approach compared to Sweden. These experiences taught me to adapt my expectations and embrace a different rhythm of work.

## Comparison between the host and the home institutions (in Sweden)

The similarities and differences between UB and SU provide valuable insights into how educational institutions operate in varying contexts and can provide inspiration for re-evaluation and possibly change in Sweden.

### • Pedagogy and its importance

At UB, there appeared to be limited emphasis on pedagogy, though there were discussions on Outcome-Based Learning at the Faculty level. In contrast, SU places greater focus on integrating critical thinking into curricula, which has been a hallmark of its pedagogical

approach for years. That said, the Stockholm reform has not been evaluated since its introduction and it is not clear whether the reform is being fully complied with or whether it has been successful.

- **Curriculum and courses offered - How teaching is conducted**

The curriculum at UB reflects Botswana's unique history and culture, offering mandatory courses such as Customary Law and practical subjects like Land and Mineral Resources Law. In contrast, SU's curriculum places greater emphasis on Information Technology (IT) and commercial law. These differences highlight the importance of tailoring education to local contexts and needs.

Like SU, UB's Law Department also offered progressive courses, such as Gender and the Law. Within the constitutional law curriculum, discussions included topical issues such as women's rights, indigenous peoples' rights, and the right to determine one's own gender marker—topics influenced by landmark decisions from the Court of Appeal. These discussions illustrate how some legal issues are universal, transcending cultural and jurisdictional boundaries.

At UB, teaching was primarily conducted through case discussions, drawing examples from Botswana as well as other common law and Roman-Dutch jurisdictions like the UK and South Africa. In contrast, Sweden, as a civil law system, traditionally focused on legislation in its teaching. However, since joining the EU, the use of case law discussions has increased. Additionally, reforms at SU's law department have shifted the teaching approach from emphasizing specific legislation to focusing on broader principles and policies, encouraging critical thinking.

Class sizes and teaching methods at UB varied depending on the level and type of course. Teaching ranged from large lectures (with up to 100 students) to small seminar groups (of about 10 students). Methods included lectures, where communication was largely one-way, and case law discussions. However, student-led methods, such as presentations, were rare during my time there, with interaction limited to lecturers posing questions during class. At SU, there is a stronger emphasis on seminars and student-led teaching methods. In most classes in Stockholm, student presentations are a regular feature, reflecting a more participatory learning approach. That said, the student presentations are not always fruitful as the students sometimes coordinate only minutes before the class and presentations are shared from previous years.

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

Technology and IT do not play a significant role in education at UB. Before my first day of teaching, I inquired about using PowerPoint for my lectures but was informed that the projector was not functioning. After a few weeks, the projector became operational for one of my courses but remained unusable in the other. Consequently, I was able to use

PowerPoint for many of my Intellectual Property (IP) lectures and uploaded the slides to the course website, which the students seemed to appreciate. (It took me some time, however, to discover the existence of the course website.) Additionally, I used Socrative to administer multiple-choice questions after lectures to assess student knowledge, which received very positive feedback. The students enjoyed this interactive element, as it allowed them to be more engaged in class.

For my Private International Law (PIL) class, I could not use PowerPoint since the projector did not work. This turned out to be a valuable experience, as it allowed me to lecture more freely and adapt on the spot (though admittedly, I often lacked the opportunity to prepare for this class in advance because I was often not given advance notice on when I was to teach). When necessary, I used a whiteboard to write down key concepts, legislation, and case references. However, I would have preferred to have the possibility to utilize PowerPoint or a projector to show legal texts and access online resources during lectures although I learned the benefit of not relying on it too much.

At SU, I have experimented more with technology and IT in my teaching. For my PIL course, I replaced some lectures with videos, not just recorded lectures but also curated films. This was partly to save costs and partly to allow students to revisit the material if they missed something. Due to budget constraints and the high cost of lecture halls, I also moved the Q&A session in preparation for exams to Zoom. Additionally, I regularly use Socrative during lectures to engage students, which has proven effective in keeping them active and involved.

The library at UB is modern and provides access to several databases, including Hein Online, Westlaw, and resources for South African and Botswana legal materials. However, not all laws in Botswana are easily or freely accessible online. There is a commercial database based in Scotland that offers access via subscription. If students need access to a law and it is not freely available online, they need to purchase a copy from the Government Printing Office. Also, the database for Botswana case law is only updated through 2022, which limits access to more recent judgments.

In contrast, Sweden offers comprehensive and free access to legal resources online. All laws and other legal documents are accessible on the Parliament (*Riksdag*) database.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, a non-profit, volunteer-run website provides access to most laws and case law from the Swedish legal system.<sup>3</sup> Case law from many Swedish courts is also freely available and easily searchable, ensuring broad access to legal information.

#### • Forms of examination

Students at UB were assessed through two “Continuous Assessments” (CAs) and a final exam. The CAs typically involved group work, requiring students to answer one or two essay questions in a five-to-seven-page memorandum. The final exam also consisted of essay questions, often including one factual scenario where students applied the law to a set of

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<sup>2</sup> [Sök | Sveriges riksdag](#).

<sup>3</sup> [lagen.nu](#).

facts and one theoretical essay question. The CA enabled the teachers to provide extra support to students who were lagging behind and give the students information about where they needed to focus. Only one colleague that I am aware using multiple-choice questions (MCQs) to examine students and they reported that this method of examination was not appreciated by other colleagues.

At SU, we have reduced the number of continuous assessments due to the high costs associated with grading them. For the final exam, I have introduced multiple-choice questions (MCQs) in my PIL course to assess certain learning outcomes. This approach not only saves time and resources but also allows for more objective grading compared to essay-based assessments. However, I still include an essay question to evaluate critical thinking skills.

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

My impression was that pedagogical merits are valued less highly than research achievements at UB. During my time there, pedagogy was rarely discussed, aside from one faculty meeting focused on Outcome-Based Learning. In contrast, there were several workshops dedicated to topics like “Building Research and Innovation Ecosystems.”

That said, the requirements for promotion at UB are similar to those at SU, emphasizing a combination of pedagogical merits, research achievements, and community outreach.

- **To what extent educational programmes conform to labour market needs**

A law degree from UB has traditionally been viewed as a reliable pathway to a stable career, but the employment prospects for law graduates are increasingly uncertain.<sup>4</sup>

Unemployment, particularly among young people, remains high. While UB’s law program appears aligned with labor market needs—offering practical courses such as Clinical Legal Education (a mandatory three-semester course) and a specialized course on Mining—there are not enough jobs available to accommodate all law graduates.

In contrast, evidence from Sweden indicates that law graduates are quickly absorbed into the labor market.<sup>5</sup> However, employers and former students often suggest that Swedish law schools could do more to prepare graduates for the practical demands of their future roles, such as drafting contracts and preparing legal briefs. Greater emphasis on these skills could further enhance the readiness of students for professional work.

- **Competence development and career opportunities for teachers.**

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<sup>4</sup> Patriot, ‘More graduates, no job’, 15 November 2020, [More graduates, no jobs – The Patriot On Sunday](#); Ephraim Modise, ‘Botswana nears highest unemployment rate since 2008 ahead of 2024 polls’, tech cabal, 21 June 2024, [Botswana unemployment rate nears 2008 levels as 2024 polls loom](#).

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, Employment rates of recent graduates, May 2024, [Employment rates of recent graduates - Statistics Explained](#).



I did not hear much about these opportunities at UB. For example, I am unaware of any faculty exchange programs or sabbatical opportunities. Overall, I got the impression that faculty members were burdened with heavy teaching obligations and that university reforms made career advancement more challenging. As previously mentioned, the Law Department did not have any full professors of law. Additionally, UB is facing severe budget constraints, which negatively impact programs for professional development.

In contrast, SU offers numerous opportunities for faculty to teach or conduct research abroad, including through initiatives like STINT. The SU Law Faculty also collaborates with the Centre for the Advancement of University Teaching, where faculty members can take courses to enhance their teaching methods.

## Recommendations

My experiences at UB highlighted the importance of patience and adaptability when navigating new academic environments. Respecting local customs and approaches is crucial to achieving goals collaboratively.

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

For SU, incorporating African legal perspectives into teaching and research could enrich the curriculum and provide Swedish students with a broader understanding of global legal systems. Establishing stronger collaborations with African universities, such as UB, could foster mutual learning and growth.

I also believe there is great potential for continued engagement with UB. Exploring joint research projects and exchange programs could strengthen institutional ties and create opportunities for knowledge-sharing. My time at the University of Botswana was profoundly rewarding. Despite initial challenges, the relationships I built and the experiences I gained have left an indelible mark on my professional journey. The warmth, resilience, and dedication of my colleagues and students inspired me, and I am grateful for this opportunity. I look forward to fostering ongoing collaboration between our institutions.

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