

Cambridge College's NITE Program Hosts Group of Educators from Sweden

By Kim Dunbar

Every year, Cambridge College's National Institute for Teaching Excellence (NITE) program draws teachers from across the United States to the Cambridge College campus. This year, the NITE students were also joined by educators from Sweden.

The group, consisting of 12 Swedish teachers and professors—five from St. Eskil high school, and seven from Mälardalen University—attended NITE with the purpose of studying and experiencing the Cambridge College teaching and learning model, as well as the organizing of NITE.

“I am very impressed with Cambridge College's teaching and learning model,” said Monica Falk, Head of Development in the Department of Social Sciences for Mälardalen University. “Cambridge College makes things happen with its students.” This is Falk's eighth summer visiting the NITE program. In 1996, Falk met President Sharma during a conference in Northern Ireland, and he invited her to participate in the program. Falk, a principal at the time, brought people with her to Mount Ida in the summer of 1997. She has returned to Massachusetts several times since then, bringing with her colleagues to observe the Cambridge College teaching methods. Last year she brought four fellow professors with her from the university. “I feel that this is important,” said Falk. “And because they liked it so much, it was not difficult to convince others to come.”

One of the reasons Falk and her colleagues enjoy NITE is because of the diversity they are able to experience while here. “NITE is so interesting because there are teachers from 42 states coming together,” said Falk. “You can experience new environments, new people, but in the end, everyone is a teacher. We explore what we have in common, examine our differences and what we can learn from each other,” she added.

“We like the idea behind Cambridge College and dealing with adult learners, not young students,” said Ove Karlsson Vestman, a Professor in the Department of Social Sciences at Mälardalen University. “The students are already professionals and have come back to further their education.”

Falk and her colleagues value the Cambridge College NITE program so much that they are working with President Sharma to establish a similar program in Sweden. “We have a vision and a dream to have an international NITE program,” explained Falk. “President Sharma and I have a vision and a dream of an international NITE program,” explained Falk. “We now have the intention to start a program in Sweden in collaboration with Cambridge College and then hopefully we can work together to spread the idea to other countries.”

“The idea of bringing people together like this is something we have been discussing at the University and trying to establish for summer 2008,” elaborated Karlsson Vestman.

“We would like to start with a one week program, possibly combined with online studies, as a way of expanding our programs into the summer.”

Karlsson Vestman added his group’s experience at NITE is important, as they can witness a concrete example of the type of program they would like to institute in Sweden. “We are here to collect ideas from people with more experience doing this,” said Karlsson Vestman.

Falk is very engaged in recruiting colleagues to attend the College’s NITE program and this year Kerstin Aman, a Senior Lecturer and Director of Studies in Special Needs Education in the Department of Social Sciences at Mälardalen University is one of the participants. During her visit, Aman took a special education class with Dr. Kenneth Boatner. While she said she was more of an observer during her time in the classroom, she did participate in the work. “It was very interesting,” said Aman, adding that she noticed a difference in the way the methods are taught at Cambridge College and in Sweden. “I learned a lot, and I appreciated the opportunity to work in the classroom. The students were really challenged to think about the lessons and to listen to each other. It is great how these professors make the students very skilled teachers,” she said.

The NITE experience also created closer bonds among the Swedish educators “The University and high school groups did not know each other before we came here, but they have become close and are now able to talk about their professional ideas,” said Falk. She added that the entire group spent their evenings together discussing what they learned and how they would apply their new knowledge when they returned home. “You can make friends and learn things if you share your core values and common ideas. When people meet, something happens.”