

COMMENT & DEBATE

Engaging the public with Scandinavian culture: The UCL context

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Recent changes in the way research in UK Universities is assessed and funded, via the Research Excellence Framework, have led to a burgeoning recognition that engagement and knowledge exchange with audiences and communities outside Higher Education must be part of any University department's core mission. The Department of Scandinavian Studies at UCL won the UCL Provost's Departmental Award for Public Engagement in 2010-11, reflecting its outstanding progress in the previous year in developing activities that share research with local and international communities. In what follows, a few of these projects are outlined.

Nordic Noir Crime Fiction Book Club

On 3 February 2011, our first Nordic Noir evening took place at the Horse Hospital, an atmospheric arts venue in Bloomsbury. The

Scandinavian Crime Fiction Book Club was conceived by Dr Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, Lecturer in Scandinavian Literature, but draws on the expertise and enthusiasm of a good number of the department's staff and postgraduates. The project aims to build on the considerable

**NORDIC NOIR
Book Club**

appetite for Nordic crime fiction in the UK by holding book club evenings where aficionados of thrillers can come together to discuss their favourite genre, meet the Scandinavian authors and translators behind the books, and hear from scholars and experts in the wide-ranging issues raised by this kind of fiction. Ultimately, the project has three aims: to enrich the public's understanding of the Nordic cultures behind crime fiction; to learn from fans of Scandinavian crime about their reading practices and perceptions of Scandinavia; and to tempt fans of this genre to try out Scandinavian fiction of other kinds, too. We intend to continue to develop Nordic Noir into 2012 to respond to British interest in Danish television series such as *Forbrydelsen* (The Killing) and *Borgen*. Nordic Noir has been awarded funding by UCL's Beacon Bursaries for public engagement. Please visit the Nordic Noir blog to join in the debate, and to find out more about upcoming events: <http://scancrime.wordpress.com/>

UCL Impact PhD Studentships in Swedish-English Translation

In winter 2009-2010, Carl Otto Werkelid, Counsellor for Cultural Affairs at the Embassy of Sweden in London, and Claire Thomson, Head of Department of UCL Scandinavian Studies, agreed to collaborate on a project that would promote knowledge of a broader range of Swedish literature in the UK, and foster the next generation of Swedish-English literary translators. These discussions coincided with the launch of the UCL Impact PhD Studentship scheme in early 2010, the aim of which was to facilitate collaboration between UCL departments and external partners on training PhD students across all disciplines. Under the scheme, UCL undertook to match funding from external partners, to cover supervision fees for each student and provide an annual stipend. Carl Otto Werkelid secured funding from three generous sponsors: Mr Stefan Olsson, London; the Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation, San Francisco; and the Swedish Academy, Stockholm. The studentships were advertised in summer 2010, and Agnes Broome and Nichola Smalley were appointed. As UCL Impact



PhD students, Agnes and Nichola are expected – alongside their research – to engage in innovative and effective ways with partners, communities and stakeholders outside UCL, as well as collaborating with staff and postgraduates in other Faculties, as appropriate. Both students have thrown themselves into this task, demonstrating an impressive degree of resourcefulness, communication skills, and an enormous appetite for hard work. They have been aided in planning and implementing their first projects by UCL's Public Engagement Unit, which has provided training and networking opportunities for Arts & Humanities postgraduates involved in public engagement work. For example, Nichola Smalley has been running a small book club for lovers of Swedish fiction at Fika Swedish Bar and Grill on Brick Lane, East London. New Swedish Fiction Book Club is supported by an AHRC-funded Train & Engage award from UCL's Public Engagement Unit. Visit the New Swedish Fiction Book Club blog to find out more: <http://newswedishfiction.blogspot.com/>. Agnes Broome is taking the lead on a project to mark Strindberg's centenary in 2012, which pairs highly-qualified but inexperienced Swedish-English translators with mentors who are established in the profession. Together they are working on a series of one-act plays by Strindberg, which have not previously been translated.

Bright Club

Bright Club is a monthly event which transforms researchers into comedians for one night only. Established in 2009 by Dr Steve Cross of UCL's Public Engagement Unit, it is now



an international phenomenon, with off-shoots across the UK and as far afield as Australia. The usual venue is The Wilmington Arms bar in Clerkenwell, North London, but since late 2010 the 550-capacity Bloomsbury Theatre has hosted occasional larger-scale events. Curiously, UCL Scandinavian Studies has provided more performers for Bright Club than almost any other academic unit at UCL. To date,

fourteen academic staff and postgraduates have performed stand-up routines about aspects of their research in Scandinavian Studies: from cinema to book history to Old Norse poetry. Hundreds of people, mostly in the hard-to-reach twenty-to-thirty-something age range, have thus learnt something new and engaging about Scandinavian culture; and the performers have developed their communication skills and confidence, learning to think about their research in new ways.

Norvik Press



Norvik Press, publisher in the Scandinavian field, moved to UCL in 2010 from its original home at the University of East Anglia. Dr Elettra Carbone, who recently gained her PhD from UCL with the dissertation *Nordic Italies*, was appointed Office Manager. She has taken the lead on re-organising the Press in its new home, moving to a print-on-demand model, and developing collaborations with other small businesses attached to UCL. In 2011 Elettra's post has been funded by a UCL Knowledge Exchange Associate post, a postdoctoral position which matches recent PhDs with small and medium enterprises which can benefit from their expertise. Norvik Press is just one of several small presses developing collaboration within UCL, enabled by UCL Enterprise's support for Knowledge Exchange activities in the Arts and Humanities. As part of her KEA post Elettra organised an event called *Book Camp: a hands-on introduction to publishing*. This two-day workshop, which took place at UCL on 7-8 November 2011 and was supported by UCL Knowledge Transfer Champions funding, cast light on various aspects of the publishing business. Thanks to the help of many experts in the field, participants gained an insight in the publishing cycle, the changing status of the book and learnt about publishing at UCL. All participants were also able to gain hands-on experience in developing marketing techniques and in creating books, journals and magazines. A full report on this even will appear in the Comment and Debate section of *Scandinavica* 2012:2, a special issue on book history and the publishing sector in the Nordic countries.