

RELIGION

in Peace and Conflict

Master
Programme

Alumni Newsletter Nov 2020

Short News

Pandemic in Sweden

From 24 November, only eight people can attend general meetings and social events. From 14 December, stricter rules, and general advice about everyone's responsibility to prevent the spread of Covid-19 apply. Everyone in Sweden is obliged to take measures to prevent the spread of the infection.



Measures of the RPC program

The RPC program provided students with three dates for their master's theses instead of two - in May, August and December.

Campus weeks for 1st and 2nd year students were online. The format was "no campus, no week" as Brian Palmer wisely described it. Each week we met at a different Zoom event.

Instead of excursions, walks and meetings with lecturers, we have prepared short films about Uppsala and Uppsala University, a "Peace Walk" and short interviews with program lecturers.

Measures of Uppsala University

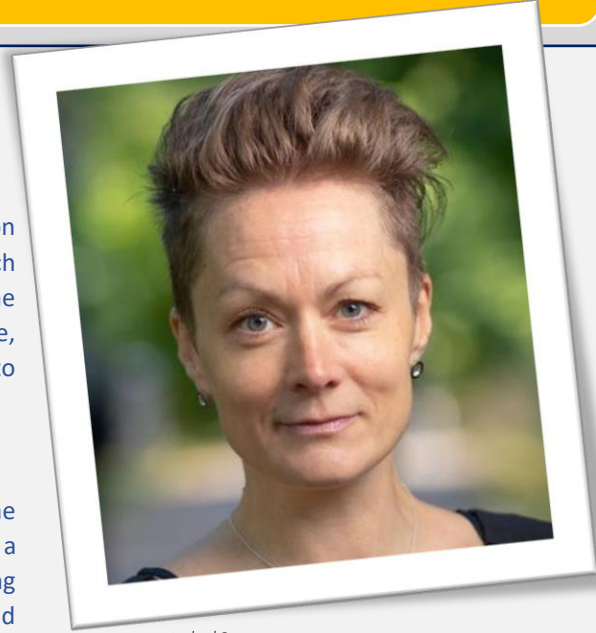
Uppsala University returned to campus in August 2020. Rules for maintaining social distance and do not gather more than 50 people were used. Since 24 November, all faculties have been recommended for education on distance where possible.



Join us!

FACEBOOK: Religion in Peace and Conflict Master's Programme
INSTAGRAM: rpc_uu

Maria Klingenberg



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When did you start working at the RPC and what do you teach there?

My first experience of RPC was in 2013, when I developed two courses in collaboration with two colleagues and taught part of a course. Then followed some years of research leave and other teaching duties on my part. In 2019, I became responsible for the course on Applied Methods. This year, I was supposed to continue with said course, but my workload from research and teaching other courses resulted in me having to leave over the course to my colleagues. I will surely be back another year.

What do you find most difficult as a program teacher?

My experiences reflect that I have taught a course on empirical methods. Some students have no previous experience of empirical methods, while others have a background in social sciences and are already quite skilled. I have found it challenging to design assignments in a way that allows for everyone to develop their skills and abilities, regardless of starting point.

You teach a lot on campus and until the pandemic is much less online, don't you? What is the strength of online courses for teachers and students and what are the weaknesses?

The greatest benefit of online courses is the flexible format and the way in which it allows for students to meet despite geographical distance. However, when done right, campus teaching results in dynamic and dialogical interaction: I have not yet found ways to create conditions for such experiences online. Also, I have found that the flexibility of the online format makes some students assume that the workload is lighter. Such assumptions are bound to make online studies a frustrating experience.

Given the current situation, do you believe that the future lies in online education or mixed education?

Digital possibilities do not remove people's needs for face-to-face interaction. I do not live in the same country as my birth family. When I write this, I have not seen my family in eleven months, and our daily messages on WhatsApp can never replace that. Along the same lines, I find it hard to envision a situation where academic studies would be realized primarily as a digital enterprise. While some students are not too bothered by the current transition from campus to online teaching since they enjoy working in solitude, others are not doing well: they need peer support and learn better in the company of others. I think that the given situation has resulted in us learning a great deal about how to improve the digital format and explore the opportunities it entails, but I can't wait to see students on campus again.

Last year you gave a lecture at campus week, and this year you did it online. Could you reflect on both of those experiences?

I enjoyed both of them! Both lectures were really rewarding experiences due to the active engagement on behalf of the students.

Not only do you teach, but you are also active in research. What are you researching at the moment?

Right now, I am conducting a study together with my colleague Mia Lövheim (who also teaches at RPC). The study is on a Swedish leadership program for women from different religious communities. We are doing a survey and interviews with the women who have participated in order to gain insight into contemporary conditions for female leadership in religious communities.

What would you recommend that our students think about when choosing a topic for their master's thesis?

Make sure that you consider the feasibility of your project when you decide what to write about and how to conduct your study. Ambition is good, but projects that are not feasible run a larger risk of remaining unfinished. Writing a thesis is a hard but necessary lesson in lowering your expectations of what can be achieved in one study.

What is the most important thing to think about for those who want to pursue an academic career and apply for a doctoral program?

I think pursuing an academic career can be equated with pursuing a professional career as an athlete. Hard work is the key: talent surely helps, but it does not take you very far. In other words, your ability to pursue an academic career is highly dependent on your ability to learn from the feedback you receive on your texts. Learn what your strengths and weaknesses are and try to develop your weak points.

Are there any motivational words for our graduates and students?

Hang in there. This, too, shall pass.

When did you graduate from the RPC program?

In spring 2019.

What do you like most about the program?

The interaction with my classmates. It was a gift to be able to not agree with everyone in everything (especially in a sensitive subject like religion). I grew out of that. The theme of morality has also stayed with me in my daily life, perhaps enhanced by the pandemic we are in.

When did you start working as a program administrator?

I started in August, a few months after graduating from university.

Why did you decide to apply for this position?

While I was finishing my thesis, I received an email from the current administrator about her moving to a new position. It made me wonder if I might be the one to take up the position. I had always loved being a student and the atmosphere (and purpose) of the university, but it was only at this point that I realized that I could work there on my own with my work and study experience.

How was your first day?

It was very welcoming and fun. It was still summer, and it was so empty that it was almost scary. In the coming weeks I saw some familiar faces around (Brian, Kajsa and Håkan etc.) and early on we started getting ready for campus week, which I enjoyed a lot myself.

What has surprised you most about your new job?

The diversity of things you need to know and keep track of. A lot of work behind the scenes when it comes to the organization of courses, including from an administrative point of view. For this I need to understand the whole university system, the deadlines, the rules, the huge number of applications, etc.

What is the most difficult part of your job?

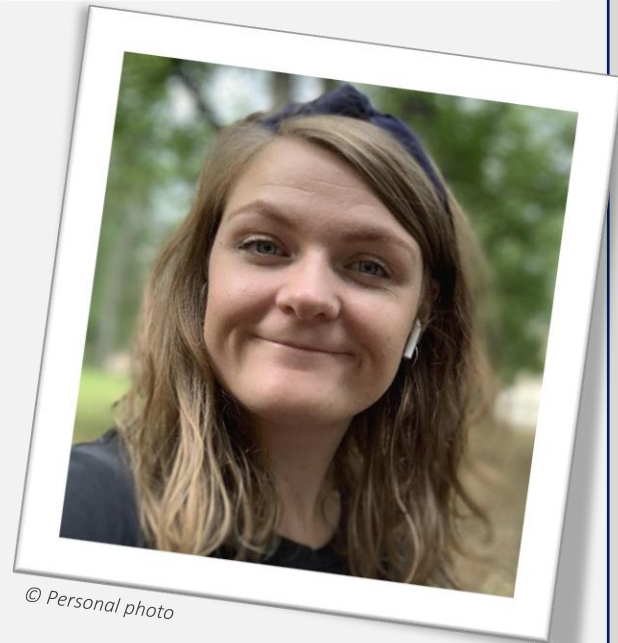
Knowing what students know and what they don't know. Some things may be taken to an annoying degree ten times over, while some things may be obvious to me but not to them. It's difficult, even though I was a student myself a moment ago!

What is it like to be an RPC graduate and work in the program?

It is a privilege. I enjoyed being part of the program and now I am learning why it is structured this way and in relation to other programs, courses and PHD students in the department; I am still learning about "Religion in Peace and Conflict".

Could you give some advice to our students and alumni if they want to be administrators at the academy?

You have a unique perspective on student life and can work as a bridge between students and the university. Remember how to be a student and think about how to improve your situation - it's gold for the university.



Season's Greetings!
We Wish You Peace
& Health

