

RELIGION

in Peace and Conflict

Master
Programme

Alumni Newsletter Autumn 2022

Campus Week

We hosted two campus weeks this term and were delighted to meet so many RPC students!

As always, we enjoyed the various lectures, discussions, walks, conference activities for second-year students, lunches, and dinners. **Many thanks to everyone who came to Uppsala!**

Our second-year students made an amazingly delicious gift to the program – **large RPC chocolate!**

Special thanks to Daniela Dumitrascu!



Virtual City Walk

We encourage you to take a virtual city walk on the history of racism in Uppsala, produced by CEMFOR at Uppsala University <https://www.cemfor.uu.se/events/city-walks-on-the-history-of-racism-in-uppsala/>

New course

We now have a new course, **Theories and Methods for the Study of Religion**, which began this semester. This course was designed specifically for the RPC program and incorporates feedback from students from previous years. This course will help our students prepare for academic research and writing in the field.

Maxim of Uppsala University

Do you know the history of the Uppsala University maxim **“To think freely is great, but to think rightly is greater” (Tänka fritt är stort men tänka rätt är större in Swedish)**, which is engraved in gold letters at the entrance to the Grand Auditorium of the University Main Building?

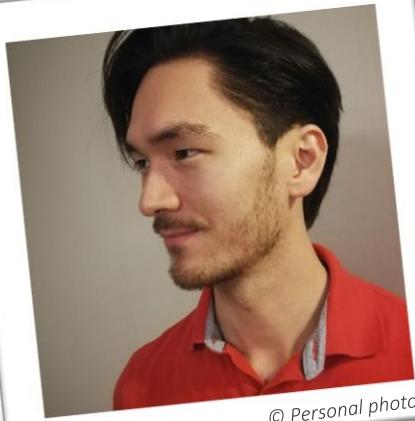
You can read about it here: [To think freely is great, but to think rightly is greater - Uppsala University, Sweden \(uu.se\)](#)



Let's stay in touch!

We want to know more about your activities and achievements! Would you like to share your story with other RPC alumni and students? Please send it to rpc@teol.uu.se with "newsletter" in the subject line!

Our Administrators



We have a new team member! Please welcome our new administrator **Tim Saari Byström**, who replaced Emma Eriksson currently on a parental leave.

When did you join the RPC team and what is your role now?

I joined the RPC team on October 31 this fall.

Can you tell us a little bit about your professional background and how you chose to become an administrator?

A few years ago I was in a situation where I half finished my bachelor's degree and worked as a carpenter. At that time, my sister started working as an administrator at Uppsala University. Her enthusiasm and insight into the role interested me and encouraged me to finish my studies and start applying for similar positions at Uppsala University.

What do you enjoy most about your job at RPC and what is the most challenging?

I have truly amazing colleagues who brighten my day. Secondly, I enjoy solving problems and providing services. Being new to the role of an administrator, I have to absorb and process a lot of new information. So far, I think this is the most challenging aspect.

Do you remember your first impression on your first day in the program?

On my first day, I was very excited to start working and just really excited about everything. My colleagues took good care of me and made me feel welcome. The day was an introductory day, and a lot of time was spent getting my computer in order and accessing the systems I was to work on. I had boxes in which to mark various things that needed to be organized or instructed. I think I checked a lot of boxes on the first day, which gave me a feeling of progress. Overall, the first impression was very positive.

What place in Uppsala would you recommend to someone who only comes to Uppsala for a few hours?

Uppsala's central areas have beautiful old buildings that give it a special charm. I would recommend taking a short sightseeing walk around the city and the Cathedral Church area. Finally, I would recommend to immerse yourself in the atmosphere of Uppsala in one of the many cosy cafes located in the center of the city.

Is there a "must-do" for you on your winter breaks?

I try to meet friends and family as often as possible, and I enjoy playing tennis.

Meet our Alumni

Today we meet **Ulrica Söderlind**, an RPC graduate. She is currently an associate professor in the Department of Food, Nutrition and Culinary Science at **Umeå University**. You can read more about Ulrica and her research here:

[Ulrica Söderlind \(umu.se\)](https://umu.se)

Hello, Ulrica, and thank you for sharing your time with us. Let's start from the beginning. When did you start studying at RPC and when did you finish?

I started studying in 2017 and graduated in 2019. I was in the group before the pandemic outbreak. So, we were lucky enough to have our graduation in person in Uppsala.

Why did you choose this program?

I had a bachelor's degree in religious studies. And I knew I wanted to keep on the track, and that I wanted to get a master's degree. I also wanted it to be an international master's program. And the reason for that, I think, is that if you do an international master's degree - it's wider, it's broader, it's more challenging for your own ideas. The other reason that it was a distance program because I was working. So, I found the RPC program on the internet, and then I started to look it up on the university website. Then I applied and was accepted on the first try.



What did you find useful about the program?

This program is the best one I have ever been a student in. To say the least, it was very dynamic. It was very challenging. And we had the group I was in, we had extremely good teachers. That pace is extremely hard. I mean, there's no such thing as holidays and weekends, and all of that, yeah, you forget it for two years. But it was a super program, I must say. And very relevant. Also, a lot of eye and mind opening about what is what so-called religious violence is and how common or not it is in the armed conflicts around the world. It was extremely interesting.

Do you remember any course that you found the most fun or exciting?

I think Brian Palmer's course [the Life Stories course] was extremely good. He taught us how to write science in the style of a novel. It was very, very fun, really interesting. Very educational. And Brian Palmer, I have to say, is also a very special teacher in some ways. So, I like him a lot.

How useful was the RPC program in terms of your research?

When I was writing my 30-credit thesis as part of this program, I traveled to Israel and Palestine. I did research on how gastronomy is used as an instrument of peace or as an instrument of resistance in the Holy Land.

And then, just before the pandemic, I applied for a research grant from The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities. I wrote the application based on the results I discovered during my, during my time on this program and, and writing my thesis. So I wanted to expand it by going to Jordan. And, surprisingly enough for me, I got a grant. And I also got funding from the Swedish Christian Council for the same research trip to do it in the field. And then the pandemic hit, so I couldn't do it, but I'll do it in 2023. At least that's my goal. And I'm sure that if I hadn't participated in this program, I never would have gotten these grants. I'm sure of that, absolutely sure. So, for me, it was both a push and an opportunity to go to Jordan. And to continue the work that I started in my master's thesis.

You wrote several books about Georgian cuisine. Could you briefly share with us your journey to the research of Georgia?

Oh, it's a long story. When I started studying archaeology, I wanted to write about some specific Bronze Age finds in Georgia. But at that time, going there was not advisable. So I continued my studies and continued my research for my PhD. And then my interest continued and grew over the years. I've been there 22 times since then. I remember the feeling when you're standing on a very specific spot in Tbilisi, it's a kind of hill, behind you is a church. And then there's the river that separates the city. And then you just look straight ahead. And you see a very old part of Tbilisi, one of the oldest churches, a mosque and a synagogue that are on the same quarter. And it's something very incredible. And when I saw it, I thought to myself, I'm seeing something important, I'm looking at something important. Really, I didn't know what it was at the time yet. But later I decided to write about how gastronomy is in these three religions. That's actually how it all started.

You have a very long, impressive list of publications. Could you share your secret as to how you manage to be so effective?

I think you have to follow ideas or follow your voice and intuition if something feels right. Stick with it.

If you were to give advice to our current students who are in the process of finding a topic for their master's thesis, what would it be?

Choose gastronomy [laughs] I'm joking! Follow your interests, follow your gut. Because it's usually the right one. In my experience with the tutors in the program, if you give them an idea, they're very open and willing to help, even if it's not part of their expertise. In my group, that was very much appreciated. I would say that writing a 30-credit thesis about something you are not interested in will not end well. Follow your intuition, your interest, and your heart!

Imagine if you met one of our alumni who was going to apply to PhD education. Where would you advise them to start and what should they consider before applying?

I would say the same thing. Follow your interests. Usually, one will continue what they wrote in their master's. PhD candidates usually use that as a foundation. The most important thing is to write about what interests you. Keep that spark.

I've always had enough privilege to write about what interests me. But I know that not all PhD students can write about what they want to write about. I also think about this, especially if you are a woman: Strengthen your self-esteem so that you can defend your findings and discuss them in a scientific way. It is important to learn and develop this skill.

How do you spend your free time?

I have dogs, so I walk them outside a lot. But while I do that, my mind is constantly in motion, coming up with new ideas. I read a lot. Mostly biographies, history, and antiquity. Also, Agatha Christie crime novels. If I watch TV, I watch a lot of British crime, history channels.



**Happy
Holidays!**