

Internationalising the Curriculum

Insights into the Distinguished Visiting Scholars Programme in Geography

The Distinguished Visiting Scholars Programme in Geography is a well established, formalised event held within a School that already draws heavily on internationalised teaching examples, experiences and field trips. The School has sought out a number of synergies between its international research work and the teaching and learning experiences of its students. The Distinguished Visiting Scholars Programme is one obvious example of this. The Programme is organised by the School's Society, Space and Culture Research Cluster. Each year one member of the cluster nominates an internationally esteemed research partner from another institution and arranges the visit. With the Cluster covering the costs for travel and accommodation, the researcher comes to Queen's for one or two weeks to interact with staff and students on site, and, more specifically, to work closely with one or more members of the cluster, on a common research interest. He/she is also asked to prepare a paper for presentation and discussion with the Human Geography Reading Group as a means of facilitating a broader exchange of ideas. In addition to this, significant opportunity is built in for final year and postgraduate students to meet with the visiting scholar, in one to one or small group formats. In this way, the Scholar can also act as a mentor to postgraduates and to final year undergraduates with an interest in his or her area of research.



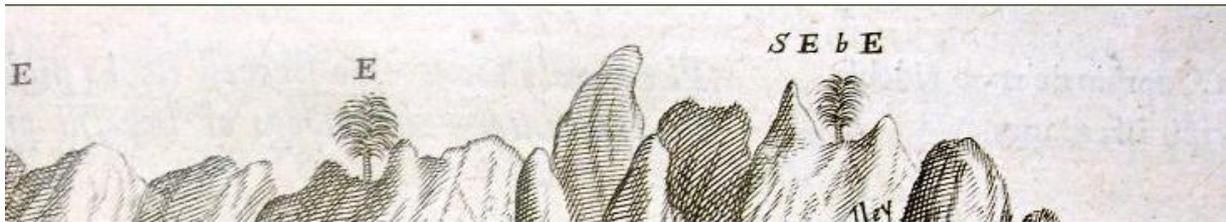
This year's Distinguished Visiting Scholar was Nicolaas Rupke, Professor of the History of Science at Göttingen University in Germany. The Centre for Educational Development spoke with Professor Rupke during his recent visit and asked him about his experience of the programme, the value of the visit from his own perspective and about his view of the student mentoring role that the Research Cluster had included as part of his remit.

Professor Rupke had attended a conference organised by the School of History and Anthropology at Queen's several years ago, so had previous experience of visiting the University. However, on this occasion, it was the ongoing research contact with Professor David Livingstone in Geography that was the key factor in his decision to accept the offer to be the visiting scholar in 2011. The programme is organised in a way that allowed Professor Rupke to present and discuss work relating to a book that he is currently writing and to further develop some of his current research work in a way that he found "extremely useful". There are other attractions in the programme at Queen's School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology. For example, the appointment as Visiting Scholar is a formalised role and is publicised on a website, www.qub.ac.uk/schools/gap/Research/SocietySpaceandCultureSSC/DistinguishedVisitingScholars/, along with a list of previous Distinguished Scholars. It is therefore an appropriate experience for the researcher to add to their CV and will be recognised and understood as an honour by academic research peers in other institutions.

For Postgraduate Research students, in particular, the visit of a distinguished international researcher, like Professor Rupke, offers several significant opportunities to engage with an authority who can view their work and overall development from a more detached perspective. Students are encouraged to discuss their work with the visiting scholar during one to one "drop-in" sessions. Seminars provided opportunity for students to gain an understanding of some of Rupke's previous work and to engage in dialogue on areas that were relevant to their own projects. In addition to the meetings and seminars, which are timetabled in as part of the visit, there are informal opportunities for students to talk with the visiting Scholar in a more relaxed context such as an evening social

event. Professor Rupke felt that these occasions often provided the best opportunities for broader and more honest discussion about the student's research project and their longer term aspirations. Students were found to be more open and willing to seek advice on the aspects of their research project that they were concerned about in the less formal settings. These conversations also presented opportunities for the visiting scholar to offer suggestions on how to widen their research networks and prioritise their activities etc.

In terms of further potential learning experiences which could evolve from the Distinguished Visiting Scholars visits, Professor Rupke has not yet been involved in a student exchange between Göttingen University and Queen's. However, there have been Erasmus based exchanges with the University of Edinburgh, and this was a further internationalised learning experience that could potentially evolve from this programme.



Distinguished Visiting Scholars

The Scheme:

The Visiting Scholar Scheme was established some years ago to enable eminent scholars from outside of the UK to be invited to visit the School for a period of one or two weeks. These distinguished academics have interacted with staff on research matters, delivered a seminar in the School, and taken on a few other duties such as presenting one or two lectures to undergraduate classes and meeting with post-graduate students.

2011 SSC Distinguished Visiting Scholar:

Our visiting scholar this academic year is Nicolaas Rupke who will be at Queen's from Monday 14 March to Friday 18 March. Nicolaas is Lower Saxony Research Professor of the History of Science at Göttingen University. His areas of expertise are the late modern earth and life sciences. Among his books are *Alexander von Humboldt: A Metabiography* (2008) and *Richard Owen: Biology without Darwin* (2009). He is currently working on the non-Darwinian tradition in evolutionary biology. Rupke is a fellow of the German Academy of Sciences Leopoldina and the Göttingen Academy of Sciences, where he directs the project "Blumenbach Online."

(Thanks to Professor Rupke for his time and comments. Thanks also to Professor Steve Royle and Dr Diarmid Finnegan from the School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology for their assistance in providing background material for this article and arranging for the meeting with Professor Rupke)