In early May, Dr. Carmen Steggell and graduate student Laura Lien from Oregon State University, USA, visited CASE. They had crossed the Atlantic to work on the Housing Enabler (HE), which is an instrument for measuring the accessibility problems in the home for the elderly and persons with disabilities. The tool was developed by Susanne Iwarsson and Bjorn Slaug. Their goal is to develop collaboration on the HE to adapt to circumstances that apply to older Americans.

Carmen Steggell, a researcher in the Gerontechnology section of the interdisciplinary Center for Healthy Aging Research has had the intention to translate the HE to American conditions for a couple of years. With Laura Lien’s dissertation project approaching, this became an urgent task. The thesis is linked to Laura’s previous studies on how the transition between different forms of care housing for older adults works, but now she wants to include the functional aspects of individuals for their research. This is where the HE came in handy.

“There are other accessibility tools, but the HE has been identified as logical in rating or weighing the environmental factors that have the greatest impact on the problem of accommodation at various functional levels. It is also a straightforward way of dealing with individual situations. As a researcher, I am also looking for an instrument that is widespread across many countries so the results can be compared, and the HE is the best way to do this,” explains Carmen Steggell.

She has already translated the British version of the HE to American English and has converted the metric measurements for the various home conditions. But there is still a lot of work.

“The problematic thing is that U.S. accessibility standards are different from European. Sometimes a little, sometimes a lot. So what is a barrier or obstacle in Sweden may not be counted as an obstacle in the U.S., and vice versa,” exemplifies Carmen Steggell.

To really understand the tool and create a strategy for Laura Lien’s dissertation, they decided to make the trip across the Atlantic and take a five-day course for the HE. This was something they were both very happy with.

“We have determined a step by step strategy and now feel that we have fantastic opportunities for fruitful cooperation in the future. It is probably the biggest advantage of the trip, to meet people here in Lund in person. It provides connections and contacts that you may not gain otherwise,” says Laura Lien.

Even if they come from a multidisciplinary environment with the motto of studying everything from “cell to society,” the interdisciplinary collaboration in CASE left a lasting impression.

“At Oregon State University, we are really trying to build an understanding between different disciplines so they can work together, but we’re still in our infancy. Here [at CASE], the team is already fully functional and we have learned a lot just by watching how the dynamics work,” says Carmen Steggell.

Text and photo: Erik Skogh