# logo clear long blue.fw**Writing Development Initiative**

# **2021‐2022 Proposal Application Form**

Please answer all of the following questions as clearly and concisely as possible, filling in your responses immediately below each question.

When you have answered the questions, please indicate Chair approval in the space provided at the end of the form, and send the completed version of the form as a Word document to Michael Kaler ([michael.kaler@utoronto.ca](mailto:michael.kaler@utoronto.ca)).

If you would like to see proposals from previous years, there is a selection here: <https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/wdi-archives>.

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact Michael.

**Deadline:** Proposals must be submitted by **April 16th, 2021.**

1. Please indicate the course code: POL 346
2. Please briefly (150 words maximum) introduce the course, its position in its program, and writing assignments or instruction that have typically been used.

This course, Urban Politics, is a **year-long** 300-level course that students are not required to take, but many choose. Typically, this course has relied on lecture (there is no tutorial), a variety of research papers or policy briefs, and exams. Because of teaching online during COVID, I opted not to give any exams. Instead, **assignments included** weekly reading responses (6/10 required each term); a write-up of a public meeting (fall); an Op-Ed (winter); and research projects (fall and winter), with accompanying advance proposals with annotated bibliographies in each term. Because students identify with the local issues presented in urban politics – housing, transportation, public space – they are eager to research and write about how those issues play out in their lives.

1. Please indicate the desired learning outcomes for the proposal (as distinct from the course as a whole), and how these learning outcomes relate to the course or program’s learning outcomes: that is, indicate how the proposal complements student learning viewed holistically.

This proposal offers strategies **to improve students’ ability to use evidence to support an argument, and to move from fact-based to concept-based claims**. This goal is tied to the following course outcomes.

*By the end of this course, you will be able to:*

* *Critically evaluate and propose potential solutions to some of today’s most pressing urban policy challenges.*
* *Analyze processes of urban and local governance in your daily life.*

Across the range of writing assignments this year, I find that many students can amass sources, and some can make a claim based on these, but deploying facts, and then concepts from these sources to support an argument (especially engaging with counterargument) continues to be a challenge, particularly in the research papers and Op-Ed assignment. I do not think they are ‘bad students,’ or ‘bad writers’ but that the wealth of information they are exposed to continues to stymie their ability to choose strong sources, and to distinguish major and minor pieces of evidence based on these.

This point is well-made in a memo from my TA this year, Nathan Olmstead. Here he describes challenges in a batch of reading responses in which students are meant to engage two articles on the multicultural city with their families’ own immigration stories:

*When it comes to engagement with the reading, there is a difference between engaging with the facts mentioned in an article and engaging with the claims made based on those facts. Some students would piggyback references to particular years or trends in immigration to locate their story historically but have less to say about transnationalism, enclaves, or any of the other theoretical claims put forth in the reading.*

The goal of considering evidence, and using it to bolster an argument expands on Emily Nacol’s WDI course, Political Theory (the only other WDI course in POL), in which she supports students in writing an argumentative essay. As writing pedagogy is iterative, I look forward to mobilizing and advancing skills that students acquire in her course to work through contemporary urban issues.

1. Please provide a basic overview of the strategies that will be used to improve students’ writing.

Four strategies will be used to improve students’ writing:

1. Provide **specific scaffolding for writing research proposals**, and for turning proposals into research projects. This will include in-class exercises for generating ideas and getting immediate feedback; analyzing past proposals and papers for their strengths and weaknesses, either in class or as assignments; and establishing flexible templates for students to generate their final projects.
2. **Make reading response assignments more generative**. Presently, the assignments encourage summary rather than text/self or text/world connections. I would look forward to working with an Educational Developer on these assignments, and on structuring them to support larger writing goals.
3. **Explore opinion and argument, culminating in the Op-Ed assignment**. Op-Eds have the potential to be an accessible form of structured argument, which can be easily tied to student interests. However, as I marked Op-Eds this spring, I kept notes on trends I was seeing (see Appendix 1), particularly on student challenges with rhetorical flow, mobilizing facts, and differentiating opinion from assertion. This strategy first requires integrating this style of writing throughout the course readings, with an eye to analyzing successful structures. Second, my TA and I would participate in an Op-Ed training course (see below). Third, we will walk students through the process of pitching/publication, as I believe those real-world stakes are motivating.
4. Use **writing workshops** to help students identify their own blocks to writing, generate early material, and work through student challenges in real time. These will be collaboratively designed and led by RGASC staff, me, and the TA, and will be integrated throughout the year.
5. As of September 2020, UTM has begun offering a first-year writing course, ISP100H5 *Writing for University and Beyond: Writing About Writing*. For the 2021-2022 school year, this course will be required by the Departments of Anthropology, Chemical and Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Computer Science, and Visual Studies for admission to some of their Specialist and Major programs. If you are proposing a project for a first-year course in any of these Departments, please be sure to consider how the project would complement or reinforce instruction offered in ISP100H5. For further details about ISP100H5, please contact Michael Kaler (michael.kaler@utoronto.ca).
6. Please indicate how Teaching Assistants will be used in the project.

The TA will work closely with me to **develop writing assignments**, including in-class writing exercises, reading-responses, and scaffolding materials for research projects, based on their training in the WDI program, and from Op-Ed training. This will set them up to feel more a part of the course in general, and to think about pedagogy beyond marking, even without tutorials. The TA will also **evaluate student writing** in formative and summative assessments; **hold office hours** (incentivized, in groups); and **offer in-class feedback** and workshops to students based on trends they identify in student writing.

1. Please indicate whether additional TA training (beyond the WDI Writing TA Training session for new TAs) will be required and, if so, indicate the number of hours/TA (maximum 4), content of the training, and its relationship to the proposed student assessment or instruction.

I would like for my TA to join in **a faculty writing workshop on Op-Ed writing**, offered by Mira Sucharov, Associate Professor of Political Science at Carleton University, and author of [*Public Influence: a guide to Op-Ed writing and social media engagement*](https://utorontopress.com/us/public-influence-4) (U of Toronto Press, 2019). Dr. Sucharov teaches not only about the techniques of Op-Ed writing, but also about how to teach this material to undergraduates, as she has done often. I have secured funds from my department to pay Prof. Sucharov to come give this training to our faculty (and affiliated social science faculty who want to join).

The Op-Ed was a form that students and I struggled with in the past year of this course, but which also sparked everyone’s imaginations and passions with regard to mobilizing the issues we discussed in the course. Furthermore, the Op-Ed also appears as an assignment in Dr. Emily Nacol’s WDI course, and could potentially be a future point of collaboration.

1. Please describe the writing tasks incorporated as a direct result of the additional funding requested, and provide details on any writing instruction to be provided that relates to these tasks. If the funding is supporting an increased number of graded writing assignments, please indicate the number of additional words students will write.

The writing tasks resulting from the additional funding will be as follows:

1. **More robust reading responses**, as the best writing pedagogy is to have students write regularly. These will be oriented towards the skills and content we are aiming for in the term projects. TA will assist in designing these, and in marking them, and then synthesizing findings into mini-lessons in class.
2. **Re-worked research project assignments** (both proposal and final) that offer students the flexibility to choose their own topic areas, while supporting their ability to mobilize evidence towards argument. This will include templates for organizing materials (for example, see Appendix 2, from GGR 271: Research Methods, which I taught at UTSG.)
3. **A clearer Op-Ed assignment** based in the best practices in the field, which I hope the TA and I will learn from a training by Prof. Mira Sucharov (Political Science, Carleton). The assignment will include more specific instruction for choosing a topic, analyzing strong rhetorical structures, gathering meaningful sources, writing for maximum impact, and pitching and publishing.

Note: I came into teaching this course in the context of COVID, which meant that I was allotted more TA hours than usual. This gave me the capacity to assign all parts of the curriculum I intended to deliver. “Regular” funding next year will cause me to *reduce* my capacity to offer writing support next year, as well as my ability to improve on what I have learned teaching this course for the first time. This is not to say that I just want to keep up COVID-levels of funding and do what I was doing, but rather that I want to be able to work in earnest with a TA who has time to really think through assignments with me to improve our ability to instruct students at a standard I believe this course should support.

1. Please clearly state the number of students participating in the project, if the proposed project is course‐based. Indicate the maximum enrolment for the relevant course(s) and the final enrolment in the courses the last time they were offered. Please also indicate the course’s relationship to the broader program of study.

This course has a cap of **80 students**. We ended this year with about 65, attrition that I think is related to the pandemic. This is the **‘introductory’ course to urban politics**; the other two courses are 400-level seminars.

1. ~~Please provide details on how the funded activities will impact and support students, if the proposed project is not restricted to a specific course (or courses).~~
2. Please indicate any other resources you will use to support your project (library, RGASC, online resources, etc.).

In the 2020 – 21 school year (my first year teaching this course), we had two visits each term from RGASC writing consultant Jonathan Vroom – including workshops on sources, and guided writing exercises – as well as additional writing office hours and a writing retreat that he provided outside of course time. I also anticipate bringing in support from library staff, as I find that students continue to struggle with finding appropriate sources for research projects.

In the past year, I also worked with Dianne Ashbourne at RGASC to develop an in-house course evaluation, and to work on changes based on that student feedback. I would like to work on a similar process of surveying students at various points throughout the year to understand their experience of the writing changes.

1. **Please provide a detailed budget.**

Under regular circumstances, the TA for this course would be assigned 104 hours for the year-long course, or 1.3 hours/student /year (or .65 per term).

This year, I was able to offer 155 hours for the year, or 1.94 hours per student per year (or .97 per term).

To achieve what I describe here, including training, course material development, and additional writing instruction, **I am requesting 160 hours for the year, or 2 hours/student/year (or 1 per term)**.

The hourly pay rate for TAs for 2020 -21 will be **$52.71/hour**, including vacation & benefits pay:

Additional training hours for all TAs

**2 hours** for Op-Ed writing training with Prof. Mira Sucharov = $105.42

Writing assignment & scaffolding exercise development

10 reading responses per term (students choose 6)

Fall term paper proposal + scaffolding

Fall term paper assignment

Winter term paper proposal + scaffolding

Winter term project

\*the amount of time we will spend on developing/changing these will vary per assignment.

**10 hours** x $52.71 = $527.10

Additional hours for marking, focused office hours, in-class workshops

Marking (all assignments, total hours)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Assignment** | **Hours** | **Total** |
| Fall reading responses | 2.5 hours/week x 10 weeks | 25 hours |
| Public meeting write-up |  | 13 hours |
| Fall term paper proposal |  | 15 hours |
| Fall term paper |  | 15 hours |
| Winter reading responses (6 per student/term) | 2.5 hours/week x 10 weeks | 25 hours |
| Op-Ed |  | 14 hours |
| Winter term paper proposal |  | 15 hours |
| Winter term project |  | 15 hours |

Focused group Office hours: (**4 hours** = 1 per major assignment, open hours)

\*attendance will count towards term participation grade

In-class workshops + prep: **3 hours**

Course total

160 hours

Total requested:

**56 hours = $2951.76**

1. Please include this sentence in your application: “I confirm that I approve this proposal.”

I confirm that I approve this proposal

1. Please also include this sentence in your application: “I confirm that my Chair supports this proposal.”

I confirm that my Chair supports this proposal.

**Appendix 1: Notes on teaching Op-Eds**

1. Students still have a hard time distinguishing urban politics from other scales.
2. Students have difficulty distinguishing between Op-Eds, editorials, and other kinds of opinion pieces, especially those with a blend of opinion and reporting (like short features).
3. Students should read a bunch of these, and they should be assigned to ‘diagram’ them so they understand the construction.
4. Students don’t understand where research fits in (and mechanics such as citation.)
5. The organizing principle should be: we are doing X but we ought to be doing Y. Here are some good reasons. Here’s what you can do.

**Appendix 2: GGR 271 assignment 1 worksheet W20**

Title, Author, Journal, Date

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Topic (be specific) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The main argument in this paper is that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Conclusion: based on the evidence, what did the author find?**

How did the methods chosen influence the conclusion? What method would yield a different kind of conclusion?

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Ethical concerns: what kinds of ethical challenges does this research present (stated or not)? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Limitations: what is left out by this style of research (design or methods)? What more would you like to know that is not made possible through this design? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Further notes: