**Objective:** To contribute to the support of ELL students at UTM through projects that explore innovative pedagogy and approaches to language development

**Core Message:** Funds are available to support Departments who want to develop and deliver innovative activities, workshops, tasks, or other interventions designed to support ELL students at the undergraduate level.

**Overview**

The students at UTM are becoming more linguistically and culturally diverse with international students comprising over 20% of our undergraduate population; there are also many more students who do not speak English as a first language. The Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre (RGASC) and the Office of the Dean would like to help Departments, faculty, and staff provide enhanced support for English Language Learners (ELLs) in the four core areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The goals of this initiative are to provide ELL students with the communication skills they need to succeed at university and to help them gain confidence as they establish relationships within the larger UTM community. Building upon existing RGASC programming for ELL students (see, for example, [http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/programs-and-services/english-language-learner-support](http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/programs-and-services/english-language-learner-support)), the ELL Support Initiative seeks to develop students’ foundational communication skills as outlined in UTM’s Academic Plan 2017 (see Goal #1).

We know that language learning is most effective when it occurs in a discipline-specific context where the student must learn and use the language. An effective way to achieve this is to have an ELL Specialist collaborate with disciplinary faculty and TAs to ensure that the language support is tailored to the disciplinary context. Thus, this initiative seeks to promote systematic language learning support embedded within appropriate courses across the curriculum. It also seeks to offer professional development opportunities for those faculty members and TAs wishing to improve their ability to address the challenges facing our ELL population.

The program is guided by several principles, including:

- English language support should address a range of core skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking);
- English language programming should support the needs of ELL students at all levels of proficiency;
- English language skills should be focused within the discipline and related to a subject-specific context;
- English language learning happens over time and students must continue to develop their skills over the duration of their time at UTM.

We believe that Departments are most aware of the challenges their ELL students face and the different contexts that exist within each program of study. Therefore, instructors are encouraged to submit proposals for projects that will help ELL students enhance their listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills within the discipline. We are particularly interested in applications from instructors of courses that historically have had a large number of ELL students.
The Application Process

The ELL Support Initiative provides financial support for instructors who wish to implement specific ELL programming within their courses. Much of this support is directed at supplemental TA hours, which could allow for additional training, workshops, marking of written materials, or assessment of oral communication. We are looking for instructors who are committed to working with students to help them not only improve their communication skills, but also integrate into the UTM community in more meaningful ways. Funding for projects is determined in part by the number of students enrolled in the target course(s). Funding preference is given to projects where multiple core skills are targeted.

It is crucial to measure the efficacy of successful proposals. Assessment provides clear evidence of the value of the instruction; it guides instructors and other stakeholders in their ongoing reflection on, and efforts to improve, the support that students are given; and it provides data for ongoing research into language pedagogy and context related language support in the disciplines. Using the tools and methods developed to assess the Writing Development Initiative, the RGASC will organize and carry out assessment of the efficacy of funded projects: A Final Report template will be provided to instructors to document the details of the assessment of, reflection on, and changes to the project. Final reports for 2017-2018 projects will be due by May 31 2019.

The RGASC currently offers a variety of programming and services for faculty seeking to pursue ELL support in their classes, and these might be used as inspiration for instructors seeking to implement further/new ELL initiatives. The RGASC provides both generic and subject-specific Professional English Language Skills (PELS) workshops for ELL students; drop-in “help sessions” for ELL students; and regularly scheduled 30-minute appointments for ELL students. The RGASC’s ELL Specialist and Educational Developer also support instructors with assignment design, classroom instruction, and other activities that can make their classes more inclusive or accessible for students from all linguistic backgrounds.

Instructors requesting funds from the ELL Support Initiative are required to estimate the demand (i.e., approximate number of students impacted) for the project they are proposing. **They also need to ensure that the TAs participating in this initiative will be available for a minimum of three hours of supplemental training on ELL pedagogy, though more training can be implemented if the execution of the proposal requires it.** This training is paid by the ELL Support Initiative and is offered each September and January through the RGASC; it focuses on grammar/vocabulary support, oral communication strategies, providing effective feedback on written work, and sensitivity/inclusion practices. Not only does this training benefit the undergraduate ELL students at UTM, but it also serves as useful professional development for the TAs themselves.

To help potential applicants conceptualize a project for their own courses, we are including the following example.
An instructor of a large first-year course with a diverse student population notices that many of her ELL students are struggling to understand some parts of the course textbook. This instructor could apply to the ELL Support Initiative for funding to help support students’ critical reading through the provision of additional small-group workshops. These weekly workshops would be scheduled outside of regular class times and facilitated by a TA who has been given ELL training by the RGASC. The TA would teach strategies for critically reading the course text. The TA would require students to use the strategies taught during the workshop to take notes on course readings. At the end of the term, students would submit their notes to the TA for evaluation. These scores would then comprise a part of the students’ participation grade. (Alternative options for this “participation grade” would be made available for students in the course who do not take advantage of the critical reading workshops.)

This is just one of many examples of ELL support programs that have already proven effective in other courses at UTM. The RGASC’s ELL Specialist, Laura Taylor, would be happy to discuss the kind of support most appropriate for the students in your course. Please contact her at laura.taylor@utoronto.ca to set up an appointment.

Deadlines

Proposals for new projects should be submitted to Laura Taylor by April 13th, 2018 at this address: academicskills@utm.utoronto.ca. Decisions on funding will be made by June 15, 2018.