

CALL FOR PROPOSALS: ELLI

The Office of the Dean is pleased to invite Departments to submit proposals to the 2019-2020 English Language Learner Initiative (ELLI).

ELLI provides financial support for instructors who wish to implement specific English Language programming within their courses. Departments are invited to submit proposals for projects that will incorporate language learning components into core courses. 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. The Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre (RGASC) offers support for funded projects, while encouraging individual Departments to integrate forms of language learning instruction that meet the unique needs of their students. In past years, much of this support has been directed at supplemental TA hours, which allow for additional training, workshops, marking of written materials, or assessment of oral communication.

Please note that faculty interested in developing projects primarily intended to support writing instruction in core courses should contact Michael Kaler, the RGASC's Writing Specialist (michael.kaler@utoronto.ca); funding for such projects is potentially available through the Writing Development Initiative (details here: <https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/writing-development-initiative-wdi>).

Objective: *To contribute to the support of ELL students to 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 even 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) along with 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, which are important in their academic development. Building upon existing RGASC programming for ELL

students (see, for example, <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/programs-and-services/english-language-learner-support>), the ELL Support Initiative (ELLI) 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. Successful past initiatives have most commonly been directed at reading comprehension of course related materials. This has included aspects of vocabulary instruction paired with critical reading strategies. Because not all students at UTM are ELL students, ELLI differs from other RGASC offerings, such as the [Writing Development Initiative](#), which targets in-class writing projects applicable to all students.

Submitting a Proposal

We are inviting Departments to submit proposals for projects that focus on language learning fundamentals. 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. A link to an online **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 2019-2020 projects will be due by **May 31st, 2020**.

Currently, the RGASC currently offers a variety of forms of assistance 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 ELLI will be encouraged to estimate the demand for this offering within their course. They will also need to ensure that the TAs participating in this initiative will be available for additional training on how to better support ELLs offered each September and January through the RGASC. **Three hours of supplemental training on ELL pedagogy is required for all Teaching Assistants participating in the ELLI , though more training can be designed if the proposals’ execution requires;** the primary focus of the mandatory training will include grammar/vocabulary support, oral communication strategies, providing effective feedback on written work, and sensitivity/inclusion practices. Not only will this training benefit the undergraduate ELL students at UTM, but it will also serve 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 and Submission Details

Proposals for new projects should be submitted as a Word document to Laura Taylor by **April 19th, 2019** at this address: laura.taylor@utoronto.ca.

Decisions on funding will be made by **June 14th, 2019**.