

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).

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:

ANT 102H5

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

ANT 102H5 is the Introduction to Sociocultural and Linguistic Anthropology, and a required course for students wanting to minor, major, or specialize in anthropology. It also fulfills a social science credit, which is why many students enrol. This course offers an in-depth introduction to core concepts, categories, and practices of sociocultural and linguistic anthropology – the study of people as social and cultural beings, and of how people order their lives and give meaning to their experiences. Students learn to think anthropologically by de-familiarizing common-sense or taken-for-granted aspects of our world, and by studying the relations, meanings, practices, and values that explain why we do what we do.

In previous iterations, the course was offered without tutorials and consisted only of two exams – a midterm and a final. In Fall 2020, with a new instructor, writing assignments were introduced. Starting Fall 2021, tutorials will be introduced.

3. 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.

A core aspect of learning about anthropology is developing critical thinking skills. I aim for students to not just regurgitate what they learn in the classroom, but to learn how to use the ideas to which they are exposed and apply these concepts or theories to issues that are of interest to them. This approach informs my teaching, even at the first-year level.

While often vocal in class discussions, however, many students struggle to develop this argumentative voice in their writing. Though they might express opinions in tutorials, or make connections to things they have observed in their own lives in conversations with the instructor, students often are unclear how to take a stance or formulate an argument in a written assignment. First year students especially tend to fall back on viewpoints (I think, I feel) rather than well-supported arguments. In addition, many assume that taking “a critical approach” to a topic means literally critiquing it, in the negative sense.

Through this WDI, I aim to help students develop those skills as they work, step-by-step, towards a well-written final paper. Designed as a scaffolded writing assignment, students will work with TA's to develop an argument, an outline, a first draft, and eventually a final paper. Through this step-by-step approach, I want students to learn 1) how to formulate an original argument, 2) how to link argument, to theoretical concepts, to evidence, 3) how to organize their paper and avoid grammar mistakes, 4) how to avoid plagiarism.

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

I taught ANT 102 for the first time in Fall 2020, and introduced writing assignments to the course then (since previous iterations only had two big exams). However, ANT 102 did not have tutorials, which was a big obstacle to providing students the necessary support. I have now requested tutorials for this class, and received approval from the Dean.

The format of the written assignment in Fall 2020 was a scaffolded assignment in which students were asked to critically discuss a documentary (of their choice, from a list) in relation to the course content. Specifically, they were asked to use 3 course concepts to guide and inform their discussion of the documentary, structured around a core argument. The eventual submissions suffered from a lack of argument (often offering a mere summary of the documentary or agreeing with the stance taken by film makers), lack of organization, a disconnect between examples offered and argument made, and a range of issues related to different forms of plagiarism.

To improve the writing assignment and teach writing more effectively, I will 1) integrate small, low-stakes writing tasks and peer review into the tutorials, to work towards an argument, an outline, and first draft of the final paper, 2) break up the writing assignment, with three scaffolded assignments building on one another, allowing for drafting, revision and resubmission. Submissions of outlines and first drafts will be required as part of the final essay (i.e. the first text submitted will be considered the outline, even if submitted on the final paper deadline), 3) dedicate a few tutorials entirely to writing workshops, including a review of students' Turnitin reports to discuss plagiarism in detail, 4) provide TA's with more time to provide detailed, and constructive feedback to submitted assignments.

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).

Not all students are decided as majors or specialists at the first-year level. In fact, the majority are undecided and will therefore not be enrolled in ISP100H5.

While ISP100H5 will help those students already focused on Anthropology as specialists or majors, there are many more students in this course who are undecided or who might take anthropology as a minor. Those students equally need to learn how to write better, in terms of both argument development and organization/grammar. Integrating this initiative in a first-year course allows us to engage students as they enter university, providing them with concrete and basic writing skills that will benefit them throughout their time at UTM. With the support from RGASC and the additional time for assignment design and grading, we can create assessments that focus on writing skills essential to anyone continuing in the social sciences and humanities.

I have already been in conversation with Sara Seeley, the liaison between the ISP100 team and the Anthropology department. In fact, she was the one who recommended I apply for WDI. We intend to work together and discuss effective writing assignments for ANT 102 toward the end of the summer.

6. Please indicate how Teaching Assistants will be used in the project.

As of Fall 2021, TA's will lead tutorials and will grade assignments as they have in the past. If we are able to integrate WDI into ANT 102, TA's will be an essential part of the success of this initiative. Funds will be used to enhance existing TA support by enabling more writing focused training for TA (to enhance writing-focused instruction and improve constructive feedback), and by providing additional time for TAs to provide feedback and guidance to students (this pertains to small in-tutorial writing tasks, writing journals, and the scaffolded writing assignments). A lead writing TA will be responsible for developing writing workshops for tutorials, and providing rubrics for the writing assignments. They will also provide the TA team with guidance during the grading process as they will function as the go-to person for any advice pertaining to feedback and grading of written assignments.

7. 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.

Anthropology graduate student TA's write plenty themselves, but generally have never received explicit instruction on *how* to write effectively. They learned through trial and error. This means they can often identify why something doesn't work in an essay, but are unclear how to offer constructive feedback to students – how to indicate what a student can work towards, rather than highlighting what didn't work in the submitted assignment. They generally had little training in how to teach students *how* to write and how to write better: what are strategies for developing

an argument? How does one teach students about an argumentative thread or how to link examples effectively to an argument made? How does one teach students to not just repeat a particular view expressed in a documentary or article, but rather to take their own stance?

For the coming year, TA's will therefore need an hour of training in writing instruction. They will also need one hour of training in the provision of targeted formative feedback on drafts. I would therefore like to request 2 hours of training per TA.

8. 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 main focus of this initiative is to aid students in writing a strong final paper. If funding is received, one additional assignment will be added as part of this scaffolded assignment, and smaller formative assignments will be added to tutorials.

- In tutorials, low-stakes writing tasks will be included on a regular basis. Students will all have a writing journal in which they will need to, for example, reformulate an article's main argument in their own words, formulate a research question, or offer reflections to the readings. These submissions will be reviewed by the TA or will receive peer-review.

TA review will consist of more than more completion checks, but will include short feedback on the journal entry itself. For example, is the summary or reformulation of an article's main argument effective? Where did the student miss the point? What can be improved?

- Instead of two versions, the main written assignment will consist of three different submissions – an argument and outline, a first draft, and a final – to allow for feedback and review.
- TA's will provide extensive and detailed feedback to students' writing (as part of their journals) and the graded writing assignments.

9. 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.

The maximum enrolment for ANT 102H5 is 850 students (divided into two groups – 450 and 400). In the Fall of 2020, the enrolment was 603 (due to the pandemic).

10. 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).

N/A

11. Please indicate any other resources you will use to support your project (library, RGASC, online resources, etc.).

I will work directly with RGSAC **as well as with Sara Seeley** to develop 1) the scaffolded writing assignments, the detailed guidelines for students, and grading rubrics for the

assignments, 2) develop effective small writing tasks for tutorials, 3) train TA's. In addition. I will work with RGSAC to provide support for students, through consultations and writing groups. I will also integrate the academic integrity module into the course as a requirement (as I have done previously).

I will work with the library and our library liaison to develop a course specific lib guide and to introduce students to effective library searches.

12. Please provide a detailed budget.

The main requirement for this initiative is additional TA hours. Based on a conservative estimate of enrolments for Fall 2021 (based on Nov 1st enrolment rates over the last 4 years) I expect the additional hours to look as follows:

2 hours of additional training x 14 TAs = 28 hours

24 hours for lead writing TA (at an approximate 2hrs/week) = 24 hrs

20min/per student to evaluate writing journals x 700 = 233 hrs

(an estimate of approximately 5-6 journal entries throughout the semester, with limited feedback = 4min per journal entry)

20min/per student to evaluate first draft of paper x 700 = 233 hrs

Total of requested TA hours = 518

Extra time per student works out to 40 minutes per term.

"I confirm that I approve this proposal."

"I confirm that my Chair supports this proposal."

Sarah Hillewaert
March 19, 2021