



The College of  
**Arts&Sciences**

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## Fall 2021 James Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize

We are pleased to invite applications for the James F. Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize. This prize of \$500 will be awarded to the graduate student instructor submitting the best sequence of writing assignments for a First-Year Writing Seminar (second place winners, if any, will receive \$150).

Assignment sequences in a writing course are built around a series of essay topics. These sequences probably represent work assigned during a portion of the course rather than all of the essay assignments distributed over an entire semester. Submissions should include a rationale and a description of your plans for eliciting and responding to student drafts and revisions, as well as a description of how you prepare students for each essay assignment, for example by engaging them in preparatory writing exercises, including informal writing designed to help students understand the material on which they subsequently write formal essays. Reflections on what worked well, and why, and what you would change another time, are welcome.

The winner will be announced to the Cornell community. Winning entries will be deposited in the Knight Institute's web accessible archive and made available to other instructors under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. (See [creativecommons.org](https://creativecommons.org) for more information about cc licensing.)

To facilitate future searching of the Institute's archive, we ask that you provide a brief descriptive abstract (about 75 words) of your document, and a short list of appropriate keywords that might not appear in the text. Examples might include terms like "rhetorical situation," "style," "citation," etc. **Any borrowings such as quotations from course texts or handbooks must be cited properly in the document itself.**

Submissions are due by Monday, January 3, 2022. No exceptions can be made.

## Fall 2021 James F. Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize Application

~Please type or print clearly. Do not staple. Use paper clips only~

Instructor's name Geethika Dharmasingle  
Dept & Course # Asian Studies Course title Violence and State in Asia

Should I win a prize, I give the John S. Knight Institute permission to publish, quote from, and/or distribute copies of the assignment sequence, and to distribute publicity to newspapers and other publications, local and/or national, about my winning the prize. I also grant the Knight Institute permission to deposit the assignment sequence in a web accessible archive and make it available under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. I am prepared to send electronic versions of my text to Amanda Munson ([anm94@cornell.edu](mailto:anm94@cornell.edu)) in the Knight Institute. I understand that I will receive the award for my prize-winning sequence upon submission of the electronic text.

Grant Proposal  
Title of Assignment Sequence  
Instructor's signature [Signature] Date 01/06/22

## **James Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize Application**

Title: Grant Proposal Assignment  
Author: Geethika Dharmasinghe  
Course Title: Violence and the State in Asia  
Year: Fall 2021

### **James Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize: Grant Proposal Assignment**

#### **Introduction**

For my first-year writing seminar, “Violence and the State in Asia,” I designed a sequence of assignments to examine violence and the socio-cultural life of Asia, and the intersection of the two. I incorporated various modes of writing (descriptive, analytical, and creative) and made students work collaboratively. I wanted to encourage them to form study groups or identify a “study buddy,” something I encourage throughout the semester. It addresses the Instructors Guides to Supporting the Incoming Class, compiled by the Center for Teaching Innovation and shared by Dean of the Graduate School: Build community and belonging

I did not necessarily tell students what is violence is as it erupts, instead I taught them the conditions that make violence possible and how to restrain violence. We discussed masculinity, respectability, shame, guilt, race, religion, and more. The students learned to critically analyze and contextualize linguistic and cultural norms and political structures in the context of power relations within Asia and beyond (one of the learning outcomes).

#### **Final Assignment: Grant Proposal**

The class is divided into three sections based on the three axis that we grapple with: the problem of violence; its emergence and perpetrators; and its multiple unfolding. In each assignment, I focused on one or two exercises to teach a skill that will lead to completing the final assignment: grant proposal.

We moved throughout many countries in South Asia. Following anthropologist Bernard Cohn, I named this intellectual adventure going into an ‘anthropologyland,’ which is, for our purpose, a zone where the learned concepts can be practiced. The final assignment was designed to take students to the field in a very concrete and academic sense.

#### **Rationale**

Writing grant proposals require particular skills but in the end it is skill in writing that is valued most. Ironically, writing a successful grant proposal is not necessarily about how well one knows the subject of a study. This is because the proposal comes before the actual work or study. Later, one knows a lot about the subject. In applying to study it the most important value is how well one presents it. This requires not only analytical skills, but finding a gap in the object of one’s research, developing one’s own voice and presenting the subject to a particular audience. Ultimately, this

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involves concise writing and editing, which shows the stakes of writing as it actually has a 'price' attached to it. Proposal writing emphasizes the use of active and positive language. A strong proposal needs strong analytical and research skills. Further, it makes students imagine the importance of their research in the sense of contribution to the field.

Throughout the course, students read and learned about concepts while learning the specifics of anthropologyland. First, the students orient their attention to the world around them, attune themselves to the forms of violence they interact with, and write about their experiences.

It is my expectation that students will be able to write a grant proposal if we focus and prepare assignments on five questions that any grantor in the humanities asks (refer to page 5-6) in addition to an abstract and reference list).

So I organized the main assignments, the project milestones, and the exercises that will lead to the final assignments, preparing students to answer the questions and build on previous conceptual work, gained skills and especially writing.

### Effectiveness and Areas for Improvement

The seminar was effective as it required students not only to work on different writing skills but practice writing skills beyond classroom settings. In preparation for writing grant proposals, students also wrote a testimonial of an experience of violence, an argumentative paper, and a public statement. The assignment, writing a public statement on a topic in which they demanded justice required them to work as a group on to produce a nine-page statement. It was an exercise that guided them to think about a paper that is more than four to five pages long in preparation for a grant proposal of eight to nine pages. The three types of assignments each went through a peer review process. This helped the students emphasize the importance of narrative flow and coherence.

Many students responded positively to the final grant proposal assignment. In every assignment, I made them write a *labor report* on how they did what they did and explain their writing process. They also granted themselves a grade. One student wrote, "When I first read this assignment, I felt extremely overwhelmed. I didn't think I would ever be able to write something like this, and I felt like I couldn't do it. However, the mini due dates pushed me to tackle this paper one section at a time, and slowly, I saw my paper become a completed product. Looking back at my work, I'm so happy and proud to see everything that I've learned from this semester (such as how to critically analyze papers and incorporate peer comments) come together to form one completed product."

Many students commented on the early preparation for the final assignment. They said they enjoyed *collaborative reading* (using the software [hypotes.is](https://hypotes.is) ([Links to an external site](#))) for each week's assigned reading. This prepared them to think about violence as a concept and its different ways of unfoldings, and also to think about a topic that they would research in their chosen country and to engage and debate collaboratively. From the eighth week of the course onward, we work on answering the questions of grant proposals and

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peer reviewed them. To help the students with their literature reviews (for this assignment and for the future assignments at university) we met twice with two librarians for informational sessions on how to find materials and save documents that we find online.

These library sessions also helped them to write the *Annotated Bibliography Assignment* that was preparation for writing the final project. This helped them to find existing literature on the research topic, the main arguments around the topic and the research gap to find a question to focus on.

Also, from the second week of the course, I ask students to choose a country in Asia to focus on for their final assignment of writing a grant proposal to do research in that country. This exercise, *Group Presentations: The Asian Factbook*, was extremely effective as students prepared to learn more about the countries they were interested in writing a grant proposal to visit. Every other week they presented collaboratively on a given topic: population and diversity, history (political structure, kingdoms, colonialism, democracy), social, economic and ethnic problems, culture (music, arts, sculptures, ancient artifacts, clothing), and economy.

### Design and Preparation Assignments

All assignments in the course were designed with the final grant proposal assignment in mind. I focus below on two main assignments: Assignment 2: Argumentative Paper and Assignment 3: Public Statement. I detail below the writing activity students engaged in for each assignment and their rationale.

### Assignment #2 Argumentative Paper (15%, 3 to 4 pages)

**Prompt:** In “A Space for Violence: Anthropology, Politics and the Location of a Sinhala Practice of Masculinity,” Pradeep Jeganathan produces ‘space for violence’ as opposed to the understanding of violence as a ‘fury’ or ‘sudden eruption.’ By doing so, he succinctly engages with the views he opposes. Carefully reading the essay, summarize the arguments of the authors he opposes by adapting the viewpoints or the voice of the author. It is important to remember, it is not just a summary but a summarizing different viewpoints to build a frame of reference from which a position emerges and becomes meaningful.

### Rationale

This assignment is designed to teach students to engage with multiple perspectives on a concept but carefully locate them as opposing views to each other. The goal is twofold: 1) identify and explain the main ideas of the text and different standpoints of authors and 2) provide your own evaluation of the text (both its content and writing) based on your close and careful reading. Be precise with your terminology, especially when you are citing the author: make sure you are engaging in their exact language and argument. Also note that it requires you to cite your source to prove or claim your argument. So citing in the correct format is important.

### Writing Exercise

**Step 1:** Group work: Discuss the main arguments of authors we read and two concepts on violence they engaged with.

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**Step 2:** Individual work: Concept summary activity: Anthropologist Jonathan Spencer argues that there is a general interest in what we might call “vicarious violence” among the Sinhala community (1990: 606).

- Summarize what Spencer meant by ‘vicarious violence’ and engage with the author’s reasoning in your own voice. Write it into our Google Document (one paragraph). [Students were given a worksheet to help them differentiate ‘they say,’ from ‘I say.’]
- When you engage with the text, provide a quotation and cite it properly (using APA, Chicago, or MLA reference style) and give an example from your own experience or from what you heard of.
- Be precise with your terminology, especially when you are citing the author: make sure you are engaging in their exact language and argument.
- As you write your summary: Practice using phrases from the “writing skills, strategies, and style” on Canvas. Those phrases will give you the necessary analytical language for introducing, rephrasing, explaining, and analyzing author’ explanation.

### Step 3: Peer Review

After writing the summary assignment, the students divided into pairs and peer reviewed their summary.

### Step 4: Citation Exercise

Students were given a worksheet with information on references, such as a journal article, book, and online magazine article, and asked them to put them in a correct format of whatever the reference style that they use.

### Assignment # 3 Public Statement (15%, 8 to 9 pages)

**Prompt:** Write a *Letter of Demand*. Imagine you are an organic intellectual in one of the countries you would like to visit *when you received the grant*. You are writing a demand for justice letter for the victims of violence. The letter asks people to sign on, you will submit it to the government authorities. Provide recommendations to solve the issue. You can choose your own topic, but discuss it with me before you proceed. Draw on the readings in and/or beyond class to support your thesis and analysis. I will assign you to groups. You will form a collective and come up with a name for the collective.

Reading: Combahee Collective Statement

Select a theme for your collective to represent and write on behalf of:

Gender equality

Civil government

Displacement/migration

Patent rights of vaccines

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Minimum wage

Minority ethnic communities

Surveillance

### Rationale

This assignment focused on writing convincingly. A letter of demand or condemnation seeks to convince not only the intended public, but also to create a campaign on the matter of concern. Students had to convince the readers—government officials and the opposition—on the importance of their ideas. In addition to having a strong opener, a strong thesis statement, a good readability, the convincing use of evidence is also very important when writing a letter of demand for justice. They had to include an opening and the concluding paragraph that linked the bigger claims that provided concrete recommendations for ways forward.

### Writing Activities

**Step 1:** Does structure matter? Students were put in groups of five and given two short public statements written on topics related to justice and equality. I first asked them to discuss what was the best piece and explain why.

**Step 2:** I asked them to write two 150-word paragraphs to replace parts of the text that they thought could be improved.

**Step 3:** Peer review the exercise.

### Writing Activities for the Final Assignment

#### Assignment #5: Grant Proposal (20%, 8 pages)

**Prompt:** Writing proposals for financial support will be a part of your academic journey. Your assignment is to design a research proposal application focusing on the concepts we learned in the class. Imagine you will be given \$2,500 for three months to spend in the field. To complete this assignment, you need to imagine and think creatively. You can choose any topic as your focus. You will write more than you need to complete the final proposal in answering the following questions but we will be editing them to match with the final assignment page limit. Include in your application your project abstract (150), full project proposal (8 page), and the reference list.

*Question 1: Describe your research question/ hypothesis or research objective. That is, what will be the focus of your investigation? (1 page, single space)*

*Question 2: How does your topic build on existing scholarship on violence related topics? Give specific examples of this scholarship and its findings. Draw on the readings in and/ beyond class to support your analysis. (2 pages, single space)*



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*Question 3: What evidence will you need to collect to answer your research questions? How will you go about collecting and analyzing this evidence? (1 page, single space)*

*Question 4: What is your training and how well prepared are you to do this research? List examples of your language competence, technical skills, previous research, and any other relevant experience. Describe any work you have already done on this project, and/or how it relates to your prior research. If you are collaborating with other academic personnel describe their role/s in the project and the nature of the collaboration. (1/2 page, single space)*

*Question 5: What contribution does your project make to literature on violence and to your specific discipline?. Please note that every foundation or institution mission is to support original and innovative research in particular disciplines. A successful application will emphasize the contribution its proposal research will make, not only to the specific area of research being addressed, but also to the broader field of your discipline. (1/2 page, single space).*

You will be answering the questions 4 and 5 together.

**Rationale:** Refer to Page 1-2.

We started working on the grant proposal in week 8. I divided the assignment into four writing steps based on the questions of the application itself. Over seven weeks, they worked on each question (see first page), each piece peer reviewed by at least two students, and completed the assignment. Following are the many steps that they went through to complete the assignment.

**Step 1:** I asked them to choose two possible topics that they would focus on for their final project and write a paragraph explaining why they chose the topic and what their strengths and weaknesses are. Students were put into pairs and asked them to discuss their topics.

**Step 2:** Workshop on how to work on a research question. We discussed what makes a good research question.

**Step 3:** To familiarize the existing literature on a given topic and choose them quickly, I gave them a worksheet modeled on the one that developed by Kate Navickas on how to analyze scholarly articles. In addition to this, we had two library information sessions on how to find academic articles.

**Step 4:** Work on the fourth and fifth questions on the training and the contribution together as we did not have time to spend two weeks on each question.

**Step 5:** While they peer reviewed each piece every week, they also peer reviewed and edited the final draft of connected pieces.

**Step 6:** Presentation of the final proposal.