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Document Title: Grant Proposal Assignment

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Course: ANTHR 1101

Course Title: Culture, Society, and Power: Power and Intimacy in Modern Southeast Asia

Year of Award: Spring 2019

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Spring 2019 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 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 in M101 McGraw Hall by Monday, May 20. No exceptions can be made.

Spring 2019 James F. Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize Application

~Please Print Clearly. Do **not** use staples. Use paper clips only~

Instructor's name TING HUI LAU Instr e-mail TL548@cornell.edu

Department Anthropology Course # and title 1101-102 FWS: Culture, Society, and Power: Power and Intimacy in Modern Southeast 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 Donna Newton (dlo1@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 Assignment

Title of Assignment Sequence

Instructor's signature [Signature] Date 18 May 2019

Title: Grant Proposal Assignment

Author: Ting Hui Lau

Course: Anthropology

Course Title: Power and Intimacy in Modern Southeast Asia

Year: Spring 2019

James Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize: Grant Proposal Assignment

Description

In my FWS course, “Power and Intimacy in Modern Southeast Asia,” students were assigned a travel grant proposal as their final assignment. Students had to design a research plan, travel itinerary, and budget for the Southeast Asia Program (SEAP) Engaged Travel Grant. The SEAP Engaged Travel Grant is a one thousand U.S. Dollar travel grant for undergraduate students intending to travel to Southeast Asia for research or study. Grant applications are reviewed on a rolling basis. Students are encouraged to apply at least six weeks in advance of travels. Applicants must complete at least one class on Southeast Asia or one Southeast Asian language class to qualify for the grant. The Director of the Southeast Asia Program, Professor Abby Cohn, and the Associate Director of the Southeast Asia Program, Dr. Thamora Fishel, approved that students in my course were eligible to apply for the grant.

Rationale the assignment

I wanted to create a *summative assignment* that will allow students to *practice all the writing skills covered throughout the semester*. An actual grant proposal was an ideal assignment because writing a proposal requires students to mobilizes many different writing skills including consideration for audience, writing clearly, developing attractive openers, concluding with strong closers, and citing appropriately. Proposal writing also emphasizes the use of active and positive language. In addition, a strong proposal should also be written from a place of passion and with a clear voice. Finally, a good grant proposal also needs strong analytical and research skills. For these reasons, a grant proposal to travel Southeast Asia was an ideal assignment to conclude the class with.

In addition, I wanted to end the class bringing home the point of how and why good writing matters. An actual grant to the Southeast Asia Program, which students could apply to, helps give students a sense of the *stakes* involved in good writing. A grant proposal assignment highlights to students the importance of communicating to a broad audience.

Furthermore, I wanted to emphasize *writing as an ongoing process driven by passion*. Rather than a final research assignment that *concludes*, a research proposal *opens* future possibilities and potential new interests.

Effectiveness and areas for improvement:

It was effective assigning students different writing genres. In addition to writing a grant proposal, students in my class also wrote a policy brief, a film review, an argumentative essay, and a travelogue. Writing across genres allowed them to practice different writing skills and emphasized writing beyond the classroom setting. Many students responded positively to the final grant proposal assignment. Grant proposal writing was an important skill that they were pleased to have a chance to practice in class.

Students also enjoyed the peer review process. Many commented that they benefited from reading out loud their drafts to partners and peers. Reading their drafts and commenting on each other's writing alerted them to common writing mistakes. In addition, reading out loud emphasize the importance of flow and coherence in writing.

Early preparation helped students prepare for the final assignment. Before commencing their final assignment, students took turns sharing their research topics both in class and on Blackboard. Classmates gave feedback on these topics. This was an extremely useful exercise because not only did students started to think early on about their research interests and question (which further deepen their engagement with the class as a whole), students also had the opportunity to practice writing abstracts and summarizing their research topics in an informal and low stakes environment.

Design and Scaffolding of Assignments:

The Grant Proposal final assignment involved layers of scaffolding:

Scaffolding 1: The sequencing of all assignments throughout the course. Assignments are designed in a nested sequence. Each assignment builds on the skills acquired in previous one.

Scaffolding 2: The specific writing activities for the assignments itself.

All assignments in the course were designed with the final grant proposal assignment in mind. I focus below on three main assignments—Assignment 2: A Travelogue, Assignment 2: Expository writing, and Assignment 3: Policy brief. I detail below the writing activity students engaged in for each assignment.

Assignments leading up to final assignment

Assignment 2: A Travelogue

Prompt:

Write a nonfiction essay to a magazine reflecting on your experience visiting Singapore and Malaysia. Include in your reflection a comparison between “HDB flat life” and “kampong life.” What do these very different ways of living tell us about the costs and benefits of modernization in Southeast Asia?

Rationale:

This assignment was a creative writing piece to start students on an imaginary journey to Southeast Asia. This assignment was designed to build up towards the final assignment where students had to create a travel plan to Southeast Asia. In addition, I also assigned this genre to encourage students to unshackle themselves from the formulaic five-paragraph essay and encourage them to **develop their own voice**.

Writing Activities:

Part 1: Exploring through a graphic novel

To complete this assignment students were assigned to write fieldnotes based on a graphic novel (*Kampong Boy* by Lat) that I assigned them to read in class. They had to imagine they were traveling with their partner. Students were assigned to work in pairs and write “fieldnotes” documenting incidences, things, experiences, and observations that caught their attention.

Part 2: Sharing Fieldnotes

Students were then put in groups to discuss their fieldnotes. They had to share with the group thoughts on how to critically engage with strangeness and familiarity.

Assignment 3: Expository Writing

Prompt:

Benedict Anderson proposes that a nation is an imagined community. Building on Anderson, Thongchai argues that the nation is more than something “produced out of one’s head” (Thongchai 1997:15). The nation, Thongchai maintains, is shaped in dynamic processes of identification that demarcate the spheres of “us” against “them.” Specifically, Thongchai analyzes the role of geographical knowledge and mapping technology in the formation of the nation. Both Anderson and Thongchai were writing in a time before the proliferation of social media technology. Does social media amplify or diminish national boundaries? Discuss the ethics of social media use in the current political context. Draw on the readings in class to support your arguments and analyses.

Rationale:

This assignment turned students writing skills to a more structured form of writing—expository writing. This assignment focused on teaching students how to (1) develop a **strong thesis** and (2) **cite appropriately in the correct format**.

Writing Activities:

Part 1: Thesis statement worksheets and group work

Students were divided in groups to find the main arguments of the authors we read in class. They had to fill in a worksheet paraphrasing the author’s main thesis statement.

Part 2: Debate

After deciphering the main thesis statement of the four authors we read, I divided students into two groups to debate about nationalism. Students debates over the statement: “This House Believes That Nationalism Can Be A Force For Good.” This debate encourages student to consider writing as a conversation. Students had to learn to decipher “they say” from “I say.”

Part 3: Outline

Students were given time to outline and brainstorm their main thesis statement and read the thesis statement to their partner.

Part 4: Citation

In addition to reading the contents of the drafts, students were given time to edit each other’s citation in class.

Assignment 4: Policy brief

Prompt:

You are an international development consultant. An organization working on issues related to environment and social justice has hired your service. This organization works in many parts of the world, implementing poverty alleviation projects in the arena of food security and rural technology, primary and mental health care, and animal welfare and sustainable agriculture.

Development workers in the organization are seeking anthropological insights into how to collaborate with local communities. Your assignment is to write a policy brief discussing the importance of taking into consideration local cultural practices in development projects: Provide recommendations for how development workers may approach cultural differences and similarities.

Draw on the readings in and/or beyond class to support your thesis and analysis.

Rationale:

This assignment focused on teaching students how to write convincingly. A policy brief is a piece of writing that seeks to convince. Students have to convince readers—government officials, development workers, and researchers—on the importance of their ideas. In addition to having a strong opener, a strong thesis statement, and good readability, the convincing use of evidence is also very important when writing a policy brief. Students learned to **summarize cases and deploy evidence effectively** to support their claims. In addition, students also had to include **a strong concluding paragraph** that linked their argument to bigger issues that provided concrete recommendations for ways forward.

Writing activities:

Part 1: Precis

Students were put in groups of four. Each person in the group was in charge with writing a five-sentence precis summarizing the main argument and their own reflection on a reading in class. Students posted the precis on blackboard.

Part 2: Writing your partner's conclusion

After completing a draft, students had to share their draft with each other. Their partner had to read the full draft and come up with a conclusion of the draft they were reading. This conclusion should summarize the main points and also provide recommendations.

Writing Activities for final assignment.

Assignment 6: Grant Proposal

Prompt:

The Southeast Asia Program (SEAP) in Cornell offers travel grants to undergraduates interested to visit Southeast Asia on a rolling basis. Write an application for the SEAP Engaged Travel Grant. This funding can be used for international study or independent travel. Include in your application your project title, project abstract (200 words), full project proposal (1100 words) and a tentative budget for your travel.

Rationale:

Refer to page 1

Writing Activities:

Part 1: Sharing travel plans and ideas

Starting from Week 5, students took turns to share their research ideas. The night before students had to share their research ideas in class, students posted a short abstract on blackboard (200 words) covering the following questions:

James Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize Application

1. If you were given 1000 USD to travel Southeast Asia, what topic/social phenomenon would you focus on your explorations on?
2. Why have you chosen this topic?
3. What are the concrete steps you would take to investigate this topic/phenomenon?

The next day, students gave a 5-minute elevator presentation on their chosen research topic. Other students would comment on their topic either in class or on Blackboard.

Part 2: Producing drafts

After Spring break, students returned to class focusing on producing this final assignment. I divided the assignment into the application itself and the budget and abstract. Over the course of the month, students workshop drafts and finalized their application. I describe below the step by step how I led students to producing their final assignment:

Step 1: Freewrite and produce initial first application draft. Students share each other's free write at the end of class.

Step 2: Students read each other's drafts or outline out loud and give feedback in pairs. In addition, the Associate Director of Southeast Asia Program, Dr. Thamora Fishel comes to class to talk about grant writing to students

Step 3: Students are divided into groups of three and read out loud each other's application draft. Focus on this workshop is on closers and openers.

Step 4: Workshop on abstract & budget

Step 5: Final full application workshop. Students read out loud drafts and make edits on paper to each other's paper.