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Teaching Grant Writing

Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication

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This white paper offers a review of literature and book reviews to help instructors create and evaluate their grant writing courses. It reviews some of the literature on teaching grant writing, and it summarizes book reviews of popular and new books that instructors might want to consider using in their courses.

Grant Writing Course Content and Design

Studies have also described the typical content coverage and design of courses. Typical courses taught proposal sections and writing tips, as well as other genres involved in grant writing, such as letters, memos, progress reports, resumes, among others. Modules also taught pre- and post-grant processes.

Walsh, Bonner, Springer, Lalasz and Ives (2013) conducted a content analysis of 93 syllabi from graduate-level grant writing courses, and they received survey responses from 17 instructors of said who taught grant writing to characterize textbook selection processes and best practices of instruction. The majority of class time covered finding grant opportunities and programs, writing the grant, and creating the budget, rather than post-grant writing practices. The most frequently used textbooks included *Winning Grants Step By Step* (Carlson, O'Neal-McElrath, and The Alliance for Nonprofit Management, 2008) and *Proposal Planning and Writing* (Miner & Miner, 2013). Instructors said that they picked textbooks with quality "presentation of practical information," "grant proposal examples," hands-on activities, checklists of "grant application dos and don'ts," and "user-friendly, rather than scholarly/academic" tone (p. 78). Instructors wanted more emphasis on research proposals, online components, and logic models for budgeting (p. 79).

Flowerdew (2016) examined the design and implementation of a curriculum that helped post-graduate students in science and engineering write grants. The curriculum relied heavily on Swales (1990) genre analysis and lexico-grammatical patterning, as well as Ding's (2008) process-oriented approach to academic writing. Grant proposal writing is another important high-stakes genre as getting a research article published is often dependent on being awarded a grant to undertake the research project in the first place. Flowerdew (2016) discovered that it was difficult to find suitable example materials for pedagogic use. Flowerdew (2016) recommended teachers gather and use the small, local body of samples for teaching purposes from analysts and practitioner familiar with the context of grant writing in the field.

Wahlstrom (2001) recommended teaching additional forms such as memos, letters, resumes, and reports, alongside teaching proposals, because these genres are interconnected in the grant writing genre system. Memos and letters are important in communication between group members and clients. Resumes are required to submit as evidence of applicant organizational history and qualification. Reports are important for tracking and communicating group progress. Finally, graphics are integral for communicating timelines and other information in the need statement and literature review. Proposals

facilitate writing instruction because they naturally conform to the drafting process and writing stages. Students also appreciate the "real-life" quality of assignments.

Proposal Technology and Proposals for Students and Entrepreneurs

Newer course design suggestions included incorporating social media in client and funder research and focusing on business plans and proposals for entrepreneurs rather than research proposals or service proposals for nonprofits. Finally, grant writing courses can also focus on proposals immediately important to students, such as proposals for undergraduate research or graduate thesis and dissertation projects.

Li (2012) discussed how a grant writing class used social media. Students were assigned to groups required to design group names and logos. Students registered with Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts. They used social media to search for real clients in the area, gather client information, and communicate with one another. Teams designed social media strategy proposals for clients.

Weber and Spartz (2014) suggested teaching writing business plans and entrepreneurship proposals rather than research proposals. Partnering students with entrepreneurship programs at their respective universities, or with local entrepreneurs for service learning opportunities, would allow students to participate in the negotiations during client meetings and learn a company's needs and project scope. Business proposal writing would allow student writers to gain more exposure to additional methods and genres such as customer focus groups and narratives, procedures and permits.

Cheng (2014) interviewed two graduate students about writing their dissertation grant proposals and found that four main themes emerged as they learned: (1) They equated learning grant writing to learning "how to play the game" of academic writing. They were unclear about how to organize claims and information in the appropriate place in the proposal. (2) They had to navigate when to follow and when to break the rules. (3) They had to decide when to use which writing move or strategy. They wanted to apply the rules of completing course assignments during the act of writing dissertation proposals. And (4) they had to work through who to cite in the grant. They were unclear on the size and scope of the literature review.

Using student-oriented request for proposals (RFPs) and proposals, using social media and other current technology, and focusing on entrepreneurship could be strategies for better contextualizing grant writing for students.

Teaching Grant Writing as a Genre System

Literature supports teaching grant writing beyond formal conventions. Including teamwork, guest visits, additional genres (e.g., letters, memos, resume), involvement from experts and professionals, and contact with program officers underscore the full network of grant writing activities.

Ding (2008) followed 35 novice grant writers—2nd-year-PhD students—as they learned the particulars of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant writing. Ding used social apprenticeship—a pedagogical approach that includes interaction and socialization with experts and collaborators (such as clients and funder representatives) as well as modeling, coaching, and collaboration from teachers and peers—to teach the intricate activity network of NIH grant submissions, including grant seekers, reviewers, and

program officers producing consuming, exchanging and distributing proposals, budgets and forms in a system governed by rules. Incorporating their labs, home departments, and external resources enriched the learning experience.

Jones (2017) taught proposal writing as a service learning course in conjunction with the Innocence and Justice Project at her university. Technical communication became a vehicle for social change. Students wrote grant proposals for funding the non-profit's work offering pro bono legal services. Jones enlisted situated learning (including stories, reflection, exposure to experts, collaboration, coaching, practice, articulation of skills, technology, and historical supplements) and immersive learning (using multimodal technology such as search engines, online course software and podcasts, among other). Students also considered their own positionality and power to effect change in their world. The pedagogical strategy helps avoid pitfallssuch as hyper-pragmatism (or an over-emphasis on the mechanics of the genre over the historical and social dimensions and impact of writing) in teaching grant writing .

Pierce (2007) listed the virtues and potential lessons that group work affords. Student teams in the study wrote several genres (including letters, progress reports and presentations) and used research methods such as interviewing. Teams set their own rules and function as autonomous entities, including on making decisions whether to discharge fellow members and brainstorming their own topics. Teaching additional forms of writing exposed students to the full genre system, with letters to answer RFPs, and progress reports for internal (group members) and external (instructors and other university community members) audiences.

Grant Writing as Service Learning

Studies also found grant writing courses were a natural fit for incorporating service learning. Working with clients helped focus and contextualize grant writing for students, but it also posed difficulties such as coordinating meetings and making revisions.

Mennen (2006) incorporated service learning in a grant writing and research course. The course wrote a grant for the local chapter of Big Brothers / Big Sisters. They used secondary sources such as Guidestar to research information about the chapter. They also contacted the chapter's fund development officer to gather additional information and resources such as their boilerplate with basic information about the agency. Mennen recommended having students evaluate their work and reflect on their progress often.

Bourelle (2014) taught proposal writing linked with an internship courses. One student worked for a nonprofit and helped the organization write a fundraising plan and a grant for the organization. The student worked closely with the instructor and organization director. But he experienced barriers and roadblocks that accompany grant writing, such as the organization's lack of information, inability to provide required details, and mixed messages or lack of clear directives. These problems led to student confusion and disinterest, which Bourelle addressed with more hands-on guidance and one-on-one interaction with the student. These problems degraded the non-profit's satisfaction with the student's work and professionalism. More scaffolding and regular progress reporting can help resolve these issues.

Overall, student reflection and evaluation, regular contact and reporting between teachers and students, and between teachers and clients, can help manage the quality of service learning in grant writing classes.

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Reviews of Popular Grant Writing Books

Several grant writing courses taught in technical communication programs use Writing Proposals (2008) and Grant Seeking in an Electronic Age (2004), per Walsh et al. (2013). See their study for more details.

Grant Seeking in an Electronic Age (Mikelonis, Betsinger, & Kampf, 2004) is meant for graduate students, grant writing professionals, and education administrators. It covers context of grant writing, strategic planning, audience analysis, and organizational needs assessment. It also covers how to write each section of a basic proposal, with special attention paid to the needs. Chapters also cover identifying funding sources, finding the right funding match, and learning online systems for submitting grant applications, as well as conducting research with online tools. The book also covers writing pre-proposals for internal and external audience vetting. It stresses the importance of advance planning in proposal writing, and it describes writing tips and technology resources that can help in the proposal writing process, as well as front and back matter, such as cover letters, abstracts, and appendices (Petit, 2004).

Writing Proposals: Rhetoric for Managing Change (Johnson-Sheehan, 2008) is meant for upper division college courses, or for businesses and agencies who want to teach employees grant writing. It introduces the rhetorical roots of grant writing in ancient rhetorical thinkers and terms. The book covers proposals that identify real world problems and opportunities ripe for designing programming and seeking funding. It stresses teaching proposal sections in terms of the rhetorical situation—making arguments to justify need, change, qualification, cost-benefit, and budget items. The book covers writing style and offers best practices for plain language and editing. The book also includes sample grants (Whalen, 2002).

These texts are useful, but both were published last decade. Newer books can provide more coverage of new grant opportunities, types, and technologies.

Reviews of New Grant Writing Books

Grant writing books published since 2010 tend to cover each section of the grant. Some texts provide logic models of the grant cycle. Others were more focused on specific grant writing settings and contexts.

Proposal Planning and Writing (Miner & Miner, 2013) was written by grant consultants for general readers and grant writing professionals rather than researchers. It offers advice for nonprofits seeking money from foundations and government agencies. The book includes advice on finding sponsors, writing private, governmental and corporate proposals, and polishing final drafts of grants. It also includes high and low quality sample grants, funding sustainability, tips on writing style, budgets and a logic model for planning and assessment (Muller, 2014).

Models of Proposal Planning and Writing (Miner & Miner, 2016) underscores the time and human resources necessary for grant writing. The book includes three successful sample proposals from federal and private funders, including a community health project, a health education project, and a special education curriculum development program. Each includes the sample grants in their entirety, including RFPs, cover letters, application forms, letters of intent, full proposals (e.g., with budget, project summaries), and reviewer comments. Proposals are annotated to explain strategies and content components (King, 2016).

Successful Grant Writing: Strategies for Health and Human Service Professionals (Gitlin & Lyons, 2014) is a comprehensive tool for completing grants. It contains chapters that explain the importance of grant writing, an overview of the grant writing process, models for proposal development, budget preparation, the review process and other post-submission processes. It provides case studies that illustrate practical applications of chapter lessons. The authors have several years of experience earning federal grants, and they have served as reviewers (Burnette, 2014).

Writing Successful Grant Proposals from the Top Down and Bottom Up (Sternberg, 2014) is for graduate students and new and experienced researchers in behavioral sciences. The book covers planning, executing, submitting and revising grant proposals. It includes insights from funding agencies and academic administrators about grant writing, submission, and review. It also covers specific funding agencies such as the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Education, the National Aeronautics and Space Agency, and the Department of Defense (Harrison, 2013).

Writing Successful Technology Grant Proposals (MacKellar, 2012) lists steps in the grant writing process from planning, to project design, teamwork, research, writing, implementing and reviewing grants. Each phase is described as vital to the next. For example, planning lays the groundwork for explaining need and implementation. The last chapter includes sample successful grant submissions. The book was intended for libraries interested in procuring technology. Therefore, it frames grant writing in terms of a library's strategic and fundraising plans and needs (Von Berg, 2012).

Go Get That Grant! A Practical Guide for Libraries and Nonprofit Organizations (Staines, 2016) is for administrators of libraries and nonprofit organizations. It offers concise rather than extensive coverage of gathering background information, designing a fundable project, and finding funding sources. Chapters cover grant writing background info, linking grants to organization's strategic plans, articulating needs and demographics of the population that the grant will serve, providing references, identifying funding sources, and reviewing grants. The book also provides guidance on identifying funding sources, and it defines different types of grants. It also gives advice about writing letters of inquiry and avoiding common grant writing mistakes (Baykoucheva, 2011).

Writing Winning Proposals for Nurses and Health Care Professionals (Funk and Tornquist, 2016) is geared for grant writing in the health professions. It describes preparing proposals, types of proposal and aims of proposals. The book provides tips from NIH grant review, advice for writing literature reviews, and writing style. Chapters cover each part of the proposal and include templates for writing proposals. The book is comprehensive rather than concise and the content is very industry-specific (Paris & Jang, 2016).

Conclusion

This white paper reviews common strategies for teaching grant writing. It also provides a short survey of new grant writing books that instructors might incorporate in their courses. Ultimately, it can help instructors as they design their own grant writing courses.

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