

History 710-01
Professional Development Seminar:
Writing Grant Proposals

Spring 2021
Tuesdays 3:30-5:25 on Zoom

Seminar description/ Grant writing is a crucial skill for academic careers and yet it is often assumed that students simply possess this skill by virtue of being in graduate school. This seminar is focused on strategies for planning, writing and revising effective proposals for external fellowships to fund dissertation research. The strategies you learn will be transferrable to other proposals as well, such as dissertation completion and post-doctoral fellowships. Participants will take part in a 14 week hands-on, workshop-style seminar with the aim of writing and refining a SSRC IDRF proposal and one other short (2-3 page) draft proposal of the participant's choice.

Learning objectives/

This seminar will help you learn how to:

- research and plan the external fellowship competitions appropriate to your topic and discipline
- break down grant writing into a series of manageable skills and component parts
- understand how various external grants are ranked and awarded
- produce a coherent and fundable description of your dissertation project in two different formats: a 10-page SSRC IDRF proposal and a 2-3 page short proposal of your choice
- produce an individualized timetable/schedule for your grant writing to share with your advisor.

Course workload/ This is a 3 credit seminar, requiring a total of 135 hours of work. I anticipate that you will need to set aside an average of 6-8 hours/week for reading, research and writing assignments in addition to class time, but in all honesty, this will depend somewhat on where you are in relation to your dissertation project. If you haven't started to think through the details and logistics of your dissertation research (such as sources, lit review and significance) you should anticipate that it will take added time to work through those issues in addition to writing about them. You will come out of the seminar with a much firmer grasp on how to articulate your topic and the mechanisms involved in collecting and analyzing your data.

Grading/ This seminar is an opportunity to make progress on and improve your grant writing. The purpose of grading in this class is two-fold: to help you maintain engaged participation in the workshop and to give you regular individualized feedback on your proposals outside of the group context in which much of the material you produce will be evaluated on a weekly basis. Your grades will have two components: a letter grade and written/oral comments. Your letter grade will be based solely on timely *completion* of all assignments (as scheduled) rather than on content. In addition to the letter grade, you will receive candid feedback on the content (organization, style, ideas, articulation, originality, etc.) of your proposal. Please recognize that the comments are intended to be helpful as well as brutally honest; almost all of us write dismal first drafts of our projects, however brilliant, that contain all sorts of unnecessary, pedantic, and/or downright incoherent prose as well as other verbal and conceptual baggage.

All assignments indicated with a (*) need to be completed and turned in as scheduled in order to receive a grade of "A" in this seminar. Minor variations in the assignment due dates are acceptable *with prior approval* from the instructor — but please be cognizant that this is intended as a hands-on workshop-style seminar and class meetings will be unproductive if you have not completed the assignments as scheduled.

In-class writing exercises/ Some of the guided in-class writing exercises we will use in this seminar are adapted from the SSRC DPDF Workbook. Others are activities developed by faculty in various grant-writing workshops that students found particularly helpful. In particular, I've heard that students have found the Zoom guided writing sessions productive. We will try out these activities and change or adapt as needed. Please feel free to give lots of feed-back about what methods are working best for you as we go along!

JAN 26 **Week 1/** Introductions; in-class writing exercise on your intellectual trajectories. Where did your research project topic come from? What are the personal and professional experiences, interests, observations, questions and/or scholarship that motivated your research? What are the large underlying or overarching questions that run through your intellectual biography?

Prepare: for our first seminar meeting, please prepare and bring your "elevator pitch" for your dissertation project, to be presented orally. Be prepared to share two versions of your project: the "1 sentence version" and the 2-3 minute version that includes a description of your major questions and/or anticipated argument(s), sources and significance.

FEB 2 **Week 2/** Identifying external grants, making timelines for proposal writing; how proposals are ranked. We will take a look at several grant sites in class. And we will share and discuss your 1 paragraph statements and challenges.

Read/Watch: “Writing Effective Grant Proposals for Individual Fellowships in the Humanities and Social Sciences” by Susan Friedman; “[On the Art of Writing Proposals](#)” by Adam Przeworski and Frank Salomon; and [SSRC IDRF Webinar from Oct 2020 by Daniella Sarnoff](#) (IDRF Program Director) - note that the length of this webinar is 1:29:51. Please watch the entire webinar (even if some of it seems obvious - this is incredibly useful in getting a sense of how to structure the proposal and how it will be read and ranked). Make notes on instructions and any questions that come up.

What are the particular challenges with respect to articulating your own project that you can imagine after watching the webinar? Did the webinar cause you to re-imagine any aspects of your data collection or analysis? Please bring these thoughts and reactions to class.

Due: 1 paragraph (250 words max) defining your project (to be shared in class). As succinctly as possible, introduce the topic of your dissertation and the problem you want to solve or question that you want to answer through this research. Be sure to explain what your project will do in a way that can be understood by scholars both within and outside of your discipline who may not be familiar with your topic or its context.

Make a list of issues and challenges that you discovered in the process of thinking through and writing this paragraph.

FEB 9 **Week 3/** What makes a SSRC IDRF proposal successful? We will be analyzing and “diagramming” 3 successful proposals in class. Some topics and strategies we will consider in class: organization, topic sentences, writing style, what makes a project “interesting”? Exercises and strategies for easing into writing when you’re stuck. In-class writing.

Read: model proposals

Due: Worksheet on the 3 model proposals

FEB 16 **Week 4/** How to formulate compelling (coherent, provocative, fascinating, original, creative) research questions: in-class exercises and strategy session.

Read: selected book introductions: Robinson, Bradley, Chia, Winichakul

Prepare for discussion: find and make note of the research questions that form the basis for the projects described in each of the book introductions you read. (Highlight the paragraphs, identify page #s so you can refer to them in discussion). Write your own reformulation of each of their research questions. Note that we are looking for underlying questions rather than arguments and conclusions here.

Due: 2-3 paragraph first draft description of your research questions, how they are original and why they are significant (to be shared in class)

FEB 23 **Week 5/** How to identify and talk about sources. Students will each present a well-organized and engaging 6-7 minute presentation on the archives, collections and/or other types of sources you plan to use, and share one sample primary source and explain how you plan to analyze it.

Prepare: powerpoint presentation with 2-3 slides including one sample source. List of archives, collections, you will use + a 1-2 page description of these archives that includes all the information you can obtain in advance: finding guides, digitization and on-line access, catalogues, etc.*

If at all possible, this would be a good week to visit (virtually) one or more of the archives you plan to consult.

Due: Turn in a revised 2-3 paragraph description of your research questions and why they are original and significant* (*graded assignment/feedback)

MAR 2 **Week 6/** How to talk about (historical) methods. We will discuss various scholarly constructions of methods and consider your draft methodology statements in class. In-class writing on situating your work with respect to previous scholarship and disciplinary conversations within the historical field.

Read: I will post two articles for a discussion on how to *talk about* methodology. These are not necessarily methodological models for your projects; rather, we are looking at them as models for how to successfully *talk about* methodology.

Due: 1 page draft discussion of your methodologies (to be shared in class). To help you get started on this task, you may want to identify scholarly works that inform your methods or approach. Briefly describe how the methods/ approaches used by these scholars informs your own, how you will build on them, correct, revise or enlarge them (etc). What if any are the shortcomings of these methods as used by other scholars and how will you correct them? Describe what you need to learn from your research in order to solve your problem or answer your question. What method(s) or approach(es) have you chosen to accomplish these goals and how/why will they be effective? As you write, note any challenges that you discovered in the course of writing this assignment. Remember: your proposal will be read and ranked by scholars in a variety of disciplines, so be sure that your methodological discussion will be clear to someone outside of your discipline.

Due: turn in a list of up to 25 research publications that have most significantly informed the formulation of your research topic, questions, theories, methods, and modes of analysis.* This assignment will help prepare for our session next week and is also intended as a preliminary draft of your 2 page IDRFB bibliography, though sometimes people find a way to cram in more than 25 titles.

MAR 9 **Week 7/** Situating your project within a scholarly context, also known as "lit review." What goes into a proposal and what doesn't; strategies for demonstrating that you know the scholarly literature on your topic without summarizing it at length. In-class writing exercise on situating your work with respect to scholarly conversations outside of your discipline. If time: making a detailed schedule and timeline for your research.

Read: Keppy, Rotter. What are some of the rhetorical strategies they use for laying out both narrow and broad-ranging categories of related scholarly studies?

Due: Turn in a 2-3 page description of your research focus, sources, and methods, drawing on our work in the two sessions above (weeks 5 and 6).* Describe what you need to learn from your research in order to solve the problem or answer the questions you are posing. In what ways have you chosen to focus your research (be it to study specific groups of people places, time periods, texts, etc)? Why are these choices appropriate given your research question or problem? What sources and methods of investigation will you employ to collect and record the information that you will need to complete

your search? How will the method(s) or approach(es) that you have chosen for your research enable you to accomplish your research goals?

MAR 16 **Week 8/** Analyzing your evidence. Your detailed plan and timeline for your research. Strategies for succinctly presenting your qualifications and preparedness.

Due: 2 paragraphs on how you will analyze your sources (to be shared in class). Assume that your research methods will enable you to obtain the information or data that is necessary to address your problem or question. How then will you examine and analyze this collected evidence to solve the research problem or answer the question you have proposed? It is not enough to say that you will “find and read” historical sources. You need to talk about *how* you will analyze them and discuss how and why analyzing them will help you to successfully answer your questions/address your problem. Take note of any challenges that you discovered in the process of thinking through and writing these paragraphs.

Due: Turn in a detailed work plan (2 paragraphs) and schedule or timeline.* Describe how you will organize and carry out your investigations. What is your total timeline for your dissertation research? Where will you go and how long will you spend in each research site? What will you be doing there? How will this work contribute to solving your problem/addressing your question? When and where will you do the work of analyzing your data? Be forewarned that this will take some time to work out even though the amount of space devoted to it in your proposal is relatively small. Plan to work on this with a calendar in front of you and think realistically about logistics. Sketch out your research plan in as much detail as you can, at least on a week by week basis. This can be an extremely valuable exercise (and a reality check) if you take it seriously.

Due: 1 paragraph (200 word max) draft statement of your qualifications, training and preparedness for conducting research on your topic (to be shared in class). Describe the skills you have gained that make you particularly well-suited to conduct your dissertation research. For instance, what languages and investigative or analytical skills have you learned that will be necessary for your research, and how did you attain them? What contacts or permissions or access do you have that will be helpful or essential to conducting your research? What if any unique qualifications do you possess? This paragraph should not be challenging to think through but cramming it all into 100-200 words will probably take strategic trimming.

MAR 23 **Week 9/** Writing - no seminar meeting this week.

Write: the first draft of your 10 page IDRf research project narrative. You will be able to draw on many of the individual components that we have produced already but I recommend that you *not* try to simply cut and paste them into your proposal. Instead, work off of them but be willing to write new versions that flow out of the narrative you are constructing. You will need to develop an outline and subtitles for your proposal. Consult the model proposals for ideas but adapt the sub-titles to your own project. Be sure to follow the strategies suggested in the SSRC webinar and make your proposal accessible and comprehensible to non-specialists.

MAR 30 **Week 10/** Strategies for effective personal statements. We will discuss strategies and aims of personal statements and how they should and shouldn't intersect with your project statement. In-class exercise to prepare for writing 300 word personal statement.

Due: 10 page draft of your research project narrative with attached bibliography.*

Bring: bring the "week 1" in-class writing we did on your intellectual trajectory. Also bring a copy of your updated cv. (A personal statement is *not* a narrative version of your cv but glancing at your cv may help you think through what you want to emphasize).

We don't have time to work on cvs in this class but if you are uncertain about the design and effectiveness of yours, this would be a good time to seek out models and resources on crafting an effective cv.

AP 6 **Week 11/** Peer reading workshop on your draft proposals. Strategies for making revisions including the "topic sentence rule of thumb" and "reverse outline" methods.

Read: You will each be assigned to read and comment on one proposal this week.

Due: Complete the peer reading worksheet in preparation for class today. We will share these comments in class.

AP 13 **Week 12/** Crafting the disciplinary and interdisciplinary statements for the IDRf proposal. We will "workshop" your disciplinary and interdisciplinary statements in class today.

Due: personal statement (300 words max).*

Due: Drawing on previous in-class writing (see weeks 6 and 7), write drafts of your 3 IDRf disciplinary and interdisciplinary statements (to be shared in class).

- How does your research engage with methods and approaches within your discipline? (250 words max)
- How do other disciplinary approaches, concepts, and debates inform your research (250 words max)
- The Mellon IDRf program seeks to fund projects in the humanities and social sciences that engage in humanistic inquiry, producing research that can play a vital role in understanding what it means to be human and how we react and engage with the world around us, in historical, contemporary, or even future contexts. How does your project examine the human condition, using a capacious understanding of humanistic inquiry? (300 words max)

AP 20 **Week 13/** Titles and abstracts — why they matter and why you should not wait until the last minute to construct yours. In-class writing exercise on formulating a title and abstract. Moving a longer proposal into a 3-5 page format. We will discuss strategies for reformulating your proposal. In-class exercises on crafting and writing a short proposal outline.

Read: model short proposals

Prepare: be prepared to share the requirements/instructions for your short proposal in class.

Due: Turn in revised full IDRf proposal with project narrative, disciplinary and interdisciplinary statements and personal statement.*

AP 27 **Week 14/** We will workshop your 3-5 page proposal drafts in class today. We will also discuss general strategies for approaching different types of grants: federal grants such as Fulbright, Fulbright-Hays, and Boren and more specialized proposals such as ACLS/Ho, CAORC, ENITS, AAUW, Newberry, SKJ, and others.

Due: Turn in short proposal draft (to be shared in class).*

Due: Individual timeline of grant competitions deadlines and writing schedules to share with your advisor.* Research the competitions you are eligible for and make a timeline to share with your advisor that details when you plan to be writing each application, when you will submit draft proposals for your advisor to comment on, and when you will submit the proposal. Include notes about when you will have materials ready for letter-writers. Every grant is different, so pay attention to how much time it will take to revise or reshape your basic proposal narrative for that individual competition.