A Decade of Teaching Grant Writing Excellence

September 2013

This fall, the Laney Graduate School’s innovative Grant Writing Program (GWP) will celebrate its eleventh year.

Co-sponsored by the Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry, the GWP plays a vital role in helping LGS graduate students secure funding for their graduate research and post-doctoral projects. Over the course of the past decade, some two thousand students from across the LGS have participated in the GWP, and GWP participants have successfully leveraged their training to procure funding from all varieties of sources, public and private, and to carry out exciting work around the world. From winning Fulbright fellowships to securing National Science Foundation (NSF) grants, from carrying out anthropological research in Ethiopia to doing archival work in Philadelphia, and from landing tenure-track positions to wowing private-sector interviewers, GWP participants have reaped the rewards of an innovative program that challenges them to grow, refine their scholarship, and invest in their careers.

A Tailored Suite of Programs

The GWP was co-founded by three Emory faculty members: the late Ivan Karp, National Endowment for the Humanities professor in the Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts (ILA), Professor of English and Director of the Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry Martine Brownley, and Professor of Anthropology and African Studies Corinne Kratz. The program is currently directed by Professor Kratz, Professor Brownley, and Professor of Philosophy and Nursing Mark Risjord. Begun as a small-scale training opportunity for grant writing students in the humanities and humanistic social sciences, the GWP began an annual information forum in 2002. Since then, the GWP has expanded into offering a suite of multiple events including a general Grant Writing Forum, regular First Year Grant Writing Forums, Beginning Grant Writing Workshops, an Intensive Grant Writing Workshop, and a semesterly Proposal Writing Institute. All these events are defined by a commitment to helping students master grant writing as a genre, and to giving them vital insights into the oftentimes intimidating processes of research design, proposal construction and funder evaluations.

GWP events are geared to each stage of an LGS student’s career, from their first forays into the world of grants to supporting dissertation research to applying for postdocs. At the fall Grant Writing Forum, a large information session featuring a panel of veteran faculty and successful
grant recipients, students at all levels get a sense of the grant landscape both in terms of opportunities at Emory and from external funding sources. Students early in their graduate careers can take further steps by attending a First Year Grant Forum, an information session held each semester that helps give them a sense of how to begin planning, developing, and funding their projects.

Through focused workshops, other GWP events help students hone their proposals for specific grants through extensive and personalized feedback. In order to attend the Beginning Grant Writing Workshop (BGWW), where they can start formulating concrete research projects and action plans for specific funding sources, students must submit a brief application including a draft proposal. This draft serves as a jumping-off point for feedback from a panel of experts and peers. BGWW participants regularly find the experience a stimulating opportunity to invest in their projects with renewed energy. As one student writes: "Here more than anywhere else do I feel the link between my ‘little’ dissertation project and the larger academic community. More than just grant discussion happens in these workshops: I also have the rare opportunity to really dialogue with people in other disciplines about my discipline and research interests and what their points of view are."

Each Spring, the GWP offers the Intensive Grant Writing Workshop (IGWW), a three-day off-campus retreat. Workshop participants benefit from a high instructor-student ratio and intensive focus on their projects. At the IGWW, expert faculty and student participants perform a series of mock proposal reviews, discussing and assessing the drafts of participants as though they were on a hypothetical funding panel. All participants take part in the simulated proposal reviews together as a group— with the crucial caveat that the applicant herself remains silent during the first part of the process when her proposal is discussed. This twist mirrors the situation in the real world, where applicants cannot advocate in-person for their proposals, and thus drives home to participants the importance of framing their project accessibly and coherently. The process shows how readers actually understand a proposal, which may not be the way the author intended. “Hearing the panel’s feedback on others’ proposals before and after each [review] gave a buzz of excitement and made the need for writing clear proposals for general academic audiences with clear methodology striking,” observes Joshua Robinson, PhD Candidate in Anthropology and attendee at the 2013 Workshop.

The IGWW stimulates participants to rethink and refine their projects in productive ways. Project discussions bring applicants together in a sense of shared endeavor and communication across disciplinary boundaries. “The Workshop was very insightful and extremely helpful in translating my research to being more broadly relevant and received by humanities and social sciences-based audiences,” says one attendee. Intellectual creativity flourishes at the Workshop thanks both to interdisciplinary interactions among participants as well as to the change of scene from campus to a lodge in Amicalolala Falls State Park. “The setting was beautiful,” one participant notes, “and the process of being taken from the context of Emory allowed us a fresh way to approach our own work.”

Students who wish to take their grant applications to the next level can also apply to attend the semestrially Proposal Writing Institute (PWI). At the PWI, student interactions with an interdisciplinary group of faculty include mock interviews and one-on-one sessions that help participants critically and constructively improve their projects with an eye towards improving their chances with real-world funding sources. Student participants observe all interviews; when they are not the one being interviewed they also observe the interview panel’s initial and final
discussions about the projects. The full interviews are also recorded on video so students can review them later. Through these exercises, participants develop a vital ability to persuasively pitch their projects to audiences of academics of mixed disciplinary backgrounds. “It was a much needed wake-up call in terms of presenting my work to out-of-discipline and out-of-field readers – how do you explain the stakes of a project, the relevant contexts, etcetera, in a limited space?” writes English PhD Candidate Claire Laville, who recently attended the Institute. “To be honest,” she continues, “the [faculty] told me my proposal-draft was incomprehensible. In front of everyone. But from collective humiliation comes solidarity. The professors mimicked the grumpiest panel of readers imaginable during the ‘public’ part of the workshop, but when it was time for one-on-one sessions, they were all kind and open-minded.” This mixture of collective reflection and direct feedback helps participants like Claire better frame their projects for the real world, and anticipate the questions and challenges their work may face from external funders, but in a low-stakes way and with plenty of tailored feedback. Writes another Institute attendee, “Overall, this was amazing. The connections, content, and feedback have been critical to getting my proposal to a working stage!”

Dynamic Professionalization

All GWP events benefit from the insights and leadership of a roster of Emory professors with track records of grant writing excellence and success. These instructors hail from across Emory: over the years, GWP events have been led by some thirty faculty from varying disciplines and departments such as Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies, Music, History, Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Sociology, English, Film and Media Studies, Religion, and more. This breadth of perspectives encourages participants to better articulate their projects for interdisciplinary audiences. “I wish more advisors and DGSs would be this explicit about rhetoric of cross-disciplinary proposal writing – too often, we learn only how to address our own committees!” notes one participant; “the GWP enhances and complements training available in various departments,” observes another. For Joshua, whose work involves using stable isotopes to reconstruct paleoenvironments, GWP events were crucial to helping him “effectively balance the broader impacts and intellectual merit of my project with the detailed and technical aspects of specific research questions.” Joshua directly credits the GWP with the success of his NSF Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant, and is currently doing research in Africa. Classicist Elizabeth Gardner sounds a similar note: “The techniques learned at the PWI forced me to reevaluate the goal of the project and to tease out the most important points of my argument. Presentation of the project as one with a significant contribution is critical. I learned to present my dissertation not as one [just] about fountains in ancient Rome, but as a project that evaluates modes of political legitimization through fountain construction during a politically tumultuous period in the second to first centuries BCE.”

In testimony to the GWP’s impact, many student participants return to the program as instructors who share knowledge gleaned from their successful grant applications. Amanda Rogers, a 2013 PhD graduate of Emory’s Art History program who has just taken up a two-year postdoc at the University of Wisconsin, participated in an Intensive Grant Writing Workshop in 2009 and then returned as a Successful Student for two years to help lead the Beginning Grant Writing Workshops. For Amanda, returning to the GWP as an instructor directly stemmed from her own positive experiences as a student participant. As Amanda writes, “Although I had enjoyed a bit of success (or, more precisely, luck) in winning fellowships before, the program provided the most helpful exercise in critique, writing-genres and extensive, personalized, and constructive criticism in all my time at Emory. I was able to see the results immediately, as the lessons I took
away from not only receiving criticism and suggestions to my own work, but the experience of reading and critiquing my peers, benefited me enormously in responding to my own students, strengthening my own writing (whether in grants, dissertations or articles), and mentoring colleagues writing their own grant proposals.”

A Program that Yields Results

Emory’s GWP has an impressive record of impact across the LGS. Students from eighteen different programs registered for last year's Grant Writing Forum, and sixteen different programs were represented in the First Year Grant Forums. Some 87% of Humanities and Social Sciences students who reported receiving external funding in the past year have participated in GWP events; over the course of the past three years, roughly 75% of those reporting success have passed through GWP events. By the same token, the majority of students who have received multiple awards have been GWP participants.

The GWP program exists in synergy with other professionalization resources at Emory, and empowers participants to better pursue funding options both from external sources and on campus. “Although I didn’t win an external grant, I was a finalist for the Fulbright (France), and for the SSRC-IDRF, and my applications for internal fellowships were all based off of my external applications,” notes Adam Rosenthal, a PhD Candidate in Comparative Literature, who participated in the Fall 2012 Proposal Writing Institute and went on to win both a Dean’s Teaching Fellowship and a Fellowship at the Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry. GWP participants also enjoy considerable success on grant applications submitted later, for other phases of their work, with their experience in the program helping them better pursue completion fellowships and other external support. By the same token, GWP events empower students to take advantage of on-campus funding resources like Professional Development Support (PDS) funding by emphasizing how students can sequence and leverage PDS support to do preliminary research or training that will make their applications for research grants and fellowships more competitive. Thanks to such instruction, many GWP participants have received a series of grants and fellowships by the time they leave Emory, starting an impressive career trajectory of research funding.

Participation in the GWP not only enhances the work done by students while they are at Emory, but it also continues to yield dividends for them as graduates and post-docs. Ugochukwu Smooth Nzewi participated in GWP events throughout his time at Emory, receiving a summer Pre-doctoral Fellowship from the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art, a TIAA-CREF Ruth Simms Hamilton Fellowship in African Diaspora Studies, numerous internal Emory awards, and a Smithsonian dissertation completion fellowship. Smooth graduated this past summer with a PhD in Art History and says that his experiences with the GWP will directly shape his new professional future. “I have been very fortunate and benefited greatly from the Grant Writing program,” writes Smooth. “This August, I will start a new journey as the Curator of African Art at the Hood Museum, Dartmouth College. My new job will require applying [for] and securing external grants with which to organize art exhibitions and supporting academic programs. The skills that I have imbibed from attending the Grant Writing Program at Emory will be put into use.” For Dr. Nzewi, as for many other program participants, attending GWP events constitutes a productive investment in their professional development and future career success. Amanda agrees, writing that “I can state without a doubt that the Grant Writing Program was the single most helpful exercise in critical thought, professional development, and writing skills I experienced at Emory.”
Encouraging Growth and Forging New Pathways

The GWP has produced resources that expand its impact beyond its scheduled event offerings and benefit the LGS community more broadly. The *Grant Writing Program Handbook*, which is distributed at GWP events, represents an authoritative introduction to finding potential funders, formulating projects, writing proposals, budgeting, and more. Likewise, the GWP established and maintains an online Grant Proposal Archive. The archive is a repository of successful grant proposals and directory of links to funding sources that Emory affiliates can turn to for leads and inspiration as they pursue their own projects. The archive currently holds over seventy successful proposal samples, with new additions each year. For the past seven years the Grant Proposal Archive has been available through the Emory Library’s eReserves system, but beginning in Fall 2013 it will migrate to Blackboard where students and faculty can access it by enrolling in the organization “Grant Proposal Archive”.

After more than ten years of excellence, the Grant Writing Program has come to play a vital role at LGS and Emory more broadly. At once a vital professionalization resource and a driver of interdisciplinary engagement and scholarly community-building, the GWP looks forward to its next decade of encouraging LGS students to grow as academics, grant writers, and professionals.

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Learn more about the Emory Grant Writing Program
[http://www.gs.emory.edu/sites/grantwriting/index.html](http://www.gs.emory.edu/sites/grantwriting/index.html)

Grant Proposal Archive Overview
[http://www.gs.emory.edu/sites/grantwriting/gwresources/index.html](http://www.gs.emory.edu/sites/grantwriting/gwresources/index.html)