**Application for UCSC DCG Funds**
**Submit to the Academic Senate Office, c/o Susanna Wrangell**
**(swrangel@ucsc.edu)**
**by December 19, 2014 or March 20, 2015**

Proposals must be approved by the department or program chair and Dean. They are due in the Academic Senate Office by Friday, December 19, 2014 or March 20, 2015 at 5 p.m. submitted by email to swrangel@ucsc.edu.

1) Proposed title for Disciplinary Communication Grant (DCG)?

Politics Department Writing Tutoring Program

2) Department/Program:

Politics

3) Amount requested:

$13,548

4) Number of students affected:

At full regime, the program will affect up to approximately 600 students enrolled annually in lower division courses and approximately 1200 enrolled annually in core courses.

5) Overview of the program's DC requirement:

The DC requirement for Politics majors is fulfilled by completing any three of the required four upper division core courses (105A, B, C, D; 120A, B, C; 140A, B, C, D; 160A, B, C, D). Politics' DC requirements focus on cultivating writing, and in particular essay writing, through both take-home and in-class assignments. The core courses develop a progressive and cumulative process requiring sustained attention to the form and quality of student writing. Core classes also address verbal communication by working on clarity and quality of student contributions to section and lecture discussions.

6) What is proposed?

The department proposes to develop a curriculum for class-specific writing groups that teaches students to better articulate social science argumentation and course content. In order to achieve this goal, we request funding for the expert consultation with Amy Weaver, a lecturer in the Writing Program with extensive graduate training in political science, during the academic years 2015-16 and 2016-17.

Our goal is to modify current use of LSS tutors as follows:
1) Politics faculty will recruit and train politics tutors (LSS has agreed to administer and pay tutors that department faculty select and train)

2) Each target class will be tightly connected with its respective writing groups (i.e. tutor-facilitated writing sessions with four students). Instead of the previous lack of integration between LSS tutorials and the respective class, we envision a close-knit endeavor. This will especially benefit students with the greatest need (who are less likely to seek out and sustain attendance in writing groups) and we expect the outcome will be improved retention.

Faculty will recruit tutors among students who excelled in the previous class offering because we need tutors who are proficient in the class content. Ideally, prospective tutors would take Writing 159 and 169, which train undergraduates in tutoring practices. However, the pool of top-performers in our classes is small, and recruitment will be undermined by the imposition of such requirements. Since tutors lack pedagogical training, it is indispensible to provide them with an effective and detailed curriculum, which is the goal of the present proposal.

The deliverable of this grant proposal is a pedagogically rigorous program that is specific to the class curriculum and keyed to the syllabus. We are aware of the generic training manuals for writing tutors available on the market. The politics department seeks to fund consultation with Amy Weaver in order to translate existing materials into discrete and concrete plug-and-play activities that tutors can use with their clients and that are particularly effective for the class in question. We envision a curriculum equipped with a menu of class practices and exercises from which tutors can choose at each meeting, depending on the specific needs of a given group, and that is flexible enough to be adaptable to different group levels and needs, yet also structured enough to present a clear progression in skill development. In addition, as part of the grant, a three-hour training session for incoming politics tutors will be developed. This training, led by ladder faculty, will introduce tutors to the writing group curriculum and will provide a setting to practice its recommended strategies (LSS director Holly Cordova has agreed to collaborate in the overall project).

Over 2014-15, the department is experimenting with group writing at both the lower division and core level classes (the latter satisfy our DC requirements). We have introduced early assessment tests in the form of a short essay, which students complete by Week 2. This allows enrollment by Week 3 in class-specific writing groups with tutors paid and administered by LSS. Faculty members promote the study groups to the class, and participants' attendance and effort are carefully monitored. In addition, tutors write a weekly report on session activities and outcomes.

In the current experiments, tutors spend their hourly meeting with students working on essay prompts from a long list provided by the instructor. Students work on outlines, on evidence selection, and on thesis development. At times, they prepare the evidence and outlines at home and use the session to write up the essay to simulate an in-class examination, and then peer review the results. We have developed an initial and basic curriculum (presented in Appendix A).

Most politics faculty have worked with LSS in the past, but this plan amounts to a new collaborative approach and requires changes to class curriculum, such as tutor training, the introduction of the early assessment test and the careful monitoring of writing group activities and participation. Once writing groups start in Week 3, the main class and the writing groups run separate but parallel curricula, all centered around content specific to

the class. Thus faculty members will need assistance in adjusting their classes to the new model.

We seek funding for two years. We recognize the possibility that the curriculum developed in the first year may need revising based on the assessment outcome. The continued collaboration with Amy Weaver as essential during this period of assessment and revision. If no revision is needed, we will return the second-year funding.

Over the last decade, the politics department has searched for an effective solution to the problem of declining writing skills, and we are excited to have identified this highly promising approach.

7) What problem will this proposal solve?

Before enrolling in our upper division core classes, most students have taken a series of writing classes (C1 and C2). Yet, many are still unable to integrate political science content in their essay assignments. Currently, the most effective writing pedagogy often takes place during office hours – a situation that is unsustainable, inefficient, and fails to reach the needy students who tend to shy away from direct engagement with instructors. In response, faculty members often enlist LSS tutorials in connection to their classes, but so far to little impact due to the lack of an appropriate curriculum. The limited number of faculty members (13) in our department makes a fully in-house program inefficient and administratively burdensome.

8) How does the DC fit within your program's learning outcome goals?

Two of our program learning outcome goals (PLOs) are: 1) to critically evaluate arguments about political institutions, practices and ideas based on logic and evidence; and 2) to develop and sustain coherent written and oral arguments regarding political phenomena, theories, and values based on appropriate empirical and/or textual evidence and logic. These goals are articulated in the attached standard grading rubric (see Appendix B). The DC is therefore central to our PLOs and the project for which we hereby seek funding will raise many more students to our PLOs targets (in particular, students from disadvantaged backgrounds).

9) Detailed budget:

One course equivalence for Amy Weaver for the academic year 2015-16: $ 6,774.25
One course equivalence for Amy Weaver for the academic year 2016-17: $ 6,774.25

These course equivalences will be used to develop the proposed group-writing curriculum. Please note that they will not be used to pay or train LSS tutors in the grant period or afterwards.

10) Assessment plan. How will the effectiveness of this change be measured?

Assessment will be an integral component of our writing program and will be compiled yearly and across classes for comparative analysis. Assessment will be quantitatively measured by comparing the overall course grade for students who enroll in writing groups against the control group of students who received the same grade in the early

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assessment test, but did not enroll in writing groups. Attendance and effort levels in the writing groups will be carefully measured and used to refine the assessment. Ladder faculty will teach the target classes, and will conduct the assessment.

Inter-rater reliability is addressed by using a standard grading rubric (see Appendix B), which was developed by the department with the assistance of Amy Weaver in order to measure performance towards the department's aforementioned PLOs. TA's are trained in the use of the rubric, and model essays are used in each class to set standards. Starting in year 3, we will fine-tune the evaluation by focusing on specific aspects of the grading rubric.

Assessment will also take place qualitatively, recognizing that this model has benefits beyond the particular course students are enrolled in. Students in the writing groups will be asked to reflect on what they have learned about their writing processes as well as their revision and editing strategies.

11) Sustainability. How will this innovation be continued without DCG funding?

Sustainability is embedded in the proposal because once a detailed and effective curriculum is developed for the writing group tutorials, individual faculty will be able to rely on the fiscal and administrative capacity of LSS, much as they have done to this point – with the difference that LSS tutorials will make a much more significant impact on our students. Indeed LSS, an established campus resource, will be further strengthened by this initiative.

Our project is not only sustainable, but also replicable. We envision curricula and sets of class practices that are general enough to be easily applicable to any politics class, given that all of our classes comprise some degree of essay writing – and the approach will in fact offer a template deployable outside our department to any instructor whose course has an essay component.

Recommended by (or attach dated email approval):

**Ronnie D. Lipschutz**
Digitally signed by Ronnie D. Lipschutz
DN: cn=Ronnie D. Lipschutz, o=UCSC, ou=College Eight, email=rlipsch@ucsc.edu, c=US
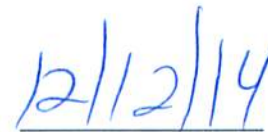Date: 2014.12.12 10:10:58 -08'00'

Dec. 12, 2014

_____
Dept. Chair or Program Director

_____
Date

_____
Dean

12/12/14

_____
Date

**Appendix A: Current Writing group curriculum**

Week 3
Students go through their notes to get a thesis and select material from class they would consider evidence
They execute this exercise for two questions

Week 4
Students bring in an outline for one question from last week and have 30 minutes to draft and 30 minutes to share and get feedback

Week 5: mid-term prep
2 students with 2 questions each (total 4 questions for the group)
Students bring thesis and evidence from home and develop outlines in the session

Week 6
The tutor emails an essay prompt to students, who prep at home the thesis and evidence to respond. In session, students outline and draft

Week 7 - 10
Same as Week 6 but students include elements of revision

**Apppendix B: Politics Department Essay Grading Rubric**

Student Name: _____ TA/Section: _____

**Writing Feedback Checklist**
**ESSAY #:**

## I. <u>Content</u>

### A. Command of the material

_____ 1) Fully answers question; meets requirements of assignment

_____ 2) Demonstrates command of core concepts and authors

_____ 3) Demonstrates capacity to analyze (not simply summarize) material

### B. Strength of argument

_____ 1) Clear and precise statement of an interesting argument

_____ 2) Development of the main claim(s) of the argument in clear, logical steps over the course of the essay, including consideration of counterarguments

_____ 3) Claims are substantiated by evidence from readings and lectures. Evidence provided effectively supports the relevant claims

## II. <u>Structure</u>

### A. Organization/coherence of essay as a whole

_____ 1) Provides a succinct introduction that successfully conveys the paper's argument and implies or indicates what is to follow

_____ 2) Essay follows a clear overall structure and is well-organized with a logical flow both within paragraphs and from one paragraph to the next. No tangents

_____ 3) Provides a conclusion that conveys key implications of the argument

### B. Clarity and mechanics of writing

_____ 1) Writing is clear, compelling and elegant (e.g. overall clarity of syntax, sentence construction, word choice, transitions, paragraph delineations)

_____ 2) Avoids unsubstantiated claims, broad generalizations, and an overly informal tone

_____ 3) Avoids sentence-level writing errors (grammar, spelling, punctuation)

_____ 4) Properly cites the ideas of others, using the assigned standard form

## Appendix C - Poli60 Fall 2014 – Writing group impact report

Students were compared based on whether they attended writing group sessions in order to measure the impact of writing groups on their performance in the course. "Attendance" here means that students attended at least 7 of the 8 weekly writing group sessions (from week 3 to week 10); 46 students enrolled in writing groups, and of those 25 attended. This report eliminates 10 students who dropped the course and/or did not take the final examination, which brought the total enrollment to 128 students

Due to high demand, writing group enrollment was limited to students who had received C or less in the early assessment test, which took the form of a 500-word essay on an assigned prompt (students who received C+ or more were thus excluded from writing groups, a practice that we have since dropped). The early assessment test produced the following grade distribution:

- 40 students received D or F's: of those, 18 attended a writing group and 22 did not.
- 23 students received C's: of those, 7 attended a writing group and 16 did not.

Averaging subsequent class performance for each of the above groups reveals significant impact of writing group attendance (labeled "LSS") on the grade of the in-class midterm and on the overall grade in the course (N.B. TA's had no information on writing group attendance. Grades are given on a 0-100 scale, where 92-98 is an A, 90-92 is an A-, 88-90 is a B+, 82-88 is a B, etc.)

Figure 1 shows that students who received a C in the early assessment essay and did not attend a writing group ("w/out LSS") received on average 69 in the midterm. Students who received C in the early assessment essay and attended the writing group averaged 84 in the midterm. Thus, 2 or 3 sessions (administered in weeks 3 to 5) made a huge difference on C students. Students who received D and F in the early assessment essay needed longer to show notable improvement.
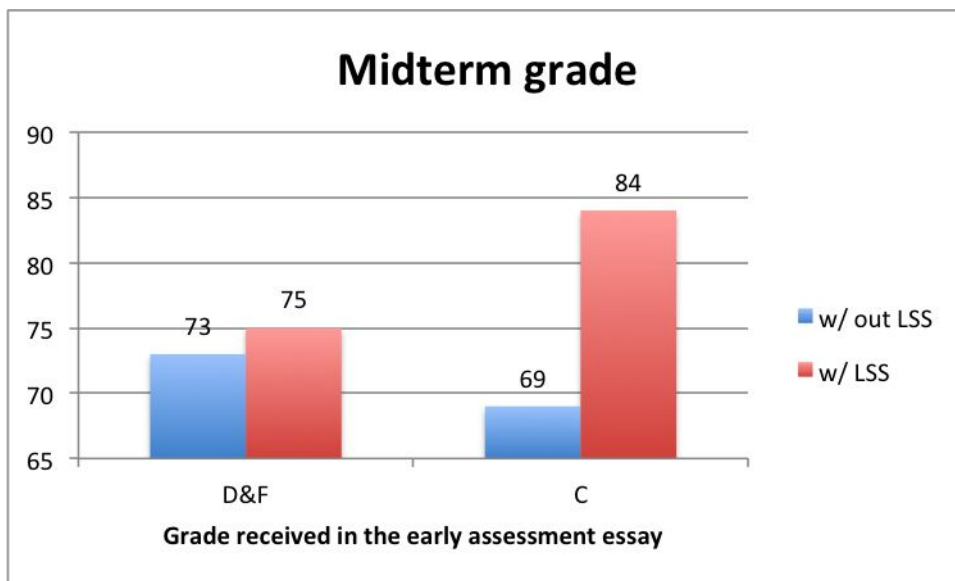


Figure 1

Figure 2 shows the impact of writing groups on the overall class grade. The 7 students who received C in the early assessment test and attended a study group maintained their improvement, averaging 85 in the course as opposed to their counterparts, 16 students who did not attend a writing group and scored 76. Over the course of the quarter, writing groups had a positive impact also on the weakest students. The 22 students who received a D or F in the early assessment essay and did not enroll

in writing groups scored on average 74 in the class, while the 18 students who received D or F in the early assessment essay and attended a writing group received on average 80.

## Overall course grade

90
85
80
75
70
65

85
80
76
74

■ w/ out LSS
■ w/ LSS

22    18
16    7
# of students

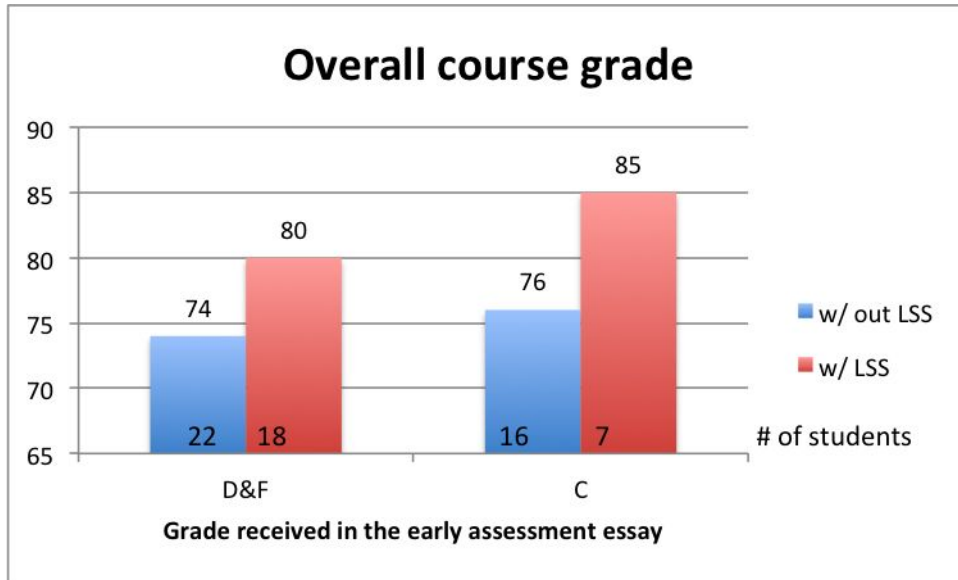D&F
C

Grade received in the early assessment essay

Figure 2

     It should also be noted that we administered an exit survey to students attending the writing groups in Week 10. Students commented very positively on the impact of the writing groups on their writing. Moreover, they consistently remarked that writing groups were also critical to their improved understanding of the class material overall, and thus had positive effects beyond essay writing. This tight connection between essay writing and course-specific content is at the basis of the present grant project and distinguishes the approach we are developing from previous ones. Thus, department believes that this already notable impact can be much improved with a better designed curriculum for the writing groups, which is the object of this grant application.