

SOCIAL WRITING:

PEER ESSAY WRITING FOR THE SCHOOL OF COMPARATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This project aimed to provide first year students within the School of Comparative American Studies an opportunity to work collaboratively to develop academic writing skills and the scholarly rigour expected of university undergraduates. Working with recent graduates from the University of Warwick's history honours programme, in form of current MA students, first-year students attended weekly, half-hour meetings to explore different aspects of academic writing, experiment with different forms of argument construction and develop key communication skills in a semi-causal and non-threatening environment. Rather than perform predetermined exercises, which are available elsewhere, these sessions utilized student writings currently under development for upcoming assessments.

This form of peer-support was needed because formal writing provision within the CAS programme was previously focused upon lecturer-student dialogues, usually centred on assessment deadlines, with irregular peer-to-peer discussion. Although the degree programme facilitates inter-year integration within the department, extra-curricular events can be seen by students as social rather than academic in nature. Conversely, the drop-in sessions provided by the university's Undergraduate Skills Programme are non-disciplinary in nature, which can discourage students from attending.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2010 National Student Surveys for History and English indicated that across the United Kingdom feedback was the aspect of their programmes with which students were least satisfied. Although significantly above the seventieth percentile, its relatively low score has become a concern to departments and faculties throughout the country. Informal discussions with students at the University of Warwick in 2011, as part of the HEA-funded *It's Good to Talk* research project, indicated that students felt that they were generally unable to improve their academic writing over the course of their programme because of the paucity of applicable feedback on written work and the relatively limited number of contact hours spent on writing instruction.

Although additional formal contact hours with permanent staff could not be accommodated within current programme specifications, it was proposed that School of Comparative American Studies pilot a programme of student-directed writing support to assist with academic writing skills and better facilitate academic progression. This form of peer-support was deemed an appropriate supplement to formal writing provision within the CAS programme, which included lecturer-student dialogues in pre- and post-assessment feedback sessions and drop-in academic writing sessions provided by the university's Undergraduate Skills Programme. Many students found the former either too intimidating or brief to facilitate substantial improvement, while latter was seen as either remedial in nature or a poor use of time owing to its non-disciplinary nature.

The parameters of the pilot were based upon the first-year academic writing support received by the principal investigator during her own undergraduate experience at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. Rather than offering students additional formal instruction with teaching staff, the programme aimed to provide them with an opportunity to work collaboratively with their peers and recent graduates. It was hoped that this would foster a student-centred approach to academic writing development and facilitate the asking of 'stupid questions' from non-threatening authority figures—those who had successfully completed the undergraduate programme but had no influence over final marks.

The project had a secondary aim of promoting a stronger collaborative atmosphere within the department between undergraduates, taught postgraduates, postgraduate seminar tutors and the permanent staff, creating a more layered departmental culture and providing first-year students with a clear sense of progression within the academic community.

In brief, this project aimed to

- **re-integrate writing skills within the disciplinary context**
 - **expand real contact hours between the department and students by providing structured contact in addition to existing content-based modules**
 - **support collaboration between members of the department at undergraduate, postgraduate and staff level**
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METHODOLOGY

BACKGROUND TO CAS FIRST-YEAR PROGRAMME

The pilot programme was undertaken by the 2011-2015 cohort of the Comparative American Studies (CAS) degree programme. Students with the CAS programme take four core modules during their first year:

- Latin America: Themes and Problems (AM101)
- North America: Themes and Problems (AM102)
- Comparative History of the Americas (AM103)
- Spanish Language

In terms of written assessments, students are required to undertake a total of ten 2000-word essays during the first two terms of their first year across the three core history and literature modules. They are then required to write a single 4500-word comparative project during term three, drawing from their experiences across all three modules. The comparative project is due in week 3 of term 3, allowing roughly six weeks of uninterrupted research and writing.

BACKGROUND TO CAS FIRST-YEAR COHORT

Because CAS students undertake identical modules during their first year, and are relatively few in number, they have generally developed strong peer relationships as well as a shared experience of assessment. As social media has become an increasingly integral tool for students—individually as well as part of the CAS Society—homogeneity of experience has become increasingly expected; students have become increasingly likely to relay information received—formally and informally—to peers via Facebook and mobile communication networks, creating an informal corpus of expectations and standards. Although this informal corpus can present problems in terms consistency, the extremely strong peer relationships provide an excellent opportunity for peer collaboration and support, encouraging regular discussion and critiques of academic work.

ANTICIPATED DIFFICULTIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOCIAL WRITING PROJECT

The staff of the Comparative American Studies programme foresaw a number of difficulties with the implementation of the Social Writing Project.

First, staff members were concerned that students would not regularly attend sessions or would not fully engage with their content without formal assessment being associated with the programme. It was determined that the sessions be explicitly linked to the term three comparative project, an assessment which students felt particularly concerned about and were therefore particularly likely to engage with in a regular fashion.

Staff members were also concerned that taught postgraduate tutors would be unable—or otherwise fail—to provide a rigorous standard of academic writing instruction without formal training or previous teaching experience. This concern was ameliorated through the careful selection of candidates through multi-level interviews by staff and postgraduate tutors.

Finally, there were concerns about a lack of trust between undergraduates regarding their intellectual property or about accusations of plagiarism and collusion. The project team aimed to limit these feelings of risk by limiting the size of the peer groups to four individuals, demanding equal contribution of material by all participants and reiterating the definition of plagiarism to students.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There were several ethical considerations for this project that the project staff aimed to address. First, there were concerns about the inequitable provision of additional writing support to a subsection of students within the modules North America: Themes and Problems and Latin America: Themes and Problems, which are also taken by non-CAS students. This was ameliorated by explaining the experimental nature of the project to participants and providing guidance on obtaining discussion space within the library or Learning Grid to any non-CAS students who wished to form informal peer writing groups; however, none of the non-CAS student requested this.

Also, there were concerns about collusion between students or between the MA student and the first-year students in the creation of assessed work. This risk was lessened by being explicit with students about the nature of collaboration and collusion in social writing and directing students to written guidance on departmental policy on plagiarism and intellectual property theft.

Finally, some staff felt that there was a chance for social isolation or discomfort from the social writing process by students with specific learning difficulties. The staff aimed to limit this by making the group non-compulsory and engaging in frequent consultation with students should any problems arise.

These ethical issues, along with the rest of the project, were brought before the History Staff-Student Liaison Committee during Term 1 of 2011-2012 and no objections were raised by the students regarding the nature, limitations or framework of the proposed project.

PROGRAMME OUTLINE

The project was originally structured to take place over the spring term of the 2011-2012 academic year and to complete before the inter-term break. However, logistical delays in recruiting tutors meant the programme was moved to weeks 5-10 of the spring term and weeks 1-3 of the summer term. It involved all (26) first-year undergraduates enrolled on the Comparative American Studies degree programme.

During January, an internal advertisement was placed for two tutors to facilitate the peer writing groups. The post was advertised to all MA students in the history department with preference given to those who had undertaken the CAS comparative project or a project of a similar nature during their undergraduate experience. Despite the limited application window, the programme received almost a dozen applications and chose to interview the four strongest candidates.

The interview panel consisted of the principal investigator, M. H. Beals, Dr Francisco A. Eissa-Barroso, convenor of Latin America: Themes and Problems, Andrea Cadelo-Buitrago, postgraduate tutor of Latin America: Themes and Problems, and two first-year CAS undergraduates. The undergraduates were self-selected, having responded to an invitation sent to all first-year students. The students were given the option to ask candidates specific questions, which they did on occasion, but were particularly involved in the final decision process after the interviews had concluded.

After selection of the tutors, the CAS cohort was asked to separate themselves into groups of three or four and chose one of a selection of half-hour session slots. Approximately half the students did this immediately while the other half had to be reminded during their next history seminar, at which point they completed the process. Once groups were established, an email was sent indicating to students where they would meet and how they should prepare for the first meeting.

Each Monday, the two writing tutors met with the principal investigator to discuss the progress of the programme and to discuss alterations to the programme to address any issues that had been raised by students. At the end of the spring term, the writing tutors and principal investigator met with a group of postgraduate seminar tutors and permanent staff to discuss the progress of the programme and any issues that had developed in the students' writing during the previous weeks. There was also a discussion of key issues students in previous cohorts had faced in writing their comparative projects for which the current cohort of students should be prepared.

PROGRAMME OF SESSIONS

Meeting One (Week 5) – A base-line exercise was completed electronically prior to the first meeting in which key assessment vocabulary are defined (See Worksheet 1). During the first meeting these terms and phrases were interrogated by the group to better understand assessment criteria and the requirements of certain essay question types.

Meeting Two (Week 7) – Students were asked to submit a small sample of their written work from either current efforts or previous essays. Tutors also brought in a small selection of their own undergraduate writing to demonstrate their own progression.

Meeting Three (Week 8) – Students worked on collecting and structuring bibliographic data (See Worksheet 2) as well as continuing discussion of their written work.

Meeting Four (Week 9) – Students worked on drafts of the written work, commenting particularly on argument structure and clarity of expression.

Meeting Five (Week 10) – Students were asked to bring in an introductory paragraph or extended thesis statement for their comparative project to discuss and improve.

Meeting Six (Week 1) – Students were asked to bring in a sample of their comparative project for discussion.

Meeting Seven (Week 2) – Students were asked to bring in an additional sample of their comparative project for discussion.

Meeting Eight (Week 3) – Students spent the session reviewing their experience of the writing and assessment process and discussing their future approaches to assessment in year two.

During weeks four and five, students were invited to take part in focus group sessions to discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of the project, and their own academic writing progress. Four students chose to participate in the sessions.

EVALUATIONS

The project was evaluated independently by the students, through written feedback questionnaires, by the academic writing tutors, through reflective reports, and by the teaching staff through a reflective examination of student writing during the project and in comparison to previous cohorts.

STUDENT EVALUATIONS

The following assessments were provided by the students of the first-year cohort of the Comparative American Studies programme. They include a direct account from one of the two student interviewers as well as a summary of responses from the written and oral feedback given at the conclusion of the project during the final peer group session and the focus-group session with the principal investigator.

STUDENT INTERVIEWER

The Social Writing programme itself was a fantastic idea and extremely useful to all of us; I feel our inclusion as students in the interviewing process was highly successful and necessary as it was, after all, us that were due to work with the MA peers. I found the initial application profiles being sent to us prior to the interviews particularly helpful. I was pleased with the questions asked, especially the focus on ideas for the Social Writing programme itself rather than only questions regarding previous experience, because the project was not focussed on traditional teaching methods as such, as some may expect. Questions about the programme itself also helped to highlight the most enthusiastic candidates and the interviewees that had fully read and understood that the task at hand was to work through academic writing methods and style, rather than to help us with the content of our American studies essays.

GENERAL STUDENT FEEDBACK

PROGRESSION OF WRITING SKILLS

Students were asked to describe the trajectory of the academic writing during the first term—prior to the start of the social writing programme—and during week two—in conjunction with the programme. Most felt that their writing had improved significantly during the first term, in response to experience and tutor feedback. They felt their writing had become more coherent, concise and clear, and that a greater differentiation had been made between literary criticism and historical discourse. They also felt that they had learned to focus more on argument than simple description.

The social writing project, in contrast, was much more focused on finer academic writing skills, usually developed during years of academic acculturation. These included creating explicit links to a central thesis, developing a consistent argument with adequate signposting, and crafting more effective introductions and conclusions. There were also several mentions of formatting skills such as proper referencing, which were improved specifically through discussions during social writing sessions.

WORK PATTERNS

At the end of the programme, students were asked when they had had an acceptable draft of their essay completed—one which they *could* have submitted as a complete version of the final project. The responses were clustered very tightly around the final weekend before the deadline. 14% felt that they had an acceptable draft more than a week prior to the deadline and further 21% felt that they had a complete draft by Friday night. About 42%, however, only felt comfortable with their paper Sunday night and 14% felt they were rushing to meet the noon deadline on Monday.

These results suggest that only a small proportion of the students had fully engaged with the drafting portion of the project. This was borne out by further queries into their working habits. Although the number of hours spent varied widely, most students spent only 5-10% of their time re-writing or proof-reading their papers. For example:

Student A

10 Hours Reading and Researching
10 Hours Writing a First Draft
2 hours Re-Writing or Proof Reading Final Draft

Student B

6 Weeks Reading and Researching (3 hours a day)
8 Weeks Writing a First Draft (3 hours a day)
1 Week Re-writing or Proof Reading Final Draft (3 hours a day)

During focus group sessions, students were asked why such a small proportion of time was spent on drafting. On the one hand, students felt that reading was the primary component of the process and often felt they lacked a fully complete view of the subject until very near the submission deadline. On the other, several students were concerned that if they re-read their paper they would find too many mistakes to correct before submission and were embarrassed by the prospect. They therefore opted for an 'ignorance is bliss' view of drafting.

Although these admissions may be unhappy revelations to teaching staff, they are extremely common at all levels of academic scholarship; the former being a particularly common complaint amount PhD candidates.

ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS

Students were asked to evaluate the assessment requirements of the first year of the CAS programme and how they felt the comparative project fit into their view of the assessment regime. Most felt that the short essays had been a manageable length, but were concerned at the relatively small amount of lecture or seminar coverage of certain topics prior to the submission deadline. This was particularly the case in the North American Literature seminar series, as the final essay was due prior to seminar discussion of the final play, which many students found disappointing.

The comparative project, in contrast, was considered an almost unmanageable length, as little time had been spent explaining expected differences in composition and formatting. Several students also felt they had been inadequately prepared to obtain specialist knowledge beyond the AM102 and AM101 lecture series and did not feel comfortable approaching permanent staff for assistance until they were encouraged to do so by social writing tutors. Nonetheless, the ability to choose one's own topic beyond the lecture series was considered the *most* attractive part of the project. Crucially, several students recognized that 'you get out what you put in' and that those who began their projects during term two enjoyed the process more than those who waited until term three.

FORMAL FEEDBACK

During the course of the project, student often made unsolicited comments regarding the feedback they had received on previous essays, often in an attempt to gauge the relative comparability of their feedback to that of their peers. Several key themes emerged.

First, all the students felt that in-text annotation on their essays had been particularly helpful, while the summative comments on their essay cover sheets were less so; the latter was often composed of stock phrases which were wholly similar across the cohort. Students were also enthusiastic about face-to-face feedback, which allowed them to ask specific questions regarding their past and future writing. However, they viewed this form of feedback as secondary in nature and felt apprehensive in organising what they viewed as *extra tuition* from their markers. This indicates that a more explicit explanation of the feedback process—that written feedback is the first of two equally important steps—may be needed.

Second, the students had mixed feelings towards the content of their written feedback, which they felt was often focused on improving the current piece of work rather than being framed as transferable to future work; for example, tutors had noted the exclusion of certain authors or bodies of evidence. Many students felt they would never write another essay on this particular topic again, and so overly specific feedback was irrelevant to their academic progression. Instead, they would have preferred explicit instruction on how to obtain a more representative selection of literature in the future.

WORKING WITH TUTORS AND PEERS

When asked which part of the project had been particularly valuable, the additional contact time with tutors or the experience of peer collaboration, they indicated the former. Although students greatly appreciated the informal atmosphere that the peer groups session facilitated, as well as the ability to look at and compare a wide variety of student writing samples, they felt the *most* valuable part of the project was the ability to ask what they deemed 'little' or 'stupid' questions that had never been addressed by their seminar tutors or lecturers. Importantly, doing this in a peer environment allowed students to see that they were not alone in their confusion on certain points, which they found comforting. The presentation of the tutors' own first-year essays was seen as particularly helpful as it offered visible proof of progression. Importantly, students noted that while they would have been comfortable working with seminar tutors or permanent staff on their academic writing, they were more comfortable working the MA students because the 'senior staff seem miles away from being able to related to you as a first year.'

Despite this preference for student-tutor discussion, some students felt they had absolutely earned 'a few more points' owing to comments by the peers; these students specifically noted that they had not been close friends with the people in their group and this had led to more honest appraisal of their work. Likewise, those who had chosen to work with good friends felt unable to be 'cruel to be kind' and would have preferred to have been allocated a group of acquaintances rather than friends.

In terms of student contribution, many felt they had failed to live up to their part of the collaboration by neglecting to send or bring in sufficient writing samples to the meetings. They had seen the value in doing so, but often did not have enough written work completed prior to the session. Most felt this was an indication of their own poor time management skills, a lack of drafting experience, and the tendency to use impending deadlines as the key motivators for doing work. In specific regard to the comparative project, there was a feeling that home was not a 'work environment' and that they would not be able to begin their project until they return to university in term three.

KEY DIFFICULTIES WITH THE PROGRAMME

There were some concerns among students regarding the late start of the project, but also an understanding of the pilot nature of the programme; they did, however, recommend that it begin much earlier in future years. There were also a few comments regarding the non-CAS background of the tutors—both History graduates. It was recommended that either literature specialists or interdisciplinary American Studies tutors be available in the future. It is important to note that these criticisms were *always* wrapped in high praise for the current tutors and a desire not to imply they had been in any way deficient, suggesting a strong rapport between the MA and Undergraduate students.

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF THE SOCIAL WRITING PROJECT

Students made a number of final impressions regarding the project as a whole. Most felt that it had been extremely successful and gave glowing reviews of the two session tutors, whom they felt were extremely approachable, helpful and attentive. Having pre-submission feedback on small writing samples, in particular, was seen as invaluable to the developed of their academic writing style.

Overall, students rated the programme an 8 of ten, with one including the addendum “I would have given 10/10 had it started earlier in the academic year” and another noting that “I couldn’t speak highly enough about it.”

TUTOR EVALUATIONS

ALAN MALPASS

After receiving verbal feedback from the final group sessions of the Social Writing project, it can be concluded that the peer writing groups have received a positive reaction from the students.

Several factors highlighted by the students as benefits of attending the weekly meetings. First, the informal setting in which the groups met provided a space for the students to ask questions that they had felt embarrassed to ask permanent staff. Although they considered the teaching staff approachable, the students considered their questions too banal to merit an email or meeting.

Second, discussing their own work and experiences with their peers revealed that most problems were common across the group, assuaging student fears. When an individual problem was raised, the combined input from other members of the group led to several acceptable solutions being offered. Furthermore, by attending meetings with both the postgraduate students and their undergraduate peers, the students have had the opportunity to better integrate themselves within the department. These factors have nurtured student confidence towards academic writing and encouraged the consultation of peers outside of the weekly group meetings.

In regard to academic writing, students felt there were several common themes that were addressed that helped them improve their work. The structure of their long essays was a collective concern. Using extracts of the students' writing was considered a useful approach in discussing the overall structure of essays. A discussion of structure also opened up conversations on style, which proved fruitful and interesting. The groups recognised that, although there were basic structures and approaches to academic writing, there was room for individual writing styles to come forth. Another key theme was correct footnoting. Although style guides are supplied to each student at the start of term, they felt that it was better to learn through discussion.

While the majority of feedback was positive, there were a number of suggested improvements from the students. First, the issue of time was highlighted; all groups stated that the program should start earlier, during the first term and have a wider remit than preparation for the comparative project, such as correct footnoting and finding source material. Second, most students agreed that they would have liked a better fuller introduction to the peer writing groups programme and the overall objective of the sessions. Third, it was suggested that attendance to the meetings should be a compulsory element of the course. It was noted that some group members only attended occasionally (or not at all), and some argued that this was because the meetings were optional. By making the sessions compulsory, they felt students would eventually see the benefit of the writing groups, rather than continually pass up the offer of help. Finally, the introduction of a tutor student who specialised in literature, rather than history, was considered to be a worthwhile consideration. Those who focused on literature in their project felt that they would have benefitted from the input of a student that had dealt with this aspect in their own work.

My own experience of the peer writing groups has been positive and I have thoroughly enjoyed taking part. Having mentored students before, I found that the experience built upon my previous work, fostering my desire to continue this type of employment. Although primarily helping students manage their projects, the peer groups also encouraged reflection on my own work and writing style. The suggestions made by the students, which I largely agree with, would be welcome additions to the programme if it were continued.

Having come to the end of the social writing programme, I am very glad to have taken part. The idea of teaching has always appealed to me and my experiences with this program and with the students has only reinforced this. The students were for the most part forthcoming and eager, not only to improve their writing, but to help each other improve.

One concern I had going in to the programme was whether the students would be interested in improving, and whether they would feel they could learn anything from a Masters student. This concern was soon allayed as their willingness to learn and improve became clear from the first sessions. The workload was not too high; 1½–2 hours of sessions a week, plus time preparing materials and fielding questions via email fell within the estimated 3 hours a week. The workload was occasionally more towards the end of the project, but this was understandable because of the upcoming deadline and was not something I begrudged at all. The organisation of the programme was excellent, making my job as a tutor much easier and stress-free. The weekly meetings with Melodee and Alan were useful as they provided an opportunity to pass on students' concerns, report on how things progressing, and to keep up to speed with the wider context of the students' first-year requirements. Overall, I would recommend being a social writing tutor to any of my peers. It has made me more reflective about my own writing, and has given me the experience and confidence to pursue more tutoring as I go on to doctoral study.

The students seemed to find social writing useful, despite a wide variation in attendance; there were some students who attended only one session, never to be seen again, and others who attended every week. Among those who consistently came, each student missed on average one session over the course of the program. Of those who chose not to come, some were more forthcoming via email. Although they will have got some benefit out of the programme from this, I feel they could have got much more by attending. One of the great strengths of this program was the 'social' aspect. The students improved their academic writing in a non-traditional academic setting, one in which they were encouraged to share unfinished work and collaborate. Those who chose to receive assistance only via one-on-one email contact will have missed out on the social aspect that helped others go some way to finding their 'voice'. I felt there was much more progress when they students were open and encouraging with each other about their own and each other's writing. For this reason, those who attended every time, but especially those who attended with drafts every time, saw, to my eyes, the biggest improvement.

Overall, I felt the program went very well. The students were able to learn in a comfortable environment where they were not afraid of asking 'silly questions' or getting things wrong. Although the programme was intended to improve their writing (which I think it did), it also seemed to have the effect of increasing their confidence in their own ideas. Because of the group- and peer-based nature of the program, they spent a lot of time learning from each other. They seemed to appreciate having their ideas listened to and taken on board by the others. In this way, the programme also showed them how much they already knew.

It was also important for the students to see that their own voices were important in essays. Many seemed to have an idea about academic writing that it involved long sentences with technical terms, heavy description, and a reliance on other people's views. The programme helped to demystify academic writing for them and teach them the value of their own words. All of these things were made much easier by having the students choose their own groups. From the outset, they were comfortable with each other and unafraid to offer advice and ask questions. To me, this suggests that the social aspect of the programme is crucial.

Drafting, however, was the one aspect that could have gone better. One of the great strengths of social writing was the way it encouraged them to draft their work ahead of their deadlines, but this was only really taken up towards the end of the programme; many of the extracts we analysed were from essays already submitted. Although this will have been useful for the development of their writing in general, it cannot have helped them achieve better marks on those specific essays. If I had put a greater emphasis on drafting, they might have been more willing to receive feedback on work in progress. It was, however, encouraging towards that those who did attend the final session before the submission of their comparative projects all brought drafts with them.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the project was a solid success. There were few difficulties with the implementation of the project or with achieving the main goal of the programme, which was to foster a collaborative environment for first year students to improve academic writing and confidence.

However, because of the limited timeframe of the project, and the ultimate incomparability of one cohort to another, the overall improvement in quantitative marks for the final comparative project has been minimal. Although there was a small increase in the average mark in comparison with the 2010-2011 cohort, this was within the annual fluctuations seen over the past five years and does not indicate a direct causal relationship to the project. However, the students felt the project had helped them be far more critical of their own writing and had helped them in developing a more polished style, something commented upon anecdotally by marking staff. Moreover, several students commented that they had not fully engaged with the drafting process, but that the experience had encouraged them to do so in the future.

I therefore highly recommend that the project be continued and expanded in future years to the entirety of the first year cohort of the Department of History, with the following qualifications and amendments.

STARTING DATE

The students, tutors and I all felt that the programme began too late in the year. It was recommended by students, and I agree, that the programme should begin either during week seven of the first term or week one of the second term. This would allow students a 'settling-in' period at university and the opportunity to work independently on their first assessed written work to determine their strengths and weaknesses. However, it would give students the opportunity to experiment with drafting prior to the large scale project in term three.

TUTOR SELECTION

The student-staff selection process worked very well. Although the expansion of the project would make the interview process longer, the student interviewers found the experience very useful and felt more invested in the process because their concerns and opinions had been validated by being able to take part in the selection process. Their participation was also particularly important as several candidates were excellent in terms of experience, and clearly appointable, but did not have a sufficient rapport with the student interviewers, something deemed crucial for the success of the writing sessions.

All parties involved appreciated that the session tutors were MA students and I heartily recommend the programme be continued in this manner. However, within the CAS cohort it was suggested that the range of tutors be expanded to include literature or film specialists as the comparative project required and understanding of writing convention beyond the history discipline.

In terms of finding a suitable number of MA tutors, the current tutors noted that the application period was very short and, had it been longer, many more of their peers would have applied for positions. As for funding an expansion of the programme, the tutors felt that the experience was extremely valuable and the workload sufficiently light that an honorarium in lieu of hourly wages would be acceptable recompense. In future years, it may also be possible to allocate the work as part of a teaching skills module within the MA programme. I would **not**, however, recommend the project relying upon volunteers. This would limit the range of applicants and therefore the range of academic writing experiences; those who can demonstrate or have experience of regular paid work during their full-time education can offer students particular insights into time management skills.

GROUP SIZE AND SELECTION

Group size was limited to four students and arranged through self-selection in order foster trust between students. However, the students felt larger groups (6-8 students), selected randomly from the cohort would have been *more* valuable in developing new social relationships and providing a wider range of opinions and writing samples.

SESSION FORMAT

Should the programme begin during week 7 of the first term, I would recommend that the first 4 sessions be devoted to formatting and stylistic skills, such as those developed in the hand outs (see appendices). Several students commented that discussing the practicalities of their writing in this manner had been very helpful, but would have been much more so had it been done at the start of the year.

Contrary to student opinion, I do not feel that the sessions should be compulsory after the initial skills meetings, as forcing students to present their work may cause resentment and be counter-effective. I would therefore suggest that the sessions in term one be compulsory, including an introductory session that explains the purpose and nature of the programme, while the actual peer-writing session be recommended rather than required.

Finally, despite explaining to both students and tutors that the session tutors were not to be treated as regular proof-readers for their work, students frequently sent additional drafts to the tutors via email for review prior to submission. While the tutors did not object to this, it is something to watch carefully in future years to prevent student reliance upon tutors regularly vetting their work.

WORKSHEETS

The programme was centred first and foremost on student writing samples. There were, however, two worksheets developed, based on student requests.

The first is a list of the assessment criteria taken from the History Departmental Student Handbook that students were asked to 'translate' into what their tutors would be looking for. These were then discussed with each other and the writing tutor in order to better understand what tutors expected of student work.

The second was a selection of title pages from various sources—books, articles and websites—with an example of a properly formatted footnote at the bottom. The aim was to have students circle the relevant information on the title or copyright page in order to demonstrate how to collect bibliographic information. This was seen as particularly helpful as the student handbook was unclear as to how to obtain this information.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA WORKSHEET

Here is a list of marking criteria that staff for the School of Comparative American Studies use to mark your essays. Have a look through them and after each section write what you think each criterion is *really* asking for. Bring this worksheet to your initial meeting of the Peer Writing Group

For example: Evidence of creativity, originality, sophistication and freshness of arguments
→ Doing primary research on a topic as you would in a journal article.

Answering the Question:

Persuasive and direct answer to the question

A direct and coherent argument

Basically satisfactory answer to the question.

Barely satisfactory answer to the question.

→

Placing the Question in Context:

Establishing the wider significance of the issues concerned

→

Covering the topic:

Comprehensive coverage of the relevant material

Adequate coverage of the relevant material

Limited coverage of relevant material

Inadequate coverage of relevant material

→

Organisation

Narrative and description taking second place to analysis

Primarily narrative

Persuasive structuring of arguments

Adequate structuring of arguments

Poor structuring of arguments

→

Style

Fluent and engaging writing style

Adequate writing style

→

Presentation

Persuasive presentation

Adequate presentation

Poor presentation

→

Accuracy

Accuracy in the details

Some inaccuracy in the detail

Major inaccuracies in the detail

→

Use of Evidence

Well supported by relevant evidence

Skilful mobilisation of evidence in relation to the argument being presented

Some attempt to mobilise evidence in relation to the argument being presented

→

Analysis of concepts

Critical analysis of relevant concepts

Competent manipulation of relevant concepts

Analysis taking second place to narrative and description

Limited understanding of relevant concepts

No understanding of relevant concepts

→

Analysis of Historiography

Critical analysis of theoretical or historiographical perspectives or methodological issues

Competent manipulation of theoretical or historiographical perspectives or methodological issues

Limited understanding of theoretical or historiographical perspectives or methodological issues

No understanding of theoretical or historiographical perspectives or methodological issues

→

WOMEN and WORK in PREINDUSTRIAL EUROPE

EDITED BY

Barbara A. Hanawalt

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M. H. Beals

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PETER LANG

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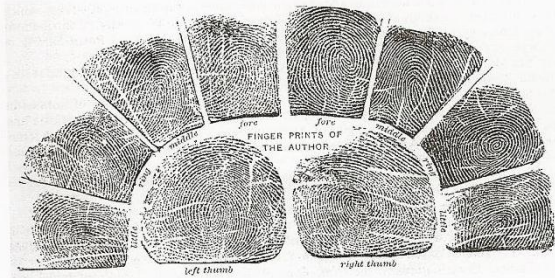
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Francis Galton's fingerprints from his *Finger Prints* (1892).

Fingerprints and Citizenship: the British State and the Identification of Pensioners in the Interwar Period

by Edward Higgs

In the aftermath of '9/11', and the associated bombings in Madrid and London, the identification of individuals has become a subject of intense public controversy. At the heart of these global debates is the vexed relationship between personal autonomy and individual, national and international security. How can the right to privacy, a space where one can be free from surveillance, be squared with the demands for personal safety in society as a whole? The latter have certainly been the excuse for the establishment of DNA databases, the routine fingerprinting of people crossing national boundaries, the insertion of biometric forms of identification into passports and other documents and the development of a vast range of new identification technologies.¹ Similarly, the expansion of digital forms of commerce has made 'identity fraud' a subject of widespread public concern, raising the question of how personal identity and property rights can be preserved in the digital market place, the welfare state and 'e-government'.² In the UK in the first years of the twenty-first century, identity fraud was claimed to cost individuals, commercial organizations and the state in excess of £1.3 billion a year.³ Moreover, the passage of the 2006 Identity Cards Act by the Blair Government, which envisaged the introduction of national

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Register of Africans from the Schooner "Virginie"

▲ Images of Manuscripts ◀ Previous image 3 / 171 Next image ▶

The image shows a handwritten manuscript page with a table of names and details. The text is written in cursive and includes names of individuals, their ages, and other identifying information. The table is organized into columns, with names in the first column, ages in the second, and other details in the third and fourth columns. The handwriting is dense and fills most of the page.

The Schooner "Virginie" was captured at sea by British cruisers and adjudicated at a court established at Sierra Leone under international anti-slave trade treaties. The image is of a picture of the first page of the court's register of "Liberated Africans" taken from the "Virginie". The register was kept as a formal record of emancipation that helped protect the individual from subsequent re-enslavement. The image is reproduced courtesy of the British National Archives.

Year: 1819

Source: British National Archives, Foreign Office, ser. 84, vol. 4, p. 248.

Language: English

Related voyages

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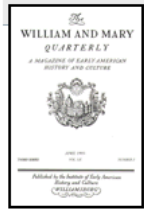
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Seeman, "Justise Must Take Plase", pp. 402-4.

INITIAL CALL FOR WRITING TUTORS

For immediate distributions to all masters-level history students

The School of Comparative American Studies, in the Department of History, is pleased to announce that it is recruiting two taught-postgraduate students to take part in a pilot programme aimed at providing additional academic writing support to history undergraduates, funded by the Institute of Advanced Teaching and Learning.

The post will involve facilitating peer-writing seminars for first-year CAS undergraduates in preparation for their Comparative Project, due in term 3. The project aims to provide a non-threatening environment in which students can explore their writing at the draft stage and receive feedback and support at incremental stages throughout the writing process. The role of the tutor will be to facilitate group discussion, rather than administer formal writing instruction, though sharing personal experience of completing undergraduate assessment is encouraged.

Each group will consist of 3 or 4 undergraduates and be taught weekly (term time) for 30-minute sessions. Each tutor will be responsible for 4 groups (2 hours per week).

The tutor's responsibilities will include:

- Preparation
 - Collecting electronic writing samples from students 24 hours prior to the meeting.
 - Photocopying and reviewing samples for each group.
- In Session
 - Facilitating writing exercises (provided by project coordinator).
 - Facilitating group readings of the samples.
 - Leading and directing constructive peer reviews of the samples.
 - Provide guidance on research techniques, argument construction and style from own experience and guidance materials provided.
- Post Session
 - Maintain a brief (anonymous) journal of the session highlighting successes and difficulties and issues to raise with the project coordinator.
 - Attend weekly meetings with the project coordinator to plan and evaluate project sessions.
- At the Conclusion of the Project
 - Attend post-project focus groups and provide feedback on your experiences.
 - Provide a written report on the success and difficulties face during the project.

Person Specifications:

Essential:

- Is currently engaged as a masters-level postgraduate student within the Department of History
- Has obtained at least a 2:1 degree classification

Desirable:

- Undertook undergraduate studies at the University of Warwick.
- Undertook the CAS first-year comparative project or a project of a similar nature.
- Obtained 1:1 on a number of written assessments during undergraduate programme

Wage:

- £12 per hour (for a total of 36 hours over the course of term 2 and 3)

Interviews will be held Friday of Week 4. The project will begin week 5.

This is an excellent opportunity to gain valuable teaching and project management skills as well as refine your writing and research skills. If you would like to apply, please send a short statement (250-750 words) describing how you meet the essential and desirable criteria and your interest in the project.

INITIAL CALL FOR STUDENT INTERVIEWERS

Dear all,

I am happy to announce that the School of Comparative American Studies has been awarded a small grant in order to provide you, first year CAS students with additional support in developing your academic writing and preparing your final comparative project.

The programme will work as follows. During this week, you will need to visit <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/people/seminartutors/beals/iatl> and form groups of 3 or 4. We are asking that you form your own groups to ensure that you work with people you feel comfortable with sharing your writing with. You should complete this no later than 12noon on Monday Week 5 (this coming Monday).

To sign up, simply log-in and click 'edit' in the top right hand side of the screen. You will then be able to add your name to own of the groups.

These groups will meet for 30 minutes each week of Term 2 and the first 3 weeks of Term 3. In them, a tutor will help you work with your comparative project as you write it, developing it and improving it, and helping you learn to critique and assist your friends; a valuable skill which will help you in future years!

We have had a number of applications from taught MA students who would like the opportunity to work with you, but we want you, the student, to be as involved as possible. Therefore, we would ask for one or two students to sit on the interview panel with me this Friday between 10am and 12pm.

If you would like the opportunity to get some interviewing experience, and have a say in who will be helping you with your project, please email me as soon as possible, but no later than this Thursday at 2pm.