

Instructing and Advising: **the Dual Role of a Teaching Assistant in Budapest**

Angela Bennett

*Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL 60115
www.niu.edu
angelabennett@mail.fulbrightweb.org*

*ELTE
1146 Budapest, Ajtósi Dürer sor 19-21
www.elte.hu
Advisers: Dr. Dorottya Holló,
Ms. Éva Major*

The role of a Fulbright teaching assistant is twofold, consisting of an educational advisor at the Fulbright Educational Advising Center, and a visiting instructor at ELTE within the Department of English Applied Linguistics and the Center for English Teacher Training.. Courses taught at ELTE include two Academic Skills writing courses, in addition to an exam preparation course to first year university students. Projects undertaken within the Educational Advising Center include the following: academic advisor and American resource person to students interested in studying in the US, weekly writing workshop leader, monthly TOEFL preparation workshop leader, International Education Week presenter, FEAC representative at college fair, and resource developer in securing book donation to ELTE and FEAC.

Introduction

The Fulbright Teaching Assistantship grant consists of two main fields of responsibility. On a general level, these include educational advising at the Fulbright Educational Advising Center and teaching university English courses at

Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem (ELTE). In this paper I will discuss in detail the projects and courses I have completed as the sole teaching assistant for the 2003/04 academic year in Budapest.

Teaching Responsibilities at ELTE

I hold a teaching assistantship in two departments at ELTE. These are the Department of English Applied Linguistics (DEAL) and the Center for English Teacher Training (CETT). I taught one course for each department for Fall semester 2003.

Within the Department of English Applied Linguistics, I instructed an AN-104 Academic Skills course. The main objective of AN-104 is to refine first year students' essay writing skills required for university courses. First, we discussed ways to approach a specific writing assignment. These include the process of brainstorming and listing, as well as creating clusters or branches of ideas. Then, the student must consider who the reader will be, or the concept of audience. Moving from the approach stage, I taught the components necessary for every paragraph: the paragraph topic and topic sentence, sentences in support of the topic, the concluding sentence, unity, cohesion, coherence, and punctuation.

The focus of AN-104 is to provide information about the structure and content that should be included in different types of essay writing. The types of essays covered in this course are: descriptive, narrative, discursive, comparison and contrast, and most relevant to academic writing, the argumentative essay. I presented the necessary components for all essays: a title, thesis statement, introductory, supporting body and concluding paragraphs, transitions between paragraphs, and the organization of ideas. Then, as a class we analyzed essay examples from the five types of essays previously mentioned. Students were required then to compose essays of all five types. In addition, they reviewed their peer's essays with a review checklist to guide them and they made necessary revisions and prepared several drafts

before submitting a final copy. Their final course grade depended on writing two take-home and one in-class essay, based on proper content and correct essay format, as well as actively participating in class whether analyzing essays, writing practice essays, or peer reviewing essays.

Within the Center for English Teacher Training, I instructed an exam preparation course for first year students as they prepared to take the TOLC 1 exam required to continue their studies in the CETT department. This course met twice weekly to refine students' English grammar, writing and listening skills necessary to pass the TOLC 1 exam.

For Spring semester 2004, I am currently instructing the continuation of the Fall semester Department of English Applied Linguistics Academic Skills AN-108 course. While the fall semester AN-104 academic writing course focused on shorter written essay assignments, the goal of AN-108 takes academic writing one step further to include writing academic papers. I am teaching the many components involved in writing an academic research paper, both theoretical and empirical. Students are required to conduct library research on their topic, analyze and document sources according to the American Psychological Association (APA) and Modern Language Association (MLA) style of documentation, quote, summarize, and paraphrase written information, organize their notes and create a review of literature for their papers. The required theoretical paper topic can be approved by the students' content course teacher, relevant to their content course whether that be literature or linguistics. The theoretical paper must contain the following requirements: title, introductory paragraph, literature review with analysis, discussion, conclusion and works cited in MLA style.

The second required research paper is the empirical research paper. Students select their own topic of interest. The main difference with the empirical paper is that students must conduct field research, usually involving questionnaires to distribute to approximately 20 participants. Thus, students create a title, introduction and literature review relevant to their topic in addition to making a questionnaire for their own field research purposes. Once their field research is collected, they must analyze the data and draw conclusions. If the data is quantitative, students total the figures and produce charts or graphs to illustrate their results. If the collected data is qualitative, students must identify trends and patterns to explain their results. Thus, the structure of the empirical research paper is the following: title, introduction, literature review, methods, results, discussion, conclusion, and references in APA style. In addition, students must prepare a presentation of their empirical research to the class using a poster, handouts or overhead projector. Finally, as a last requirement for their course grade, students will compose an in-class argumentative academic essay. Following the tradition of the Fall semester academic skills course, students have the opportunity to peer review one another's work and prepare several revision drafts before submitting the final copy for a grade. This course more than doubled its enrollment from the Fall Academic Skills course from five students in the Fall to 13 students this Spring.

Finally, I hold weekly office hours for my courses to allow students to ask any questions or concerns on a one-to-one basis. Additionally, I attend periodic meetings required of faculty for both departments.

Activities at the Fulbright Educational Advising Center

The remaining half of the Teaching Assistantship grant includes several different responsibilities under the Fulbright Educational Advising Center (FEAC) umbrella. The main function of the teaching assistant is to provide approximately 12 hours of educational advising per week, offering direct experience and information about the United States educational system as the American resource person. Students who visit FEAC are mostly Hungarian, but also we have some students visit from neighboring countries who are interested in studying abroad. As the American resource person, I can provide information about specific colleges and universities, as well as academic programs and their requirements in the US. Many students who visit the center have questions concerning the required admissions tests for their program. At FEAC, we provide bulletins for these tests and offer assistance regarding the registration procedure. We also allow students to utilize our resources when preparing for these exams by either checking out test preparation books and/or practicing exams in the computer practice room prior to taking the actual test. Finally, as an educational advisor I am able to offer information concerning scholarships to fund one's education, including information about the Fulbright award.

As the Fulbright Teaching Assistant, I lead two regularly scheduled workshops. The writing workshop meets weekly for one hour and is open to any interested person who needs assistance with the required writing portions of an academic application. This includes information about letters of inquiry, application essays, research proposals, recommendation letters, CVs, and requests for financial aid and scholarships. In addition, I also provide information to job seekers

regarding cover letters and resumes. Finally, some participants have questions about the essay section of required admissions tests which I address by suggesting strategies for essay writing in timed conditions. I also encourage students preparing for exams to practice writing essays under similar timed test conditions and submit them for my review.

The TOEFL test-taking strategy workshop meets one Saturday per month for three hours and requires pre-registration by participants. In this workshop, I present the four sections of the TOEFL exam: listening, structure, reading and writing, and discuss specific strategies designed for each section of the computer adaptive test. I also explain the registration procedure in detail and the scoring process. Following my presentation, workshop participants have the opportunity to practice taking a TOEFL exam on the computer using the TOEFL Sampler software. Additionally, participants may write an essay on a prompted topic within the allowed 30 minute time period. I then score the essays based on the ETS TOEFL scoring criteria for participants to collect. The demand for the TOEFL workshop has steadily increased from the onset of the workshop in the Fall to the need to add an extra unscheduled workshop, which again was at capacity.

In conjunction with International Education Week in November 2003, I presented two talks both days of the conference in Budapest at the Professor's House at ELTE, and at Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Piliscsaba. My presentation topics were "The U.S. Higher Education System" and "Finding the Appropriate Institution for You." In the afternoon sessions, I also led a seminar entitled "Effective Resume and Essay Writing." The purpose of this conference was to dedicate a full day to provide all

the necessary information for students wishing to study in the U.S. Attendance was good at both conference locations, and participants were active in asking questions.

In September 2003, I traveled with a colleague from the Fulbright Educational Advising Center to represent FEAC at the University of Debrecen Fall College Fair. There, we supplied fair participants with brochures and bulletins about studying in the US, admissions tests, and scholarship information. I answered students' inquiries about the U.S. educational system, different colleges and universities, and programs offered in the U.S.

In keeping with the supplemental project I proposed in my Fulbright application, I contacted and secured a book donation by Third World Books, an American organization that collects and sends educational book donations to countries in need. Currently, one shipment of four has arrived in Budapest. Of these 53 books, the majority are works or diaries by Virginia Woolf, although there are many other literature titles available. The books will be donated to the university library at ELTE. The remaining shipments will contain more literature works to be donated to the library, in addition to admissions test preparation books and writing practice guide books to be given to the FEAC. It is my intention that the book donation strengthen the university library and the resource materials available at FEAC in order to better prepare students for admissions tests and the application writing process as well as introduce students to various works of literature.

As a final ongoing project associated with the Fulbright Educational Advising Center, I am in the process of updating and revising the current "Application Handbook: Surviving the Writing Process" as part of the handbook series available at FEAC. More specif-

ically, I am integrating more detailed information about the application process where needed, as well as adding different examples concerning the written documents required for an application file.

Conclusion

As the Fulbright Teaching Assistant for the 2003/04 year in Hungary, I have gained invaluable professional experiences relating to a host of topics from teaching academic English university courses, international

academic advising, admission test preparation and knowledge, developing educational resources both first hand and by donation, application writing skills, and leading seminars and presenting lectures. On a personal level, I also believe that I developed a deeper international understanding and interest in diverse cultures. Overall, I feel that with the assistance of my colleagues both at Fulbright and ELTE, a great deal has been accomplished over the past academic year.