

## Staff Summary Sheet

	To	Action	Signature (Surname), Grade, Date		To	Action	Signature (Surname), Grade, Date
1	DFIRM (DFR)	Approve	<i>Ms R. M. [unclear] MSBKY PG-25</i> 2302	6			
2	DFER	Review	<i>SOLIS, AD-22, 24 Dec</i>	7			
3	DFIRM (DFR)	Action		8			
4				9			
5				10			

Grade and Surname of Action Officer Ms. Leonard, AD21	Symbol DFRL	Phone 333-0787	Suspense Date
Subject Clearance of Material for Public Release      Case Number: <i>USAFA-DF-PA-557</i>			SSS Date 20 December 2013

**Summary**

**1. Purpose:** To provide security and policy review on the document at Tab 1 prior to release to the public.

**2. Background:**

- *Author(s):* Ms. Constance A. Leonard, AD21, DFRL, 333-0787
- *Title:* Writing Research Papers: A Social Event
- *Abstract:* This paper details how international cadets were prepared to write a research paper using a social-constructionist approach popular among English for Specific Purposes (ESP) educators.
- *Release information:* To be submitted to The ESP Newsletter of TESOL International Association, January 6, 2014.
- *Previous clearance information:* N/A
- *Recommended distribution statement:* Distribution A, Approved for public release, distribution unlimited.

**3. Discussion:** N/A

**4. Recommendation:** Sign coord block above indicating document is suitable for public release. Suitability is based solely on the document being unclassified, not jeopardizing DoD interests, and accurately portraying official policy.

*Constance A. Leonard*

Ms. Constance A. Leonard  
DFRL

Tab  
1. Copy of article  
2. Approval of release by funding agency (if applicable)

*\* Need to add disclaimer ...*

*"The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the U.S. Air Force Academy, the U.S. Air Force, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government."*

## **Writing Research Papers: A Social Event**

### **Constance A. Leonard**

#### **Overview of Student Population**

English for Academic Purposes instructors at the United States Air Force Academy encounter a variety of challenges presented by the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their international cadets. There are currently 57 international cadets from 29 different countries who are required to take the EAP course along with their core courses during their freshman year. This past semester, as Course Director, I redesigned the course to include strictly U.S. authors in order to increase the students' knowledge about our history and culture to assist them in their other courses. Imagine the difficulties of taking subjects, such as U.S. History, Military and Strategic Studies, and Behavioral Science with little culture specific schemata. Many of the students have never lived or studied outside their country and for most, this is their first time in the United States. This past term, we had a total of 18 students from Malaysia, Japan, the Philippines, Iraq, the Gambia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Romania, Lithuania, Peru, Thailand, and Taiwan.

#### **Course Overview**

This EAP course is an introduction to academic communication focusing on reading and writing in English as a Second Language (ESL). We primarily used *The Oxford Book of Short Stories* edited by Joyce Carol Oates (2013) and *Writing Matters: A Handbook for Writing and Research* by Rebecca Moore Howard (2013), although these texts were supplemented by poems and essays. The short stories exposed students to American authors from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present exemplifying a broad range of linguistic and cultural diversity. The international cadets also need to develop an understanding of the U.S. university system in a military setting, instructor expectations, and study skills for college success. Research skills focused on developing Internet and library skills, and documentation styles. There were three required papers for the course: a narrative essay, a literary analysis, and a research paper along with an oral presentation of their research.

#### **Course Outcomes**

- Develop and write college essays relevant to English 111 and other core courses.
- Identify characteristics of a variety of standard college essays in the U.S.
- Recognize cultural variation in writing.
- Compose grammatically accurate sentences with few errors.
- Develop concise, varied sentence structure appropriate for academic audiences.
- Conduct effective oral presentations.
- Enhance critical thinking skills.
- Learn effective study skills to ensure college success.
- Use a variety of sources for research and document sources appropriately.

#### **The Research Paper Assignment**

This course culminated in a final research paper and oral presentation, which was by far the most popular assignment among the students as they had free rein to choose their topic. Most selected topics related to their countries that were of personal significance. MLA format was required along with a tutorial in the Writing Center, which was documented. In order to prepare, students

wrote in their journals, discussed their interests with the class and in small groups, wrote thesis statements, summarized articles, and participated in two seminars delivered by research librarians. These preparatory activities support a social-constructionist approach to teaching. Vygotsky argues, "that language is the main tool that promotes thinking, develops reasoning, and supports cultural activities like reading and writing." He further asserts that learning is a social activity and learning takes place through dialogue (Vygotsky, 1978).

In the same vein, although noting the usefulness of both the product and process approaches to teaching writing, the authors of *Developments in English for Specific Purposes*, Dudley-Evans and St John (2003) favor the social-constructionist approach, which synthesizes these methods. This approach takes into account the background knowledge of the student and places an emphasis on the social nature of learning.

Writing is a social act in which writers have to be aware of the context in which they are writing. That context places certain constraints on what writers can write and on the ways in which they can express ideas. We favour an approach to the teaching of writing in which writers are shown how to take on board the expectations and norms of the community to which they belong. (Dudley-Evans & St John, 2003, 117).

Dudley Evans and St John suggest several focus areas in the teaching of writing: linguistic and rhetorical awareness, genre features, extensive writing, peer review, and rewriting. (Dudley-Evans & St John, 2003, 119). The class viewed, *Writing Across Borders*, a film written and directed by Wayne Robertson (2005). The film contains interviews with both students and instructors discussing the challenges of writing in a second language. It focuses on linguistic and rhetorical awareness by comparing the style of writing in many different languages and the use of the correct register. We viewed the film over two class periods giving students ample time to discuss the conventions of writing in their own language(s) and English. Journals provided the students an opportunity to write extensively about their experiences of reading and writing and served as a place to interact with me on a more personal level. Students shared their work with each other in different pairs after each draft. Because the students were excited about their topics, they worked very hard to polish their writing and prepare for their oral presentations.

### **Oral Presentations/Guest Speakers**

Having an audience proved to be an incredible motivator for the students. From the research papers, they developed oral presentations that were so interesting that almost all of them went over time during the question/answer period. Because of the quality of the presentations, next semester, a group of these students will be guest speakers in content area classes. These students are prepared to present to disciplines such as, History, Political Science, Foreign Area Studies, and Foreign Languages. There has been a tremendous response from faculty. International students are an invaluable resource and can share an intimate perspective of their country as well as historical facts that may surprise many of our U.S. students. Some of the proposed topics for our student guest speakers are:

#### **1. The Soviet and Nazi Occupations of Lithuania**

This talk includes information about the deportations to Siberia and the experience of this cadet's family during these two occupations.

## **2. The Shia/Sunni Divide in Iraq**

After giving a brief history of the Shia and Sunni, and how their differences have affected the political and social situation in Iraq, this cadet explains how he has been affected in both his personal and professional life. Offered in both English and Arabic.

## **3. Nepotism and Political Dynasties in the Philippines**

In this co-presentation, cadets analyze the US occupation of the Philippines and the political situation that ensued highlighting not only the complexities of these issues, but also their consequences as witnessed in the recent electoral violence.

## **4. Machu Picchu in Peru**

The amazing architecture and history of the Inca are explored in this talk. Offered in both English and Spanish.

## **5. Governmental Corruption and Environmental Exploitation of the Rosia Montana Gold Corporation**

This controversial project is adamantly opposed by the majority of citizens in Romania. This is an in-depth look at the potential destruction of a city in Romania for monetary gain.

## **Conclusion**

The social constructivist approach to teaching the research paper validated the work of my students and allowed them to represent their country in a meaningful way to the larger community of the U.S. Air Force Academy. During the process, students augmented their cultural specific schemata, learned the conventions of academic writing and documenting resources, became familiar with the library resources, and most importantly discovered the social aspects of learning, which pushed them to achieve.

## **References**

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**Author Bio**

Constance A. Leonard teaches English for Academic Purposes, Reading Enhancement and Study Skills courses for international students at the U.S. Air Force Academy. She has held administrative and training positions for educational institutions in the fields of English language teaching, teacher training and development in the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Yemen, the United States, and Greece.