

**Report for PIG funds to help develop “The Global Politics of the War in Ukraine” Course  
Submitted by Professor Shampa Biswas, Department of Politics  
December 14th, 2022**

This fall, I taught a new special topics course titled “The Global Politics of the War in Ukraine.” As is the case with any course on a topical issue, not to mention one developed and taught during a war still with no end in sight, this was a challenging course to build and teach. As I had anticipated, it kept me agile and on my toes all semester. We tried to keep our focus on the global politics of war (which was the primary objective of the course) while keeping in mind the devastating human toll of the war.

This course was also experimental in that, as part of an effort to train my students to become public intellectuals/educators, I incorporated two projects with a public outreach scope. Both required developing certain skills of articulation and communication for which I sought assistance through a PIG grant.

***Podcast or Audio Essay:***

The first project was a group podcast on a topic related to the Ukraine War. Borrowing from a former colleague in my department, I decided to call this an “audio essay” rather than a podcast, to emphasize the research and writing that was to precede the actual recording and editing. Bryan Lubbers from WCTS initially joined the PIG grant proposal to help me develop this project and train students in the technical aspects of producing a podcast. I met with Bryan a couple of times during the summer to discuss the different elements of a quality podcast as well as to develop a plan (with specific assignments along the way) for the completion of the project. But sadly, Bryan took ill in early fall, and was unable to deliver fully on compiling the guidelines and resources we had agreed he would do. Bryan did meet with my class and trained one student group before his illness was diagnosed. I am thankful that Carlos Munoz from WCTS stepped into Bryan’s role at that point, and did so with much grace at short notice. Carlos had not been involved in conceptualizing the project, but we got up to speed quickly. He trained the remaining student groups and came to a session of my class where each group presented a draft of their audio essays, provided them feedback at that session, and then compiled another set of resources to help improve the quality of the recordings. I am impressed with how the audio essays are turning out, and with Carlos’ help, hope to be able to share them out with the larger Whitman community.

I had budgeted \$1,500 for Bryan Lubbers in my initial proposal. Perhaps that amount can be split between Bryan and Carlos?

***Op-Ed Project.*** The second project required each student to individually write an op-ed. Gillian Frew in the Communications department joined me to help develop and execute this project. The op-ed is a wonderful genre through which to communicate complex topics in a succinct and

accessible form, but requires a very particular set of writing and editorial skills. Gillian was amazing in helping me and the students develop these skills.

Gillian and I met over the summer to discuss the elements of a good op-ed and devised a plan on how to conceptualize and then develop a (publishable) op-ed through an iterative process. Gillian developed a concise set of guidelines, along with examples of excellent op-eds (including by young people). She and I co-led part of a class session early in the semester on the skills of op-ed writing. Gillian met one-on-one with each student to give them editorial guidance on a first draft of their op-ed, she and I met separately to discuss each first draft, we then co-led a class workshop on the second drafts of student op-eds, and have continued to communicate throughout the whole process about the possible placement of op-eds in a public forum. One student has already successfully published his op-ed, and one other op-ed appears to be of a quality comparable to op-eds in national newspapers (which, of course, still does not mean it will get published). The final versions of several other op-eds also seem quite excellent, and I hope we will be able to get those placed somewhere.

In all, I am quite pleased with how both projects turned out. Despite some challenges and disruptions with students getting adequate assistance on the podcasts, I think they did all learn both the requisite technical skills and the substantive research and communicative skills of audio articulation. I am blown away by the writing and editorial skills the students learned over the course of completing their op-ed projects, and feel quite confident in the final products. I, myself, learned a lot in this process. I thank the CTL for supporting my work in this class.