

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) SCIENTIFIC REPORT

This report is submitted for approval by the STSM applicant to the STSM coordinator

Action number: CA15221

STSM title: Exploring an effective Academic English writing model: teaching, learning and research oriented practices in Lithuania.

STSM start and end date: 28/08/2019 to 10/09/2019

Grantee name: Dr. Sonia Oliver del Olmo, Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), Spain.

PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

(max.200 words)

The purpose of the STSM was to identify the features and describe the strengths of a very effective L2 English Academic Writing teaching model from the perspectives of both learning and teaching which also integrates a research oriented approach. Vilnius University, established in Lithuania in 1579, is one of the oldest higher education institutions in Europe. The Department of English Philology at the Faculty of Philology has a rich history and a successful model of teaching Academic writing to non-native speakers of English. The STSM enabled me to research the features of the model, learning challenges and opportunities the acquired skills give to graduate and postgraduate students in their career track afterwards. A thorough study of this model (8 personal interviews, 82 student questionnaires and several research meetings) revealed an effective system of gradual development of academic writing skills in English L2. This STSM enabled us to identify the key informants in order to classify the elements that have typically led them to success, effectiveness and productivity. The creator of this academic writing teaching model, now a retired associate professor, was interviewed, as well as several teachers working in the programme. I have also interviewed current students and the graduates of the programme to inquire about the challenges and benefits they associate with the model.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

(max.500 words)

The Department of English Philology is the largest department at the Faculty and it is one of the top-rated departments of English in the country. With more than 20 members of academic staff (3 professors, 5 associate professors, 7 assistants, 4 lecturers), the Department's scholarship and teaching covers a wide range of subjects, including English, American and Canadian literature, English language and linguistics, British and American studies where they explore the history, geography, literature and culture of the English-speaking countries so the first thing that I did was to get familiar with the English Philology programme whose flexibility provides the opportunity for students to individualize their studies in a way that best suits their interests and abilities as it allows its students:

- 1) to specialise in different aspects of English linguistics, literature and culture;
- 2) to choose a minor study programme of a different field/ subject offered at Vilnius University;
- Or 3) to combine different courses of their main field and general university courses offered at Vilnius University.

I carefully studied all the subjects included in the program before my visit and during its first days (28th-30th August) Right after that, on Saturday 31st August I interviewed the creator of the program: the retired professor Laima Erika Katkuvienė, whose generous interview provided me with very insightful information on the novelty of the programme at its set up, the foreign influence and inspiration, the kind of text types that students produced according to their initial needs and her perceptions on the evolution of the model.

On Sunday 1st September I interviewed Dr Jolanta Sinkuniene, current Head of the Department and lecturer on academic writing who carefully explained the way she started teaching such a difficult subject, the main goals in the program, feedback procedures, methodological challenges, research oriented practices and the importance of having generic awareness in written production, among other key issues.

On Monday 2nd September I started interviewing lecturers specialising in both literature and linguistics and I ended up having an interview with the Dean (professor Inesa Seskauskiene). Thanks to their collaboration I could draw some conclusions on the effectiveness of the academic writing model in Vilnius University. During that week (2nd-6th September) I also designed and passed a questionnaire to 82 students from 2nd to 4th year to find out their main challenges on academic writing in English L2, the most useful genres, their most valued class methodology and feedback processes and how they could foresee the application of their academic writing skills in their future jobs. I also had an opportunity to interview three former students of English Philology studies (one now in the publishing industry, one in banking and the third one a current teacher of the department) and all their comments gave me a clearer picture of the success of this programme.

On Friday 6th September I was invited to attend a research meeting at the Lithuanian RESEARCH COUNCIL, where Dr. Jolanta Sinkuniene presented the most salient benefits of COST ACTIONS, namely Training Schools, Conferences and STSMS and I could briefly participate in it by explaining the goals of my STSM and its potential contribution to foster future interuniversity research projects within Humanities and Education fields and enhance joint academic papers publication in reputed journals.

On Monday 9th September I attended a Research meeting at the department, in which an invited professor from the University of Jaume I Castelló (Spain) Professor Inmaculada Fortanet and a colleague from the UAB, among other staff members, discussed issues on English Philology Studies from cross-cultural and cross-linguistic perspectives. To end up my stay, I also attended Dr. Fortanet's lecture on Multimodal Discourse Analysis. This scholar is particularly interested in searching ways of cooperation through collaborative online writing programmes at international level.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

(max.500 words)

Following the English Philology programme presentation in its official website: <https://www.vu.lt/en/studies/bachelor-studies/51-aboutus/6420-english-philology> it is committed to teaching comprehensive research skills; individualized instruction and feedback and it is a student-centred programme which fosters their learning motivation, develops competencies necessary for the student in order to meet the needs of social and personal development, and local and global labour market.

The programme* also helps students to acquire competences compatible with their bachelor's degree and to prepared for further studies or work in a certain area. The results of my STSM prove that the academic writing component in the BA programme of English Philology is one of the factors contributing to the success of the programme. Different interviews with key informants (five former and current lecturers as well as three former students) reveal the following items as crucial for the success of the academic writing model in Vilnius University:

- a) Senior colleagues willing to help new lecturers in the Department of English Philology.
- b) Collaboration among staff members dealing with the academic writing component (sharing ideas, materials and good practices)
- c) Gradual development of academic writing skills both horizontally and vertically (growing complexity of the tasks from 1st-4th year of English Philology BA Degree)
- d) Clear assessment criteria.
- e) Peer review practices in class.
- f) Individual tutorials with the teacher.
- g) Developing genre awareness through steady assignments: emphasizing text structure.

* I strongly recommend to read: "*Towards the history of English Studies in Lithuania*" (Grigaliūnienė, 2008). KALBOTYRA journal, issue 59 (3) pages 98-108. This article gives an overview of several periods in the development of English Studies in Lithuania from its establishment as an independent academic discipline in 1923 until 2008.

h) Awareness of the cross-cultural differences between the Anglo-American academic writing model and the Lithuanian writing style (with implications in terms of methodological approaches, course design, tasks, etc.)

i) Encouraging students to think: “Thinking is writing and writing is thinking”, which helps them while carrying out their research oriented practices (BA paper, MA Thesis or even PhD dissertation)

j) Developing content and argumentation techniques (which students will use later on in their professional careers)

k) Having suitable materials: Oshima and Hogue (2006) *Writing Academic English*, Pearson Longman and creating own materials: Laima Erika Katkuvienė and Inesa Seskauskienė *Research Matters* (2006) Vilnius Universitetas to back up the programme (at the initial stages of the model development.)

l) and last but not least, having a small class size (between 10-15 students per class), which favours interaction in the classroom and more individual attention to monitor students' progress.

As to students' answers in their questionnaires (N=82) I could see the difference between challenges 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students face in their writing. In other words, in the second year their main concern is content development and structure and organization of the text, in the third year their challenge is style and conventions and language use and in the 4th year content development is crucial again. However, most of them rate their *term/BA paper* as the most useful genre in their Academic Writing course in all the years and *paragraphs* and *literature reviews* are assigned a second and third position. All students state that it is best to have individual tutorials with their teachers as it is undoubtedly their preferred way to obtain feedback from their lecturers. Most of them enjoy group discussions in class but not many appreciate feedback in a written form (although it takes a lot of time for teachers).

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

Several years ago we established a bilateral agreement of collaboration between my Institution: Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) and Vilnius University and thanks to ERASMUS+ staff mobility programme I have had the opportunity to visit the English Philology Department and collaborate with Dr. Jolanta Sinkuniene in common research interests. I have also invited Dr. Sinkuniene and other colleagues from the Literature field to visit us in the UAB and teach in our Advanced English Studies Masters Programme.

I have always enjoyed seeing the way academic writing was structured and taught in Vilnius and, therefore, I applied for this STSM to have the chance to study the programme in full detail, interview the actual lecturers and get an inside picture from students as well. I am very grateful for their generosity, openness, time and collaboration all the time as I think with the information I gathered I can implement some methodological changes in our programme back home in Barcelona.

Being also non-native speakers of English most of our students face similar challenges and, thus, it is very interesting to share ideas and I am very positive that this exchange of knowledge and experience will have sound academic and scientific outcomes, such as the design of future common research projects and joint papers published in reputed journals. As a matter of fact, once back in the UAB (12th September 2019) I passed the same questionnaire to my students of 3rd year of English Philology in our compulsory subject *Advanced Writing* and I am planning to compare the data and carry out a more empirical study of the results obtained both in Vilnius and Barcelona having a future more standardized model of academic writing in mind.

The results of this STSM could also act as guidelines for other programmes teaching English as L2 wishing to improve / change their models of academic writing teaching.

APPENDIX 1: semi-structured interview (former and current Lecturers) Vilnius

FIRST OF ALL, LET ME THANK YOU FOR ACCEPTING AN INTERVIEW WITH ME FOR THIS SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM), TAKING PLACE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH PHILOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF VILNIUS (28/08-2019-10/09/2019)

This STSM grant lies within the COST Action CA15221 framework and I have titled it: ***“Exploring an effective Academic English writing model: teaching, learning and research oriented practices in Lithuania”***

The purpose of the STSM is to identify the features and describe the strengths of a very effective L2 English Academic Writing teaching model as the one implemented in your BA and MA programmes. In other words, studying the *Academic Writing* component from the perspectives of both learning and teaching, which also integrates a research oriented approach.

Before we start with the interview...tell me please a little bit about yourself: How long have you taught in the program? What is your background? What is your Major?, etc.

- 1) What were the main challenges when you approached the *Academic Writing* subject for the first time?
- 2) What were the most useful materials that you used at the beginning and did you develop any specific extra material for your courses?
- 3) How do you see the *Academic Writing* component in the BA program of English Philology in your University?
- 4) What do you think are the most challenging aspects of *Academic Writing* for students?
- 5) How do you assess student's progress in *Academic Writing*?
- 6) What type of feedback and how do you give it to students?
- 7) What do you foresee as the practical application of the *Academic Writing* components in your students' future job?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION AND INTEREST IN THIS RESEARCH

Dr. Sonia Oliver del Olmo
Autonomous University of Barcelona (Department of English and German Philology)

APPENDIX 2: Student's questionnaire (2nd- 4th year) English Philology BA Degree

STUDENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

2019-2020

YEAR:

1) When you write in English which is the most difficult part for you? You can tick several boxes.

- content development
- structure and organization
- style and conventions
- Language use
- other (please specify)

2) Which are the most useful genres in your Academic Writing courses? You can tick several boxes.

- paragraph
- essay
- report
- literature review
- term/BA paper
- other

Could you please briefly state why:

3) What do you think are the most effective methods (i.e. free writing, brainstorming) to learn Academic Writing?

4) Which would you consider was the best way to get feedback from your teacher? You can tick several boxes. And please briefly explain why?

- in written form
- during individual tutorials
- group discussion in class
- other

5) What worked best for you in your in your academic writing classes?

6) Do you think your academic writing skills could be applied in your future job? If yes, how?

7) Feel free to add any extra comment or observation about your Academic Writing learning.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION AND INTEREST IN THIS RESEARCH

Dr. Sonia Oliver del Olmo
Autonomous University of Barcelona (Department of English and German Philology)