Preparing for Graduate Success: Language, Culture, and Community at U-M

Summer 2021

Congratulations on your admission to a graduate program at the University of Michigan, one of the world’s premier public institutions of higher learning. This online course prepares you to succeed in your U-M graduate studies by inviting you to explore how you wish to engage with academic language conventions of graduate study and research in the U.S. as well as campus culture both in and outside the physical and virtual classroom. You will identify U-M resources that support international graduate students and establish an early network of friends. Every step of the way, you will learn specific language skills to achieve your academic, scholarly, and professional goals. We'll also explore some of the impacts of recent Covid-19 "social distancing" and "distant socializing" on our campus community, and communication strategies for skillfully participating in graduate courses online or partially online.

In this highly interactive four-week course, you will respond to brief articles, watch short videos, and participate in engaging discussions that will familiarize you with a range of features of graduate life and academics at this large research university. You will have many opportunities to hone and refine your language skills through practice assignments and through interactions with each other. You will receive individualized feedback from your instructor, Pamela Bogart.

Objectives

By completing the course, you should enhance your ability to

- Express the identity you wish to project in various English language contexts
- Initiate social conversations in English to meet new friends and colleagues
- Formulate an engaging “elevator pitch” about your graduate studies, in order to network with others before and after arrival on campus
- Use English effectively to negotiate roles and express opinions, e.g. to determine responsibilities and collaborate successfully in a group assignment
- Identify how to use online resources to improve your academic writing
- Navigate the process of attribution and citation in your academic discipline
- Participate in campus conversations and change efforts regarding diversity, identity, power, and community

Your Instructor

Pamela Bogart, Lecturer IV, English Language Institute

You can send me messages within the Canvas Inbox (Canvas dashboard) or email (pbogart@umich.edu) anytime during the online course, and I look forward to meeting you in person after you arrive in Ann Arbor.
Community Commitments for Inclusive Participation

How can we create an online community together for this course that is caring, inclusive of everyone in the course, intellectually challenging, and boosts everyone’s confidence in using English in graduate school?

We are soon going to be posting a video self-intro so that we can get started speaking in English together right away. Sharing a video with strangers, however, can feel kind of stressful. Thus, before we begin to post videos, we want to foster an inclusive, respectful community.

Here is a starting set of guidelines for our ongoing dialogue together. We will allow these guidelines to evolve as we discuss them and build a dynamic, inclusive learning community together. This Syllabus will be updated accordingly in the first couple weeks of our course.

1. **Privacy** We will not share any information about anyone else in the class or anything they post, electronically or otherwise. We'll all be submitting informal audio/video recordings, and these should never be re-posted anywhere else.

2. **Learning from one another** We will listen to each other and respond to each other, not just look for opportunities to make our own points. We realize that the differences among us in backgrounds, skills, interests, and values will increase our awareness and understanding. Part of making learning from one another possible is offering productive feedback to classmates to the best of our abilities.

3. **Valuing one another’s perspectives** We will not demean, devalue, or "put down" people for their experiences, lack of experiences or difference in interpretation of those experiences. In other words, always respect classmates (which is true for 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7 too).

4. **Challenge ideas, not people** If we wish to challenge or disagree with something that has been said (or written), we will be careful to talk about the idea, not the individual person sharing this idea.

5. **Balance participation** Be mindful of taking up much more space than others. Empower yourself to contribute when others are dominating the conversation or group effort.

6. **Read/listen before posting to discussions** By reading and listening what's already been posted before joining online discussions, frame your contribution as deepening or broadening the conversation, not just repeating what has been said. This approach will make discussions both more efficient and more productive.

7. **Be sensitive to diverse beliefs and identities** Topics involving beliefs or identity such as religion, sexual orientation, nationality, or political views should be discussed with extra care to express respect and empathy, as such topics may trigger conflict. It will be important to use guidelines 2, 3, and 6 to interact thoughtfully with one another. From a 2020 student: if politics come up, let's remain rational in our responses to one another.

*Guidelines adapted for this course from "Guidelines for Dialogue," The Program on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan, 2016 and revised with input from prior PGS classes.*

Technical requirements to take this course online

The course is set up in Canvas, available to U-M students at umich.instructure.com. This is the course platform you will also use in your Fall classes across the university. You will need:

- an internet-capable device that can play video, record voice and video, and upload video files to the course website (You won't be required to participate live on video, but you may optionally join PGS community gatherings via Zoom.)
- for some activities, a laptop or desktop computer may work much better than a phone or tablet
- access to a means to use your U-M email and login (which may require use of the free U-M MLane or a VPN, depending on where you're taking the course, because U-M email (@umich.edu) is on
the Google email platform)

Grading

There are 2,850 possible points in the course. You can choose to focus your attention broadly across the course, or to focus on segments of particular interest to you. Earning at least 80% of this point total constitutes "Completion" of the course. This low-risk, try anything, skip anything approach is described in [this paper from the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) at U-M](https://crlt.coe.umich.edu/papers/). This is not a credit-bearing course, so there is no passing or failing or letter grade. Instead, the course is graded on degrees of completion.

Course activities include:

- Discussion forums
- Language activities, including interactive video
- Peer feedback assignments
- Group project (opt-in or opt-out)
- Elevator pitch planning activities, first draft, revised draft, and final video

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Plan on setting aside 3-4 hours each week to explore life and communication in graduate school together. I look forward to meeting you and working with you as you discover the keys to graduate success at the University of Michigan!

Accommodations & Religious/Cultural Holidays

If there is anything you’d like me to know about how you learn best and any accommodations that would support your best learning, please contact me via email or Canvas messaging. If you have a disability or learning difference that we can accommodate, I am eager to do so.

Of course I will maintain the confidentiality of any information you share with me.

I encourage you to celebrate religious or cultural holidays that are important to you. Please inform me in advance, in writing, as to how a given holiday will affect your participation schedule, so that we can make advance alternate plans together.

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing

University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. It is important to know that after you arrive on campus, if you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help after you arrive on campus, contact [Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)](https://caps.umich.edu/) at (734) 764-8312 and [https://caps.umich.edu/](https://caps.umich.edu/) during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or through its counselors physically located in schools on both North and Central Campus. You may also consult [University Health Service (UHS)](https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs) at (734) 764-8320 and [https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs](https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs), or for alcohol or drug concerns, see [www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources](https://www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources).
For a listing of other mental health resources available on and off campus, visit: [http://umich.edu/~mhealth/](http://umich.edu/~mhealth/).

**Canvas help**

**Link to Canvas support for students**

**Questions and feedback**

Send me feedback and questions any time, or post questions in our community conversation space on the Yellowdig platform.

**Classroom research**

I am working on a research project that seeks to investigate how to best support graduate student learning in an online environment. I plan to use this research to help me better teach this course and other courses I teach online.

In this class, we will have the opportunity to do a wide variety of activities, including but not limited to discussions, video and audio recordings, games, quizzes, investigations, reading analyses, exploration of resource apps and websites, brief written assignments, reading one another’s writing and watching one another’s videos, and reflecting on our learning. These are all activities that I would normally offer while teaching this course, regardless of my research. I plan to analyze your work in these exercises for my research project. Of course, however, you can opt out of inclusion in my analysis of any part of your work for any reason at any time. There will be no effect on your grades in this course of any decisions you make about participating or opting out. In other words, participation in this research project is entirely voluntary, and there is neither any bonus for permitting me to include your coursework in the research project nor any penalty for not participating in the research project, in part or in full.

In any presentation of this research, I will not include your name or any identifying details. If I plan to quote extensively (i.e. more than one sentence or an anonymized image of your work), I will follow up with an email in advance to check whether this is acceptable to you. Please contact me (pbogart@umich.edu) if you have any questions or concerns about this research, or to opt out in part or in full at any time.

**Course Outline**

**Welcome to Preparing for Graduate Success: Language, Culture, & Community at U-M**

Become familiar with the course & one another. Completing this welcome module unlocks Modules 1-4 below.

**Week 1. The Culture(s) of Graduate Education in the United States**

Explore the graduate school context in the U.S. and practice language skills for presenting yourself professionally and effectively as a new graduate student.

**Week 2. In the Classroom—English for Interactive Learning and Teamwork**

Jump into the collaborative mode of many graduate disciplines today, examining the impact of diverse experiences in productive collaboration and learning language to negotiate the role(s) you will take on.

**Week 3. In Academia—English for Research & Scholarship**
Identify ways to fully participate in the scholarship of your discipline in writing and speaking, understand how research in your field incorporates published scholarly writing, and enhance language you can use to bring your own expertise to the table.

**Week 4. Beyond the Classroom—English in Campus Life**

Connect with the hundreds of ways to build social and professional networks on campus, further explore campus discussions of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and put the finishing touches on a professional self-introduction you can use dozens of times during your first few weeks on campus.