

## **FWI Funding Statement**

Name: Peter Self, Andrea Cole (School of Graduate Studies)

Collaborators: Paul Leegsma (English Solutions Education Services (ESES), Ines Rios (Immigrant's Working Centre)Faculty/Area: School of Graduate Studies

Project title: Community Connects – University Workplace English

### **Please summarize how the FWI funds have been spent:**

**\*\*This Project received FWI endorsement, such that actual funds were provided by the School of Graduate Studies.**

**Salaries: \$4068 (delivery of 2 ESL course modules (30 classroom hours/module @ \$2034 per module)**

**Equipment: None**

**Event Costs: \$370 (Course completion celebration)**

**Travel: N/A**

**Other (please specify): Remuneration for Immigrant's Working Centre (IWC) \$500**

**In-kind Contributions: Approx. 30hrs from SGS staff.**

**Total Costs: \$4938**

### **Please submit separately a maximum 3-page summary of the results of the project with particular attention to the following details:**

#### **1. How did the initiative foster collaboration and interdisciplinarity?**

Community Connects fostered collaboration between the university and a local non-profit agency (Immigrant's Working Centre). The goal was to enhance English language skills and professional networking support for community and university-based students. To this end, it was a successful collaboration. It also created the opportunity for undergraduate students and community-based volunteers to interact with each other and English-language learners. Students in the classroom came from various faculties, academic, and professional backgrounds. This fostered interdisciplinarity as students got to know of each other outside of the conventional learning environment.

#### **2. How did the initiative demonstrate innovation and risk-taking?**

We wanted to involve degree-holding Hamilton newcomers (immigrants and refugees) in the program who are not formally associated with McMaster and who did not complete their degrees here. The intent was for students to learn advanced English language in a setting where resources would be shared between two organizations towards mutually beneficial goals. It is still rather unorthodox for the university to look outside of its own capacity for experts and knowledge holders. In this case, the initiative could be considered risk-taking. It is an innovative approach to talent recruitment, with the potential for future students, staff, and faculty to access the university through this channel.

#### **3. How did the initiative enhance McMaster's position as a research-focused student-centred institution?**

Student-centred because we were acting with the premise that English proficiency tests yield varied results when it comes to actual, applied English proficiency. When students struggle with academic English, it sets back their progress as students and the quality of results they can

produce as researchers also suffers. We accept this as a reality, and therefore this initiative enhances McMaster's position on both aspects: research-focused and student-centred.

**4. How did the initiative encourage collaboration between faculty members and students?**

Faculty members were not directly involved in this collaboration. However we believe the impact of this project - improved English communication skills for the student and postdoc participants - will improve student-faculty member communications as a by-product (ie., enhanced written and verbal communication as well as comprehension between graduate students, postdocs, and their supervisors).

**5. What were the outcomes of the project? How was success measured and demonstrated?**

15 English Language Learners attended a two-module pilot designed to improve their academic English skills. Each pilot was of five weeks duration, for a total of 30 classroom hours. 5 of the students were local Hamilton residents not formally affiliated with McMaster, but with advanced degrees from outside Canada. The remaining students were current McMaster grad students, visiting students, or postdoctoral fellows who were also English Language Learners. Up to 5 volunteers (a mix of undergraduate and community-based volunteers) were integrated into the classroom to help with one-on-one work and pronunciation. A relationship was forged between McMaster School of Graduate Studies and the Immigrants Working Centre that did not exist before.

Success was measured through an evaluation tool (questionnaire and facilitated group feedback activity) administered at the end of the pilot. Students rated highly (eightieth percentile) across the following dimensions:

- ✓ Community connects helped me to facilitate academic networking opportunities (more so than career networking opportunities)
- ✓ A community bond amongst the students
- ✓ Increased orientation to university life in Canada
- ✓ Attending classes at the university campus was enjoyable (more favourable than attending at IWC)
- ✓ Highly ranked abilities in: Presentations, conversation or discussions (specifically, confidence and cultural awareness in)
- ✓ Understanding of the university environment in Canada
- ✓ Overall increased English ability
- ✓ Opportunity to socialize with academics
- ✓ Knowledge of community service

**6. How will the impact of the project be sustained now that the initial funding has been exhausted?**

Because of the value demonstrated through the FWI pilot, the School of Graduate Studies has been able to reserve a small number of seats on an ongoing basis (in the non-pilot stream) for community-based students so that they can continue to learn with and contribute to the class.

The financial and project reports can be submitted to [fwi@mcmaster.ca](mailto:fwi@mcmaster.ca)