Scientific writing and communication – 2 credits

Course Number: 224.4035

Lecturers: Dr. Beverly Goodman-Tchernov and Prof. Michael Krom

Course Type: Lectures/Student presentations

Course Level: MSc/ PhD

Prerequisites: No

Course Description:

Writing and communicating your work is a central aspect of academic life. This course covers the general subject of academic study dissemination and guides the class participants through a series of writing and communication activities that will provide the opportunity to develop useful and necessary skills including how to write a formal abstract, prepare and present posters, conference talks, speed talks, understanding the peer-review process, academic papers, and writing proposals.

The course will be held on Zoom with the exception of a handful of dates where frontal presentations will require the students' attendance (the students with hybrid/exception needs, need to discuss them with their TA). The lessons will be a mixture of lectures and student presentations. A working camera with an open camera setting is required for all classes. Cameras are required for certain activities. It makes it easier for the lecturer to feel engaged with the students as the audience rather than speaking to themselves. Announcements and assignments will be posted on Moodle. Weekly lectures will be recorded and made available after each lecture on Moodle. Whenever possible, lectures will be posted in advance. Any recordings of student presentations will be limited access, and removed from the platform after the activities unless approved by the student.

At the end of the course, there will be a full-day Conference during which the students will present their proposal plans (for those at the proposal stage). The event is open to supervisors (their attendance is highly encouraged and expected) and anyone else the students would like to invite. Details regarding those activities will be expanded upon in class and specific instructions as that phase is approached in the course.

Homework Assignments:

Each of the students will be assigned to a teaching assistant ('TA') group. A TA is a student's resource for questions and general issues that might arise. All of the TAs are PhD students who have already published in academic journals, presented at conferences, and are selected for their experience and ability to provide good feedback and guidance. The course's students should contact them first for any questions and/or issues. The announcements will be broadcasted via Moodle when information or issues are raised that are useful for everyone.

Sunday morning writing 'café':

Sometimes writing needs a time and a place. During the hour before every class, there is an informal writing session. During this time, the room ('café') will be open for customers. Do you have a special request for something that you want to better understand? Do commas make you crazy? Are the differences between British, American, and Canadian English causing you issues? Does that last sentence not make any sense to you? You can use this opportunity for dedicating time to working on your writing, or getting specific tips on a range of practical writing tools. During some weeks there may be an additional breakout room used to give additional information to students from specific departments, such as instructions on proposal formats or other department-specific issues, but the main 'café' room will always remain available for everyone.

Homework Assignments:

Because the course is about writing and communicating, it is important that the students get practical experience, so it may seem like there are a lot of assignments. However, all of the assignments are designed to be about EACH STUDENT'S work, and therefore it all builds upon itself to help the students' progress with the work the students are already required to gain competency in, and in most cases, the course should nicely parallel the students' stage of work in their studies. The final assignment is a proposal based on a student's department's format. For those of the students who are past the proposal submission phase (either phase B of the degree or waiting for approval), there will be an alternative assignment (grant proposal assignment or alternate).

All homework must be submitted through Moodle in WORD format - this is important so that any corrections or remarks can be made through the track changes feature. The lecturers realize that some students work using other programs such as Overleaf, but the lecturers ask that it be converted to Word for ease of responding since not all of the course staff are Overleaf users. All students should have access to Word through the 365office feature.

Review 'buddies': The lecturers encourage finding someone in the course to trade assignments with to do 'pre-reviews' before submitting. It is very hard for the students to see their own mistakes, even if they know the correct way to write. Editing other writing is a way to improve a student's own writing skills, and in exchange, a student will get their own work polished. During the course, the lecturers may announce extra credit for some assignments for those who do this, and there will be one assignment in which reviewing a classmate's work will be a requirement, so it is suggested to tag a buddy early.

Grading:

1. Assignment #1: Introductory Essay: Part I: Biography, Part II: Science (5%).
2. Assignment #2: Referencing assignment (10%).
3. Assignment #3 Poster (15%).
4. Assignment #4: Speed Talk about Poster (10%).
5. Assignment #5: Outline and approval from TA and Supervisor for proposal (5%).

6. Assignment #6: Abstracts for conference (10%).
7. Assignment #7: Conference Talk (15%).
8. Assignment #8: Final Proposal/Final Work submission: (20%).
9. Participation: 10% (5% registration and attendance at 3min workshop, 5% registration and attendance at the final conference).