Some Notes on Grantspersonship

David L Clark
Department of English & Cultural Studies
McMaster University

Why (not) apply for research grants?

Many graduate students are quite understandably intimidated by the grant application process, and consequently find the prospect and labour of completing the associated forms extremely difficult. For what it might be worth, I dare say your instructors sometimes feel the same anxieties and discomfort about grant applications, this, even though securing "external" funding—i.e., support for research from granting bodies outside the university—is often a central part of being in the profession. It makes a certain sense that you might be experiencing these difficulties. After all, grant application forms, an exemplary instance of what Foucault calls "the intersection of power and knowledge," are partly designed to produce this effect, that is, to cause applicants to self-select themselves out of the competition. The first step, then, is to work with and—in so far as this is possible—*through* this aversion. It might help to know that students in this department have in the past consistently done extremely well in terms of winning outside grants, *well* ahead of many other departments in most university faculties in terms of "percentage wins" and in absolute numbers of successful applicants. The secret? First, motivated and intelligent students, students who have worked hard to get to the place where they currently are and who deserve a chance at securing a grant in support of their future work. Second, getting a handle on the strategies behind a good grant applications, or what I am calling here *grantspersonship*.[1]

Why listen to me? I've had the good fortune of assessing thousands of grant applications from a wide range of fields over the years, and in various capacities: for example, as a graduate supervisor, as a member of the Graduate Studies Committee, and as a member of the School of Graduate Studies Scholarships Committee. I founded the grantspersonship seminars in my own department soon after my arrival at McMaster in the late 1980s, and I have given versions of those seminars on many occasions over the years. Almost all graduate students with whom I have had the pleasure of working as a supervisor have held external awards. All doctoral students who have completed PhD's with me have held SSHRC funding, and most of those went on to hold SSHRC post-doctoral fellowships. I am happy to bring some of that accumulated expertise to you here. But I'm going to be frank and to the point.

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[1] A document like this one runs the risk of making the grant application process seem repellently or self-servingly mechanical (and so collaborating with the worst meanings of "professionalization," a case in point, in other words, of the complete instrumentalizing "rationalization" of knowledge, the production and legitimization of privileged forms of cultural capital, and so forth). It is an interesting and pressing question, and I would venture here to say that in the postmodern university there will never be any way to avoid the hazard I have evoked here absolutely. Yet among the reasons for preparing a text like this is not only to attempt to provide some hands-on advice, but also, more generally, two interrelated things: i) to encourage reflection upon what it means now to be a researcher in the humanities, and ii) to try quickly to locate the grant application process within a larger scholarly and institutional context (especially as that context is connected to the question of research *ethics*), a context without which being said researcher, it seems to me, would make any sense at all.

To begin, let's ask the obvious question: why are these grant application forms so taxing, even before one has actually begun to prepare them? There are probably many different answers to this question. The rewards may seem distant or unlikely. Grant applications involve writing a specialized kind of academic discourse with which you may initially have little or no familiarity. The very structure of the form is alienating. In the case of SSHRC, the form is designed for graduate research in the social sciences rather than the humanities. To a certain extent, you are being compelled to contort your project so that it conforms to the knowledges, disciplines, methodologies, protocols, worries, and fascinations of the social sciences. (It is no wonder that a certain element of humanities scholarship is increasingly modelling itself on the positivisms of the social sciences. Unsure or unconvinced of its own legitimacy, the humanities anxiously seeks it elsewhere.) Moreover, grant applications compel you to look into an otherwise unclear or unformed intellectual and professional future, and to construct yourself on paper as a thinker you may not yet quite be or believe you could ever be--someone who has an uncannily clear view of the work to come, someone who is confident, disciplined, and focussed. Grant applications compel us to think about what we have done and what we still need to do, not necessarily an easy task under any circumstance. They involve going out to ask for references, and thus of discussing, sometimes with relative strangers, what kind of student you are and want to be. Grant applications mean subjection to the process of peer review, circulating your work among academics first in your own community but then among readers outside of your own department and university. And finally, putting together a grant application can be extremely labour-intensive at precisely the moment when the demands on your time are already very high.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, however, winning external grants remains enormously important and should be pursued vigorously and rigorously by any student who is seriously committed to conducting research work. Strictly speaking, it is hard for me to imagine anyone in a graduate programme as good as ours who was not so committed. The benefits? Beyond the obvious benefits of having the cash-money, winning an award during your graduate studies is important for several reasons:

i) The process of writing project proposals can itself be tremendously clarifying for your own thinking and work, and can represent a kind of entry-point into the project as such.

ii) Holding an external award during your graduate studies is a significant indication that your proposed research direction has been highly regarded not or not only by a single professor, but also by your department, your university, and by an outside academic body whose task it is impartially to assess the merits of your work.

iii) Winning grants is important for future grant and academic job applications--i.e., successful grant applicants tend strongly to go on to win other grants and have a distinct advantage in being interviewed for positions at universities. (For example, I have never met anyone who has held a SSHRCC post-doctoral fellowship who did not also at some point hold a SSHRCC doctoral fellowship. Almost all the Canadian applicants who I have known who have been short-listed for academic jobs in Canada have held both kinds of grants.)

iv) Learning how to make grant proposals is a skill that remains useful, not least because a significant portion of one's professional career is taken up with more grant applications (and analogous documents) and with assessing the merits of the applications of others.

There are four things specifically to consider here: 1) The Proposal; 2) Letters of Reference; and 3) Publications and

Presentations 4) Grades and Coursework Performance.

1) The Project Proposal

This part of the application needs to be taken very, very seriously, and it is the part that should take up the greatest part of your efforts. Don't forget that the SSHRCC or OGS assessment committees are not the only bodies that will examine your application carefully: the members of the Graduate Studies Committee and then the School of Graduate Studies Scholarships Committee will be pouring over your application, and both groups will *rank* your application according to its merits--*this*, before it has even got to Ottawa or Toronto. The University Scholarships Committee is made up of faculty members from a wide range of fields in the humanities and the social sciences, everything from Business to Sociology to English & Cultural Studies. Be acutely cognizant of your readerships at every step of the process of crafting your proposal. You are taking an opportunity here to make a good impression on the faculty of your own university, as well as seeking legitimization for your work outside your university. --Pretty daunting work, to be sure; but also a splendid chance to begin to fashion a critical voice that you can call your own, and to locate yourself within an academic community of fellow active researchers. Under no circumstances should you submit a grant application that isn't polished and complete. Anything less looks awful, just awful. It makes you appear careless about your own work and careless of other people's time and effort. --Much better *not* to apply than submit an unformed, hastily assembled, or unconvincing grant application.

In general, grant applications and project proposals are written in a certain kind of discourse, with their own conventions and rhetorical strategies. Project proposal lengths vary considerably, and this variation needs to be taken into account. If you are working with me, give yourself plenty of time. You'll need to circulate *many* drafts of your project proposal with me, giving me time to make suggestions and point to ways in which you can strengthen the document, and giving yourself time to incorporate those changes. Don't be surprised if your proposal goes through upwards of a dozen separate complete drafts. Be prepared to work very hard and with a consistently positive outlook. Pointed and sustained critique of your drafts is not a criticism of you. Keep your eyes firmly on the objective, which is to persuade faculty members at McMaster as well as the relevant granting agency of the originality and importance of your project. Put together a grant application that you can be proud of and that I am delighted to recommend to my colleagues and to the granting agency.

Let me quickly outline the following questions that need attention in your proposal:

i) *The field as it currently exists, and what is original and necessary about your own project*: Indicate briefly what the present state of the field is, but use this signal as a way to indicate how and why *your* project is original and necessary. The key here is to be brief, but pointed and specific. Avoid sharply negative criticism of existing positions, instead arguing positively: i.e., the work of others has "laid the ground for your own work," or "made legible problems that need to be pursued," not that existing or previous are foolish or inadequate (even if they in fact sometimes are). Better: try something like this: "Current discussions of the question of animality in the work of Emmanuel Levinas emphasize.....My project, on the other hand, turns to....." This kind of gesture in the proposal indicates to your readers that you are willing and able to master a certain critical context, a context that then forms the dialectical ground for bringing out the newness and pertinence of your own project.

ii) *Project specificity and detail*: Your proposal should be as specific and as detailed as you can make it. (This, even if you don't know for sure that this is the direction your work will be actually be taking at this point; part of writing a proposal is *conjuring* a

project's focus, and convincing others that you have it in you to *imagine* a distinct and executable research project. Like many tests, this is a test to see how well you do the test. It is a test to see if you are able to propose a new line of research and to convey its elements convincingly to other.) Thus, for example, rather than saying that you are going to write about the construction of the feminine subject in Charles Dickens, say *which* texts of Dickens; indicate *why* these texts, what it is about *these* texts in particular that raise questions and problems that are germane to your project, what you mean by "the feminine subject," etc.. Here you want to be using expressions like, "For example, *Bleak House*....", i.e., making moves that suddenly concretize your argument, moving it from general claims to specific texts. (This movement from the general to the specific is a central feature of the dialectic of good grant applications.) Moves like this suggest that you are already in a position to think about specifics (even if the project itself ends up going in somewhat different directions). So, what you want to be doing with these details is to *concretize* your project: indicate that you have in mind *quite specific* questions about certain named texts, archives, or cultural locations. Somewhere in the proposal, provide a provocative, catchy, but informative title for your project (in italics): use this as another way of focussing the project, giving it a certain level of detail. Find and use every way that you can to capture the essence of your project, what quickens it, what shapes it, what makes it tick, what makes it important.

iii) *Doability*: Make sure that your project looks and sounds *doable*: hence the need to narrow the focus and breadth of the project to one that could reasonably be completed within the tenure of the award.

iv) *Structure of Project*: Indicate something of the structure of the project: i.e. how it is that you intend on unfolding the argument. This can be done, for example, by saying something like: "my project falls naturally into three movements"; or, more coarsely, "In Chapter 1, I will..." But the structure should make sense, i.e., it should make legible why the project is unfolded the way that it is, how the problems and questions that you are exploring *call* for this particular kind of organization. A chapter breakdown is great....but really the point here is quickly 6o map out the elemental movements of the thesis, so it doesn't literally need to be in chapters (although that always does make the proposal look and feel very purposive, confident, sure-footed). What's important here is to make it clear *why* the project demands the structure that you say it has, i.e., that the divisions don't come across as arbitrary or merely cumulative, but instead express and obey a logic inherent to the project, i.e., driven by the particular thesis/problem/question that you have laid out as the raison d'etre for the whole thing.

v) *Theoretical framework and methodology*: Articulate a theoretical or methodological framework for the project: be careful here not to substitute *names* or lists of names for relevant theoretical positions, methodologies, or principles: So, *not* "I will use Foucault, Lacan, and Kristeva..." (names that will be meaningless, in any case, to most of your external assessors), but something more precise and detailed. In other words, no name dropping: don't throw around names unless you can say something particular about why the work represented by those names is important and relevant to your project. Describe what it is specifically, for example, in Kristeva's work that is crucial to your project. Then quickly link that to the texts your thesis is addressing. Thus: "From the perspective afforded by Kristeva's notion of psychological abjection, Anna Barbauld's poems about so-called `women's work' are important for three reasons. First,..."

vi) *The "voice" of your proposal*: Write in a brisk, efficient, style that conveys a sense that you are *engaged* with the material, that it interests and excites you. The project *should* quicken your interests, after all, so try to let that liveliness, that sense of intellectual investigation and fascination come through wherever possible. Avoid over-specialized theoretical terms, and where you absolutely must use them (as in the case of the term "abjection"), make sure you indicate what they mean (remember that

most of your external assessors will be from outside of the field, some of them *way* outside). You can in some cases do this very quickly, in a relative clause, for example: So: "the *abject*, by which I mean, after Kristeva,....." Start the proposal sharply, jumping right into it: "don't bury the lead," as journalists say. Leave the more mechanical work of the proposal (who will supervise, the institutional background for your project, where you are in the program) until last. Be scrupulously careful not to hold the project away from yourself by talking in abstractions or round-about ways. Do not hide behind your language. If you are yourself unclear about some of the project's elements, do not let this come out in the proposal. It's important to come across as curious about the outcomes of your research but also sure-footed and confident in your direction and intention. Do not hide behind baffling turns of phrase, obscure terms, incomplete or unformed ideas and concepts. Use active not passive constructions. Don't hesitate to use an interrogative somewhere, especially when you are describing what sorts of questions motivate your project or what questions--as yet unanswered, but about to be answered by you--spring from the project at hand. You get to pose the question, so you get to do it in a way that craftily helps develop your proposal. Moreover, questions are useful rhetorically--if used in moderation--in that they convey an energetic sense of exploration and curiosity. Minimize subjunctive-sounding constructions and write more imperatively: not "I would like to explore the abject in Barbauld's poetry," but "I will explore..." *Make every sentence count*: look over the proposal and ask yourself, what does each sentence do to further the aims of that proposal? Is what I am saying absolutely clear? Does each sentence form an identifiable task in the proposal? Does each sentence and each paragraph follow in a logical order and in an order that is palpable to the reader? Be ruthless and ascetic with regard to your revisions, cutting out anything that doesn't work and that doesn't work one hundred percent. Don't get attached to sentences, phrases, ideas, or narratives that aren't working. Be fully prepared to throw out a great deal and to start again. Only it won't be starting again. Every draft sentence, every draft proposal is part of an agonistic process leading to the proposal that is persuasive. No padding, no fuzzy generalizations, nothing nothing nothing that is not performing self-evidently identifiable *work* in the proposal.

--A few words about the nature of the experience and labour of revising your proposal. For the sake of brevity, I'm going to be very direct and directive about that work. The stakes are very high. So let's cut the crap and get right to it. Once you circulate a draft of your proposal to me, expect significant criticism. Take this criticism on board and revise accordingly. I'm not making these suggestions lightly. I do not intend to repeat myself. For me to point to places where your proposal needs to be changed and for you to ignore that advice says something about your willingness to learn. This is not the occasion to "bargain" with me, hanging on to elements of your proposal that you think should remain but I think need to be significantly revised. You have so much to gain by experimenting with new, more clear-minded and more persuasive ways of crafting a project proposal. So, *make the revisions, as suggested.* You will be surprised at how much better your proposal will become. Moreover, make changes in the *spirit* of the suggested revisions, i.e., if I suggest certain changes, don't make the absolute *minimum* change possible, don't be anxiously literal-minded about the revisions, but instead think *globally* about your entire proposal, recognizing that a particular problem is likely to be a problem that surfaces elsewhere in your proposal. Take on board the letter of the revision, yes (i.e., change X to Y, not a little bit of X to a little bit of Y), but also the spirit (i.e., what does that particular change say about my original draft, how can I generously respond to this criticism, how does that particular revision offer me a lesson in how to improve the proposal as a whole?). Show initiative: if, for example, you use of quotation marks is incorrect in one part of the proposal, it's up to you to search every other instance in the proposal and make the appropriate corrections. Failure to do so suggests something disappointing to me. As I say, you don't want to come across as "bargaining" with me, or approaching this process with the idea of "giving up" as little as possible and hoping that that will do. It won't. The minute I see such bargaining happen, or a grant proposal writer making the least revisions possible (rather than the most), my

heart sinks and my willingness to go all out for you evaporates. So, resist at all costs the temptation to hang on to your words and phrases and arguments when I've indicated that they need revision. Instead, jettison what you've been told doesn't work…and *revise*. If a sentence or a paragraph in your proposal needs supplemental explanation by you (i.e., if I say to you that this part of your proposal isn't very clear, and you clarify it for me in conversation), then that sentence or paragraph isn't working very well. The proposal must work and work very well on its own. Look carefully through the rest of your proposal, searching out analogously problematical areas---and revise those as well. Don't passively await my judgment about or comment on each particular phrase, i.e., literally only changing what I say needs changing, but instead take my suggestion about one facet of your proposal and think about where the remainder of your proposal needs similar revision. I'll be looking for you to be making these kinds of steps, for they say something about your intellectual courage, your willingness and ability to learn and to adapt. Don't leave sections unrevised that I say require revision. Don't, in later drafts, re-introduce sentences and phrases and claims that you made in earlier drafts and that you were advised to revise. Remember that this is not the occasion to debate fine points, with you and I parsing your argument the way that we might parse an argument in your dissertation or the way you and I read and critically consider the argument in an essay or book chapter. We can do that good work on lots of other occasions or at the very least to the side of the actual composition and revision of your proposal. The objective *here* is to write a project proposal that is stand-alone persuasive—i.e., that can convince a small handful of specialists, and then a larger group of non-specialists. Here's one way to think about the matter: at certain points in the process, for example, when your proposal moves from the departmental committee to the university committee, your proposal will be given only a matter of a couple of minutes of consideration, tops. So, a subtle point that may look very large and important to you right now, and feel like a point that that you want to argue with me, will not in the long run be important to your assessors. Your assessors are not going to wrestle with the fine points of your project, they are not going to ponder the nuances and subtleties of your text, they are not going to spend one second wringing out of your proposal all that is implied or "telegraphed" or unspoken or allusively "present" in it. *So don't write with the expectation of such a reader!* I'm coming to your proposal mostly with that larger perspective: how to revise this text so that it is persuasive to non-specialist others who will only be able to bring a very quick judgment to your text and who are not assessing it in isolation, but always ranking it in comparison with *many* other applications. Don't confuse your proposal with a journal article or course assignment or thesis chapter, don't get caught up in the fine-grained points that make all the difference deep inside your field. Instead, just make the revisions as suggested. Again, take the revisions in the spirit in which they are given and remembering the context for which your proposal is destined. My suggestions address particular weaknesses in your proposal but they also always point you towards refashioning your proposal as a whole. Take responsibility for your work and demonstrate your competence to take responsibility for your work by moving decisively in the direction towards which I have pointed you. Be active and take steps, rather than be passive and wait for me to guide you through each and every step. Demonstrate your ability quickly and decisively to learn, to grow…here, in revising your proposal, and in all other interactions with me while you are in the graduate program…and beyond. With each draft of your proposal, make *significant* changes, not minor ones, not the least that you can, as it were, get away with. The object here isn't for me to repeat myself, i.e., for you to act as if a suggestion about a problem in your proposal is only important it I make it several times. Under no circumstances assume that your proposal doesn't require any revision, or minimal revision. Be aware that *not* sharing your proposal with interested faculty members, especially your supervisor, is just plain evasive---it suggests a powerful unwillingness in you to use this opportunity to learn and to grow. If you are being supervised by someone else, or expect to be supervised by someone else, other than me, then ensure that you have already worked with your supervisor on drafts of your proposal before sharing it with me. You need the input of your own supervisor first. Insist on getting that input. Never submit a proposal with the idea that someone else will "fix" it for you. Never treat those with whom you are sharing your

proposal as a mere "editor" (just as you would never treat an actual editor as a "mere" anything....instead, in the future, remember to treasure the advice of every good editor you come across, for they are creatures who save us from ourselves!) In the case of grant proposals, you are your own editor. Think carefully about your draft. Take total responsibility for the work and for the writing that you are doing there. Is this the *very* best that you can do? Only share the very best work that you can do.

vii) *Consulting with others*: Circulate your proposal to your professors and classmates. *Use* the considerable expertise that is available here in the department to deepen and to clarify your project: but give your professors time to look at your proposal and to discuss its strengths and weaknesses with you. If you feel like you don't have a project, go back and look at your most successful or stimulating papers; think about the sorts of things that intrigued or troubled you in courses you have taken; take the time to meet with the professor who taught that course and discuss the matter. But be professional about this: do not give your professor a hastily put-together draft and expect him or her to, as it were, pull it all together. As a rule, give your professors the most complete and polished draft you that can produce, and then start the revising process from there.

viii) *Doing by example*: Get your hands on some winning proposals and study them very closely for their rhetorical, narrative, and argumentative strategies. <u>I cannot emphasize this instruction too strongly: there is simply nothing like having a number of winning grant proposals in front of you to make clear and real the strengths and qualities that I am describing in this memo.</u> Half a dozen winning SSHRCC grant proposals are available for your consideration in the Department of English & Cultural Studies graduate binder, thanks to the generosity of some students who are now or have been in our programme. Finding your own critical voice and figuring out a way to write a persuasive grant application proposal begins by intelligently mimicking what you admire in the writing of others. So get your hands on as many winning proposals as you can. For example, ask your supervisor to contact students with whom she or he has worked in the past, and who have won external funding: see if you can get copies of their winning proposals to read and from which to learn. A sample of winning grant applications in your field can teach you an enormous amount. Take on board what those winning proposals share—the spirited and concise way in which they are unfolded, their specificity and detail, the attention to what makes the project new and significant in the field.

ix) *The work of revision*: Re-work your proposal: they are not static things, but can and should be extensively revised, strengthened, and improved over time and over separate application years. Remember that you can get information regarding the assessment of your SSHRCC application from SSHRCC once the adjudication process is over.

x) *Presentation*: The presentation of the proposal, and, indeed, of the whole application form, is very important. It must be utterly free of spelling mistakes and typos, grammatical errors, problems in syntax, food stains, etc. That means triple proof-reading, reading right to left; give it to other people to check--it never hurts to have a fresh set of eyes go over everything. Avoid cramming every part of the form: leave some sort of margin, if only a small one. Remember that the proposal must be readable, in both form and content, often by professors with tired and failing eyes. Use a pleasing, crisply legible font: something conservative like CG Times Roman, i.e., the kind of font that you see in most books and articles. Use a laser printer to get maximum resolution.

One last point about the process of crafting a persuasive project proposal. Let me be very frank here, since we're adults, working in a professional setting, and since time is of the essence and since the stakes so high. I'm often asked to read drafts of

project proposals and am happy to do so, time permitting. I've had the good fortune of reading thousands of grant proposals over my career, and expect to read thousands more. It's important to give me time to consider your proposal carefully, and to give yourself time to respond to the suggestions and criticisms that I will provide. It's not uncommon for me to work through half a dozen or more drafts with a grant applicant. Please do not ask me to consider your proposal and then leave yourself no time to take those suggestions and criticisms on board: that's a total waste of my time, and yours! It's important too not to take my candid assessment of your work "personally," i.e., as if I were "hurtfully" judging your character. I'm not. You and I suffer through the demands of a neoliberalized culture that tries frantically to reduce everything to a matter of personalities and the personal. Try your level best not to reproduce those individualizing and psychologizing impulses in professional relations with your instructors and professors. You should know that I'm going to be very frank in my criticisms of your proposal, and I will be direct in my suggestions about the ways in which it can be strengthened and made more persuasive. *Fully* embrace those suggestions and criticisms, revising your proposal accordingly. If you are not willing to take that step, then I'm not the right with whom to submit your proposal for critique. Resist the temptation to want to hang on to elements of your proposal that I've asked you to jettison or revise significantly. This isn't a fight for whose "right" about your proposal, "me" or "you." It's an opportunity for you to try out new ways of unfolding a proposal that may not have occurred to you and that you might not necessarily be expected to know. Embrace *both* the letter and the spirit of my suggestions and criticisms, i.e., don't simply tweak your proposal in small ways, responding to my remarks in a minimal fashion, but instead apply my criticisms globally to your entire proposal. Your aren't giving up anything if what you are abandoning in your proposal doesn't and won't work. Pushing back in the name of possessive individualism about your writing has no place in the grant proposal writing process, especially given the tight time frames. Respond to my critique in the spirit of adventure and intellectual generosity, demonstrating your willingness and ability to learn and to be critical of your own writing. Rewrite your proposal accordingly, remembering that writing of all kinds in the profession is writing *with* and *for* others. You have nothing to lose by learning new ways to write and a very great deal to gain. As I've said, time is of the essence, my time and your time. The stakes are very high. If I sense that you are revising your drafts minimally, or that you are sceptical about the value of my critique, or that you aren't willing to wager wholly new ways of crafting your proposal, no problem. We'll part company and call it a day.

2) Letters of Reference

For those for whom I am writing letters of reference, please ensure that you carefully consult the memo posted on the same webpage as this document, [Guidelines for Individuals Requesting Letters of Reference](#).

It is crucially important that you get the very best letters of reference. These should ideally only be from people who are familiar with your work, past and present. Remember that the referees are also invited by granting agencies to write letters that are detailed and specific, i.e., letters that fully reflect a sound knowledge of your project, its *details*, its merits, its possibilities, its importance and originality: so make this knowledge fully and handily available to your referee; and don't hesitate to remind your referee that it would help enormously if his or her letter included such specific details. In other words, play an active role in helping your referees write good letters, emphasizing the kind of information that the granting agency thinks is important:

i) Referees should keep in mind that their audiences on and off campus will be multi-disciplinary, and so should write in what SSHRCC calls "clear, non-technical language," while at the same time coming across, of course, as the expert in the field.

ii) Referees should indicate why *this* student is the one to work on *this* project, bringing out her or his particular strengths, the ones suited to the particular project at hand, as well as how other work that the student has done is important or related. Evoking the student's track-record, pointing to previous graduate work, particular essays and seminars is important as a way of substantiating the referee's claims with real evidence.

iii) Referees should indicate why and how the project being proposed is important to the field, why it is timely and original.

Do not hesitate to ask a potential reference whether he or she is willing to write you a strong reference: most professors will be honest and tell you if they feel that they cannot write such a letter for you (either because they are not familiar enough with your work, or do not feel confident in your work). It is important to try and get some if not all letters from active researching-scholars, especially those who have or are in the process of securing authority in the specific field in which you are also planning to work. Remember that the form that referees fill out asks for the *rank* of a professor, so clearly this is of some importance to the SSHRCC and to OGS. It's not nearly the only or the most important thing to consider when looking for referees, but the granting agencies have signalled that it is worth considering. Also—believe me--some referees write *much* better letters than others; i.e., some write detailed accounts of your strengths and promise, while others mistakenly believe that a meagre handful of sentences will do. Some referees realize that letters are written to bring out the student's capabilities, while others--not many, but enough about which to be concerned--treat the letter as a space in which to rehash old battles, resentments, politics, etc.. So, determine as best you can who is and who isn't a good referee, even if this can be done only by deduction and speculation. Discuss this question frankly with your supervisor, or with a professor whose opinions you trust. Retrieve your file from SSHRCC, and look carefully at the recommendations copied there. (The names will be blotted out...but let's face it, you should still be able to figure out who the author is.)

Getting good letters of reference is a long-term process and should never be treated as an isolated event, detached from the larger context of your graduate education. So begin now to cultivate such references, by which I mean ensuring that you cultivate a vibrant life for yourself in the program and in the field. This process starts by keeping your professors informed of your work and by engaging them in it. But it also comes as a natural and felicitous consequence of your active participation in the intellectual community of the university, and well beyond: so participate! Don't be that student who hangs back in class, preferring to be a passive spectator of rather than an active participant in your education. Students who have nothing to say in class, and who don't address why on earth they have nothing to say in class, students who prefer living vicariously and parasitically on its margins, well, these students have seriously misunderstood the nature of graduate school and the nature of the academic community, both of which are intrinsically social, i.e., about thinking *with others*, about working dialectically *with others*, and about learning how to be a colleague. Is the silent student, the one who does not contribute, a student who deserves support in the form of a letter of reference? Throw yourself into your courses; discuss your work and the collective work of your graduate seminars with your professors; attend and participate in departmental colloquia: that is, make a thoughtful impression on and create a place for yourself in the community of scholars, some of whom will be assessing and ranking your work, or writing letters of support for it. Give your referee all the information he or she needs, and in a *timely* and orderly fashion. This is not only just plain polite, but reflects well on you, i.e., it puts to your referee that you are an organized and professional person. Moreover, some professors write many, many letters of reference, so anything you can do to make sure your letter gets the attention it deserves makes sense here. I always ask for a file folder that contains the project proposal

(do *not* change this proposal in any substantial way without informing your referee--this, so that he or she does not write a letter of reference that refers to a project that no longer exists!), as well as a number of other crucial items: list of graduate courses taken, with titles and marks; a copy of your transcripts; titles and grades of papers and seminars that you have given to or presented before your referee; a c.v., highlighting all publications and presentations; a telephone number and actively monitored e-mail address where you can be reached in case some clarifications are needed. Don't forget to include a sheet of paper indicating the due dates of each letter of reference (important especially if you are asking for several letters from one referee), as well as the proper forms and their envelopes. Remember too to fill out what boxes are supposed to be filled out by you before giving the form to your referee.

It never hurts--given the state of the mails, and given the fact the sheer volume of paper and email that daily crosses a professor's desk--to confirm with your referees--especially if they are at another university--that they have in fact got your materials. Then follow up by checking with the department to see whether your letters of reference have all arrived.

Last but not least: tell your referees of the outcome of your applications. It is only right and proper that they are the first people to be told of your results. I will not write letters of reference for students for whom I have written previously and who have not let me know the outcome of their earlier application.

3) Publications and Presentations (plus previous awards)

The larger question of publications and presentations deserves a separate seminar, but let me ask you briefly consider this:

For some, this is a most vexing part of the application form. The prospect of disseminating your research results in a public forum, beyond the relatively safe confines of the department, may seem entirely unlikely or even futuristic, something professors do but not you. You might take this opportunity to ask yourself *why* this is so, rather than assuming *that* it is so. It is worth pointing out here that strong graduate students are expected, indeed fully expected, to be publishing some of their research findings during the course of their degree, and to be presenting their findings at conferences. The publication and public presentation of your research findings remains the single most identifiable way in which to construct an academic habitus for yourself, i.e., to becoming an active member of a vibrant and rigorous intellectual community. It is also the single most telling yardstick by which peers register the significance and critical power of your work. So it makes sense that grant application committees are interested in seeing if you have in fact begun to publish your findings. In general I might say this: there is a spot on the application form to list publications and presentations, *and it is there for a reason*. Moreover, you should know that professors writing letters of reference for SSHRC applications are specifically asked "to comment on the importance to the discipline of the journals in which the candidate has published and/or the candidate's prospects for publication." In other words, the granting agency considers the public dissemination of your work in good venues to be important.

To a grants committee (and to scholars generally, including those who will consider your application to join their department!) publication and presentations mean at least two things: that you are motivated and focussed enough to be getting your work *out there*; and that your work is worthy and original enough that others, outside of the graduate school, are willing to have it published or heard. The trick is to *start now* to think about presenting papers and getting material published: it can sometimes be an incredibly drawn-out process (in some case, two years or more between time of submission and time of publication), so beginning early is better.

Consult with your professors, who can discuss your work, and point to what should and could be published, how and where one goes about publishing or getting papers accepted at conferences. Moreover, and, perhaps just as important, you

have *peers*, other graduate students, who have successfully made the transition from writing papers for their professors *to* disseminating their research results for others to read: *talk to these people*, many of whom are a wealth of hands-on information and advice about this crucially important aspect of the life of a researcher. A great deal of the work that is done by graduate students in unquestionably important and original. That being the case, *there is no intrinsic reason why it should not be published or presented at conferences, and lots of good reasons (including one's intellectual and professional growth) why it should.* The grant application form simply reminds you of the abiding importance of that fact. Ensure that the work you publish or present in conference venues is articulate, accomplished, and original. Among the worst mistakes a new scholar can make, for example, is to present an unformed or hurriedly written or poorly presented conference paper. Never be careless of your work. Be acutely aware of the audiences to whom you are speaking, and with whom you must come across as a thoughtful researcher who has no intention of wasting anyone's valuable time.

Make absolutely clear what the status of your publications is: "published" or "accepted for publication" are the only two relevant categories, along with "Peer Reviewed" or "Non-Peer Reviewed." Peer-reviewed publications carry vastly more weight than non-peer reviewed publications, so focus your efforts on ensuring that your research is disseminated in the former, not the latter. Your M.A. or Ph.D. thesis or your MRP are not treated as publications and should not be listed as such.

Don't forget to list any and all important academic awards or scholarships on your application form (describing said awards or scholarships in parenthesis where it helps assessors grasp their significance). For example, if you won a named university award for the student with "the highest cumulative grade-point average in the honours program in the third year of your program," then say that in your application form.

4) Grades and Coursework Performance

Let me return to a point that I made earlier. Applying for a grant is not an isolated event, but should be treated more dynamically as part of a scholarly, professional, and institutional continuum. If you are applying for a grant at this very moment, you can't do anything about your grades, no more than your publications and conference papers. But the occasion of your application should be a moment in which you reflect upon the bigger picture. Without question, your performance in your courses will play an important role in your grant application. Grant assessment committees will have your transcripts in front of them, which include both individual course grades and grade-point averages. So you need to ask yourself: have you and are you working at your very best in your graduate seminars? More to the point, if you are not getting *very* good grades in those courses, have you taken the time and effort to determine what, precisely, you need to be doing to do better? You won't, of course, ever resort to the undergraduate clichés that your professor is to blame for your grade or that you never "clicked" with the topic, or never bothered to figure out to "give the professor what she or he wanted." What rubbish! Stay well clear of these silly rationalizations. You alone bear responsibility for your grades, and since grades are an elementally significant factor in how well you will do in the grant application process, you'll need to pay sustained and rigorous attention to getting good ones. Get good grades. As I say earlier in this memorandum, it always helps to throw yourself into your courses, ensuring that you *lead* classes rather than follow, reading everything that you can get your hands on (i.e., not just the "assigned" materials), discussing your work, actively seeking ways to strengthen your thinking and writing skills. Speak up and speak intelligently. Never reduce classroom participation to passing along anecdotes, but instead speak to and out of the materials that you are studying. Be the intellectually courageous student, the one possessing a searching intelligence and an insatiable curiosity. Be that student and be *seen* and *heard* to be that student. Pursue projects that are quickened by big important questions, not safely familiar ones. Listen and learn. Look around you, look at the demeanour and the relationship to knowledge and the

writing skills that are modelled by those classmates who are thriving, and who appear to be growing intellectually. You have classmates who are sometimes getting A+ grades in their courses—a tremendously impressive feat, and one that is the result of very hard work. Those students have a great deal to teach you, as in fact do students who are disorganized, over-wrought, distracted, directionless, bored, or lack intellectual curiosity or courage. Stay well clear of those dark souls and go instead towards the light. You'll know it when you see it.