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# Signaling Access in Grant Writing Pedagogy and Practice

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#### Introduction

Grant writing ideally opens doors to opportunities for communities in terms of addressing unmet needs. Grant writing courses facilitate those opportunities by equipping students to negotiate varied and complex research strategies and texts to develop, submit, and implement grant proposals. Yet an everchanging "web of conditions" (Scott et al. 14) can both enable and limit access to grant opportunities — for instance, the effects of diminished funding opportunities, not only for potential grantees but also for peer reviewers facing more applications for fewer resources (Gurwitz et al. 1), social inequalities in grant funding (Odedina and Stern; Le; Martinez), and user design issues in online grant proposal templates (Gallagher et al.).

These possibilities and constraints certainly involve students beginning grant writing courses with varied expertise. Alongside barriers previously mentioned, locating funding among governmental and foundational sources is often a disconnected process – and efforts to compile them for easier access are often hidden behind the paywalls of organizations like Candid and GrantWatch. The scope of government requests for proposals (RFPs), especially federal, can be too extensive to navigate in a single grant writing class, which might be the only formal training in grant writing students receive. On the other hand, some RFP requirements are scant, surfacing potential inequalities in class requirements to be negotiated. Of particular concern is accessing RFPs, which may involve such constraints as existing community partnerships, proof of 501c3 status, and previous funding history.

In this article, I utilize institutional logics and signal theory frameworks to locate shifting variances and possibilities for intervention concerning funding access

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among grant writing students, practitioners, and instructors. These frameworks are first used to analyze initial experiences as a grant writing student and professional to locate emergences and barriers of access, especially stemming from those of resource availability, expertise, legitimacy, and quality in these experiences before doing so in the teaching of an undergraduate grant writing course at a minority-serving institution (MSI) – adding to the dearth of studies focused on undergraduate grant writing students (Wark 1). These students, many continuing their education after years, or even decades, arrive with attuned awareness of their communities' needs and how to address them. Yet they also (unevenly) experience barriers to accessing funding source information, particularly RFPs. Subsequently, they mainly consult local/regional sources and confront, in turn, limited access to current and/or past RFPs in our large, competitive metropolitan area of the Southeast U.S. These access issues are compounded by those involving variabilities in individual grant writing genre knowledge and other writing skills.

Next, I discuss past and future strategies for mitigating these constraints in my classes, keeping in consideration individual student needs. These strategies draw from existing research, including: (1) drafting the most common grant sections (e.g., Need Statement, Program Plan, Budget, and Evaluation) with attention to signaling legitimacy and quality, (2) utilizing examples from other RFPs and proposals to increase RFP access, (3) taking an entrepreneurial approach to funding, and (4) cultivating multi-actor and institutional relationships for class visits and projects. I conclude that use of institutional logic and signaling theory frameworks facilitates opportunities to intervene in funding logics, particularly for those who need these interventions most.

## Institutional Logics and Signaling

To locate how access can emerge for grant writing and funding, I utilize a combination of two frameworks most often used in management and social sciences research: institutional logics and signaling theory.

Patricia H. Thornton and William Ocasio draw from foundational works to define institutional logics as "the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality" ("Institutional Logics and the Historical Contingency..." 804; e.g., Friedland and Alford 243; Haveman and Rao 1607). Institutional logics are vital for "analyzing the interrelationships among institutions, individuals, and organizations in

social systems" (Thornton et al. 2). The framework aims to deviate from earlier structuralist (e.g., Giddens), and specifically, neoinstututionalist (e.g., Meyer and Rowan; DiMaggio and Powell) theories by locating enactments of partial autonomy (or embedded agency) among individual and organizational actors to both maintain and disrupt these interrelations in differential, historically-contingent ways (Friedland and Alford; Thornton and Ocasio; Thornton et al.).

Institutional orders of state, market, corporation, religion, profession, community, and family, which form an inter (and intra)-institutional system conditioning sensemaking and activity for individual and organizational actors, as well as contingent amalgams of orders, individuals, organizations, logics, and more that constitute institutional fields, such as those shaping grant funding (Thornton et al. 53-54; 61; Friedland and Alfred 232). It must be noted that boundaries co-constituting these fields, actors, and orders, as well as their relations among one another, are drawn for analytic purposes rather than constituting definitive causalities and realities (especially orders as "ideal types" – See Thornton et al. especially 74-75, for theoretical overview of ideal types).

I draw upon Thornton et al.'s delineations of market, corporate, and profession-based logics to analyze field-level funding access, alongside what Bitektine and Song term as "Socially-Oriented" (order) logics (e.g., community, family, civic, and social welfare, with social welfare encompassing Thornton et al.'s definitions of state-ordered logics) (3; 10; 25-36). Socially-oriented logics are bound by characteristics, such as empathy and cooperation, as well as concern for the common good and the underserved (Bitekine and Song 10). Each order is contextually perpetuated by various, shifting elemental categories (i.e., its material, but also symbolically-significant practices) that further organize individual/organizational actor preferences and behaviors inside (and I add, outside) the order's sphere of influence (Thornton et al. 54). Of particular focus for this analysis are relations among the elemental categories, "sources for legitimacy" and "basis of attention" within and across orders, although I also reference the categories, "economic system" and "sources of authority" (Thornton et al. 74).

For example, among professional orders, legitimacy can be associated with expertise(s) as source(s) of authority and attention within and beyond these orders at organizational and field levels. I focus primarily on what Bitektine and Song term as sociopolitical legitimacy, or the locating of legitimacies constituted per moral (Suchman) and sociopolitical (Aldrich and Fiol) norms associated more closely with socially-oriented logics (6). (However, I emphasize Mark C. Suchman's point that there may certainly be self-interest involved (579).) While such legitimacy discussions have

largely focused on relations among fields, organizations, orders, and logics, I argue here that this concept can be extended to individual actors in these interactions as well.

In a baseline example, a corporate foundation's director enacts personal and (representational) organizational expertise via their credentials, experience, and performance of responsibilities that can structure sociopolitical legitimacies to evoke authority and attention for themselves within the foundation and parent organization, communities the foundation/organization serves, professional associations the director belongs to, and in other ways. This expertise can also shape emergence and engagement with these elemental categories for the foundational/organizational actor across corporate, market, and socially-oriented ordered logics, stemming from elements like board, upper management, and shareholder assessment of foundation operations, market position of the organization in terms of foundation/organization visibility, and adherence to communal norms of reciprocity between the foundation/organization and surrounding geographical area.

Institutional logics have also been posited as a meta-theory (Thornton et al. 180) to be used in combination with other sociological frameworks (Lounsbury et al. 274), and I add, with other disciplines. Loundsbury et al. emphasize the importance of logics as complex phenomena rather than static and reifiable (263). One way relations among individuals, organizations, and orders have been conceptualized more dynamically (or specifically, to highlight their historicity and overall contingency) involves the use of signaling theory. Signaling theory in economic, management, and other contexts focuses on conveying legitimacy, and ultimately, (overall) quality, to address knowledge gaps at various actor levels (Spence, "Job Market Signaling" & "Signaling in Retrospect"; Connelly et al.; Certo; Certo et al.; Bitekine and Song), especially for less-established entities (Higgins et al.). Connelly et al. define quality in a signaling context as "the underlying, unobservable ability of the signaler to fulfill the needs or demands of an outsider observing the signal" (43). Expertise signaling is also certainly key to signaling legitimacy and quality (Certo 436 - 437). For example, finding alternative ways to signal expertise, legitimacy, and quality is crucial for new nonprofits to access funding with few or no data-based indicators of responsible stewardship and community impact.

While Connelly et al. consider quality to be indiscernible, efforts have been made to empirically locate how both legitimacy and quality are signaled. For example, Saurabh A. Lall and Jacob Park analyze signaling of legitimacy and quality among market-based and socially-oriented (or specifically, social welfare/values-led) logics for social ventures seeking commercial capital that have already received philanthropic grants.

Distortions in signaling environments can impact signal observability (Connelly et al. 45), or in other words, which signals garner attention to generate, disrupt, and/or enforce logics among orders and actors. In particular, these distortions can be attributed to fit issues between environmental stimuli and accessibility of stored knowledges comprising logics of various orders among which individuals [and organizations] interact and associated elements, e.g., values and schema. The greater the fit, the more likely these stored knowledges will be accessed, resulting in greater likelihood that expertise, legitimacy, and quality will be signaled, and attention will be received. Accessibility and fit are augmented (or primed) by repeated exposure to stimuli but can also spur alternative logics (Higgins; Bargh; Biketine and Song; Thornton et al.). As I'll discuss in more detail, invite-only RFPs can multi-directionally disrupt the signaling of grant availability among funders and potential applicants. New applicants, like many of those in my grant writing classes, are excluded from even knowing about such opportunities without careful research and networking, while funders remain unaware of potential grantees. Geographically-based stimuli, such as increased competition for foundations and state/local funding sources in larger metropolitan areas, can exacerbate these funding access inequities. Yet eventorganized stimuli, like those associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, have shifted these renderings of signaling fit among actors, stored knowledges, and order logics to not only open up funding opportunities from agencies and corporations to more actors (such as individuals and grassroots organizations assisting those disparately affected by COVID-19), but also to provide more support overall for operating costs. And certainly, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, individual and organizational actors have enacted embedded agencies stemming from stored knowledges and actions among themselves and orders to expand funding logics, such as those centering on advocating for those most often affected by distorted signaling environments through practices like providing funding, engaging in consultation work, and disseminating information regarding these efforts and ongoing needs via media platforms.

Yet, there seems to have been limited, and at times, indirect utilization of either institutional logics or signaling theory in rhetoric, writing studies and technical/professional communication. Louise Wetherbee Phelps analyzes institutional logics in the structuring of rhetoric and writing programs ("The Institutional Logics of Writing Programs"; "The Historical Formation"). David Wright as well as Michael Meng incorporate signaling to examine sound in technical communication and screenshots in software documentation respectively, while Ryan Omizo and William Hart-Davidson do so to help situate genre markers within

academic writing contexts. Jared Colton and Steven Holmes combine considerations of both institutions and signaling in positing how technical communicators as individual actors can bring about social justice without waiting for institutional and other cues.

The following exploratory analyses expand upon uses of these theoretical frameworks in rhetoric, writing studies, and technical/professional communication to further their potential for detailed description and study in these fields. I utilize these frameworks to locate various logics and their associated signaling of funding access that have, in turn, informed grant writing logics among actors and orders for my students and me, invoking both constraints and opportunities for individualized embedded agency among various organizational and institutional entities. While the primary focus of these analyses involves me as an individual actor (including my embodied, positional limitations), I discuss pressing needs for further inquiries in the Conclusions and Future Directions section of this article, especially with direct involvement from students, funders, professional grant writers, grant writing instructors, and others, as well as with expansion beyond U.S.-centered contexts.

# Signaling Grant Access among Actors, Orders, and Logics

My Initial Experiences as a Student and Professional

My introduction to grant writing occurred approximately 20 years ago as a graduate student at a minority-serving institution (MSI) in a medium-sized city within the Southern United States. I had grown intrigued about grant writing practices a few months prior while witnessing the nonprofit I worked for at the time renew funding for the program paying my salary. This event enacted and was enacted by stimuli activating stored knowledges and signaling patterns that invoked socially-oriented, but also professional and market logics. This was especially the case in terms of fit among stored knowledges of my individual and employment organization's values and beliefs of further assisting local youth identified as having less access to (socioeconomic) resource environments (e.g., Thornton et al.).

Yet these logics emerged differentially among individuals, organizations, and orders. As an individual actor within the organization, enactments of socially-oriented logics stemmed from stored knowledges and signaling patterns co-constituting what I would consider a (sub)logic of privilege. Privilege is defined here as greater access to a richer resource environment from birth. Combining socially-oriented with professional logics, I was also seeking a new professional direction that would allow

me to more directly make a difference in others' lives, while earning a wage and other benefits doing so. Yet, decision-makers, and at times colleagues at my organization, could be construed (as discussed further shortly) to be driven by a more lateral, socially-oriented, as well as professional and even market logics activated by their own professional accomplishments despite initially limited resources to help those from similar backgrounds achieve educational, and eventually, professional success. Furthermore, the activation of these logics was also fine-tuned by such elements as geography, race, and class, especially in terms of addressing "local, social needs" (Biketine and Song 36; Pache and Santos 979).

These mutual, yet differential, logics within and across our organization involve signaling patterns of stimuli (re)invoking sociopolitical and pragmatic legitimacies, as well as quality. While informed by previously-discussed stored knowledges of past experiences, values, and others (also indicating their historicity), these signaling patterns with my then-employer actually began during the employee screening process (Spence, "Job Market Signaling" & "Signaling in Retrospect") with the position posting's articulations of organizational mission and job responsibilities. In turn, I addressed information gaps about employment suitability via articulations of my interest and experience tutoring/mentoring youth of similar ages and backgrounds as my employers' target population in my application materials, co-constituting an initial, mutual fit between employer and employee. The signaling strength of my claims to sociopolitical and professional legitimacies and their associated logics were augmented through practices demonstrating expertise in my daily responsibilities and interest in strengthening our organization by working on this grant proposal. Meanwhile, my then-employer's signaling strength of these legitimacies increased for me as an individual actor, as their organizational mission and histories were rearticulated and put into action in meetings, conversations, and other activities. These practices also included writing grant proposals in terms of ongoing demonstrations of expertise - and authority - by leadership personnel. Our grant writing efforts also added to stored knowledges of grants for us (as individual and organizational actors) as a means for nonprofit organizational actors to access enriched resource environments for their targeted, underserved populations – especially the signaling of such access through the availability of grant application platforms (particularly RFPs).

These structured attentions to grant writing logics among actors, organization, orders and logics (in turn garnered by stimuli, stored knowledges, and actions comprising signaling patterns of expertise, legitimacies, and overall quality) invoked a moment of embedded agency for me as organizational-individual actor – enrolling in a grant writing course at my institution. Yet with limited access to stored knowledges

invoking formal training and work experiences in grant, and even professional writing, I felt more apprehensive than I ever would again navigating new writing genres.

When the course began, I started to gradually add to this knowledge by exploring governmental and foundational funding resources and their requirements provided by my professor and through my own web research. I settled on a national foundation only requiring a letter of inquiry for a project at my organization because both project and RFP seemed manageable. I was also fortunate to enlist my organization's director, who had certainly worked on more complex grants. Her input invoked further, ongoing signaling of authority and expertise, as well as sociopolitical and pragmatic legitimacies as an individual-organizational actor among various socially-oriented, professional, and market logics. Each week, I drafted portions of the letter based on the most common proposal sections like Need Statement, Program Plan, and Evaluation (albeit in condensed, LOI form), until finally, the letter was ready.

"See? So easy. Done," my director declared as she signed off on the letter. Yet to me, the process had felt like anything but, even though the scaffolded drafting of sections for feedback each week had certainly helped. In many ways, my experience was typical of grant writing students (and/or other novice grant writers). Karen Englander (24) and Lynne Flowerdew (2) draw upon John Swales to position grant proposals as "occluded" not readily accessible to anyone other than grant seekers and makers, making them difficult to predict and produce for those unfamiliar with them, or in other words, subject to weaker, multi-directional signaling patterns of funding access. And as Linda Wark discusses, many students, even at the graduate level, do not yet have this familiarity (3), i.e., the stored knowledges needed for facilitating the activation of embedded agencies to strengthen such patterns in order to modify and/or adhere to applicable logics.

Yet I also felt empowered by the ability to gain immediate access to a RFP, then to submit and complete a grant application with an established nonprofit in the hopes of assisting our targeted communities, even though our organization did not ultimately receive funding. These stored knowledges of expertise, as well as sociopolitical and practical legitimacies signaling and structuring my attentions among socially-oriented, professional, and market logics, were (re)called and strengthened in subsequent positions. This was the case, even though my schematic engagements with these knowledges have been continually (re)configured based on divergent stimuli, actions, logics, and orders. Key moments of (re)configuration involved assisting first-generation college students at minority-serving institutions alongside increasing attention to structuring of professional, among pedagogical and nonprofit logics, as I

moved from enrolled student in a grant writing course (and grant writing comprising an ancillary part of my position) to signaling of expertise and quality in grant writing constituting a more significant focus of the paid positions I've held - including my current position involving development and instruction of grant writing courses. I discuss these shifts in greater detail in the following section. For now, I state that despite such shifts, my stored knowledges, and ultimately, signaling patterns involving grant writing logics among logics of various orders, were ones I would largely take for granted. As I later discovered, stored knowledges and logics of privilege I accessed and enacted seemed to obfuscate distortions in the funding signaling environment of logics, orders, organizations, and individuals for me as an individual actor. These distortions persisted, despite stored knowledges of general, systemic inequities between funding supply and demand. Other hidden, stored knowledge that, as signaled through stimuli from course texts and lectures, as well as through observing and participating in complex interactions involving multiple individuals and often extended time commitments to complete organizational grant proposals (despite the previouslymentioned claim from my then organization's director that grant writing was easy). The stimuli structuring my attention up to teaching my first grant writing course largely involved ready access to: (1) socioeconomic resource environments, (2) other actors' signaling of expertise in my professionalization as a grant writer, and (3) RFPs as an individual actor among large-scale organizational actors, but seemingly even so as a student and novice grant writer researching RFPs in ways that were largely selfdirected, although with helpful instructor guidance.

#### An Instructor

In 2020, I was asked to develop an undergraduate grant writing course at the request of my department chair. By then, it had been some years since I had worked in grant writing and administration capacities. I had certainly taught writing more recently, which informed greater attention to pedagogically-based logics involving scaffolding as one of its elements from stored knowledges of my training in writing studies and technical/professional communication – especially to assist students with their stored knowledges of commonly-used, professional writing genres. Speaking again to historicity-as-element fueling shifting logics, the signaling strength of scaffolding also seemed amplified among these pedagogical logics by stored knowledges invoking its helpfulness as a novice grant writing student and in subsequent professional positions involving grant writing.

I also initially called upon other expertises signaled from stored knowledges of grant writing inculcated in socially-oriented, market, and professional logics that were in turn also shaped by pedagogical logics. One pedagogical logic was greater stored knowledges of targeted community needs based on grants I worked on (augmented by training, teaching, and practice of rhetorical audience analyses). A second pedagogical logic involved common rhetorical moves I could make across various grant applications-as-genre that also facilitated content repurposing and template creation for expediency, even when accounting for overlapping yet differential values, norms, practices, and logics across individuals, organizations, and orders. Examples included signaling sociopolitical and pragmatic expertises, as well as overall quality in helping first-generation college students among varied grant funding contexts, such as enhancing training and minority representation in STEM fields in one proposal, developing curricula more responsive to our institutional location near the U.S.-Mexico border in another proposal, and assisting on a university compliance manual for faculty with grant-funded projects.

The class was first held (entirely online) during the Spring 2021 semester and contained sixteen upper-division students, with students majoring in Psychology and Human Services, Integrative Studies (an interdisciplinary major), English, Administrative Management, Business, Film Production, and Legal Studies. The university, located in a relatively limited resource environment in a major metropolitan area of the Southeastern United States with most students residing in the surrounding area, is classified as a Predominantly Black Institution (PBI) with significant Hispanic or Latino and Asian populations. The average student age in spring 2021 was twenty-six.

The course, summoning aforementioned stored knowledges of scaffolding as signals of legitimacy and quality among pedagogical and professional logics, focused on selecting a project and funding source, as well as drafting major sections for most grant proposals throughout the semester. I promised students that I would work with them individually as needed to repurpose content drafted in major sections for specific funding source requirements, signaling repurposing as an element of professional (writing) logics, and specifically, those grant-related that I had acquired from pedagogical and professional stored knowledges. However, students were not required to submit their proposals to the funding source, although some did.

For the first weekly module, students were asked to introduce themselves, explain their experiences with grant writing, and propose a project for grant funding. Most students did not have experience writing grants. Among those with experience, this varied from previously receiving grants to currently working on proposals for

nonprofits. However, when describing their proposed projects, most students mentioned a desire to help communities identified in their project descriptions, sometimes directly identifying themselves and/or family members as members of these communities. However, all projects were entirely or partially situated in their geographic (city, county, state, and/or country-based) areas of residence (even if there were plans for geographic expansion of proposed projects), regardless of whether students directly identified themselves as part of the targeted communities, and which signaled another dimension of communal belonging. This assignment generated stimuli activating expertise, and ultimately, sociopolitical and pragmatic legitimacies – all of which stemmed from stored knowledges that in turn, enacted pedagogical logics enfolded among socially-oriented (community, and/or family-based), and at times, professional and market-based logics.

After receiving quick feedback on their proposed projects, students were asked to finetune their project idea, if necessary, based on this feedback as well as propose a potential funding source. Considering that most students were not experienced with grant writing, I encouraged them to pursue foundational, city, or county, rather than more complex state or federal funding sources. And as I had recently moved to the local geographical area, a colleague provided a list of resources specific to our region, which was then shared with students. A number of students frequently selected these and other geographically-specific resources. They were also encouraged to discuss potential sources with me prior to submitting the assignment.

This step of selecting funding sources proved to be most difficult in two key, and often interrelated aspects, indicating individual, organizational, and institutional moments of distortion within the signaling environment and affecting fit between stimuli and stored knowledges for both my students and me as actors to signal access, expertise, and overall quality. The first aspect involved accessing RFPs to determine their appropriateness for student projects. Students came across invite-only RFPs, or screening questions asking for such items as verification of 501c3 status that they didn't have, or for time-sensitive RFPs, their requests were outside the window to access them. (Although in one case, I was able to work with a student to obtain a past RFP.) Links to resources like GrantWatch and Candid's Foundation Directory Online provided limited free information from funders, like full or any RFPs, as well as previously-successful proposals. The other challenge involved students matching their projects to appropriate funding sources, even if RFPs were available. For example, some students (initially) still chose federal sources beyond the scope of the course to complete because they were accessible online and also seemed relevant to their projects, despite examples being given of such resources and why they should be

avoided. Ultimately, implementing this step first disrupted signaling of both financial and educational resource access, as well as student expertise and conveyance of quality, especially involving stored knowledges of their intended project populations and grant/professional writing practices. These disruptions extended to use of my own previously discussed stored knowledges for invoking socially-oriented / pedagogical / professionally-ordered expertises, legitimacies, quality, and logics.

Scholarship analyzing bias in how submitted grant applications are evaluated and funded, especially biomedical research proposals (e.g., Hug and Aeschbach; Gurwitz et al.) does not seem to have extended to shifts in signaling access to applications for existing funding opportunities, especially for individuals and smaller, formative nonprofits (i.e., those most applicable to my students). However, non- and for-profit organizations dedicated to assisting with grant writing have noted this trend in pre-application screening processes, specifically invite-only RFPs by foundations (Le; Peeps; Smith). They argue that although grantmaking has always been relationship-based, foundations' invite-only RFPs have only heightened the need for such relationships and perpetuated inequities, with one organization, Peak Proposals, observing increases in these RFPs ("Rise of Invitation-Only Grant Opportunities"). Vu Le, former Executive Director of a Seattle-based nonprofit dedicated to developing leaders of color, explains that such practices aim to (understandably) reduce administrative hardship involved in reviewing grant applications while also preventing unproductive efforts by potential grantees. These cost/benefit analysis practices can be configured for analytical purposes in part as stimuli signaling sociopolitical and pragmatic legitimacies, as well as quality for funding organizations, and in particular, for elements of managerial, market, and welfare capitalist economic systems (Thornton et al. 55) – all invoking socially-oriented, market, and corporate institutional logics. These signaling blocks for potential/current grantees could certainly be exacerbated by geographical stimuli spurring increased competition for funding from foundational and governmental sources located in large, metropolitan areas like where my institution was located, especially in comparison to the somewhat-smaller area where I lived when enrolled in my grant writing course. Vu Le also explains the following to funders in ways that summon, in particular, sociopolitical and pragmatic legitimacies:

...organizations led by communities of color, for example, will rarely have the same relationship with you, or run in your circles to eventually build a relationship with you, or have a big enough marketing budget to get noticed by you. The relationship-based funding model is inequitable because marginalized communities in general have fewer relationships with those who have power and resources. Unless

you are specifically focused on finding and supporting these communities, your invitation-only process is likely leaving them behind, and you may not know it, because you are invitation-only.

Similar signaling disruptions rendering exclusion could also apply to screening questions prior to accessing RFPs (such as whether they had been funded by the organization before), and certainly, submitting grant applications. Many of my students were forming or thinking of forming their own nonprofits during the course to help their immediate communities, again, based largely on personal experiences involving themselves and/or loved ones. Although the lesson of forming grant writing coalitions with more established organizations was a valuable one, these distortions in signaling resource access alongside expertise and quality were telling. At the very least, it would be helpful to have greater access to previous RFPs to assist newer organizations in ascertaining whether their needs meet funder priorities, as well as obtain greater insights into organizations they could partner with until their own organizations can sufficiently signal legitimacy and quality in funder circles to apply on their own.

Yet notably, there has been increased, clearer signaling of funding access due to shifts in sociopolitical legitimacies, structuring of attention, and logics stemming from stimuli involving the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a joint study by Exponent Philanthropy and PEAK Grantmaking, foundations are: (1) allocating more funding for organizations outside their usual portfolios, as well as small businesses and individuals directly impacted by COVID-19, (2) streamlining application processes and post-award administration, and (3) loosening funding restrictions like operating costs. (The study authors also acknowledge anecdotal prioritization by funders to address racial inequities amplified by the pandemic, but study findings did not confirm these anecdotes. It can be argued that these attentions to racial injustices are structured in part from similar types of shifts in legitimacies, attention, and logics catalyzed by events signaling attention to police brutality, racial injustice and others.) These shifts in signaling funding access also afford opportunities for funding organizations to, in turn, signal sociopolitical legitimacies, and ultimately, quality to potential grantees and other social actors. Yet, another report from The Center for Effective Philanthropy indicates that funders plan to scale back changes as pandemic concerns recede (Orensten and Buteau12), and it follows that longer-term impacts involving equitable funding practices remain to be seen.

In this extended discussion of student funding source selection, informed in part by RFP access issues, we can both sum up and delve further into kaleidoscopic configurations of individuals, organizations, and order logics that emerge in field-level funding signaling environments. Ostensibly, funder RFPs signal stimuli organized as opportunities for potential grantees to increase access to goods and/or services to impact earmarked communities who need them, also signaling their sociopolitical legitimacies and quality to potential grantees. Potential grantees as recipients of this signaling draw upon individual and organizational engagements among socially-oriented, professional, and other order logic-based configurations of expertise to pursue these opportunities and increase access to goods and/or services for designated communities while strengthening their own capacities to signal their legitimacy and overall superior quality to potential funders for future opportunities. As described in such texts as course catalogs, schedules, and syllabi, grant writing courses signal stimuli organized as potentials to acquire and/or enhance expertise in grant writing skills and improve funding access.

Yet again, these signals become distorted in their efforts to address information gaps, such as funders' awareness of organizations that can help accomplish their funding goals, organizations and/or individuals' awareness of funders and funding opportunities to address their needs, or a grant writing instructor's capacity to assist students with accessing and responding to these opportunities. It could be argued that the increased prevalence of (neoliberal) market-based institutional logics drives this underlying distortion, an unsurprising finding well supported by literature (e.g., Alexander and Fernandez; Spicer et al.; Thornton et al.). Again, demand for grant funding has increased, and, most importantly, outpaces supplying capacities of funding entities (Karsh and Fox), which can be augmented by increased competition in large metropolitan areas, as well as smaller cities and towns. Competition for resources perpetuates efforts for funders to drive down administrative costs to maximize abilities to keep up with supply while also signaling the privileging of potential grantees who, in turn, signal the highest quality. Legitimacy often surfaces as a key indicator of quality but can be differentiated by stimuli like 501c status and past funding from a particular grant organization or others, as gleaned from screening questions and elsewhere, but also via a relationship-based familiarity - which can also be cultivated for potential grantees by partnerships with organizations conveying more established signals of quality with funding entities. Profit-based entities further distort the signaling of resource access through paywalls to access RFPs and other relevant funding organization information. These distortions, in turn, can open up needs for grant writing expertise signaled from external actors, like consultants and professional grant writing organizations, to help navigate these signaling barriers to convey legitimacy and quality to funders. However, those who need the most assistance are individuals and fledgling nonprofits who may face financial barriers to accessing it.

Such distortions also include those involved in acquiring grant writing expertise in classroom and other settings, such as: (1) market-based logics influencing institutional and class enrollment decisions and affecting whether instruction can be offered, (2) limited access to RFPs, (3) usage of texts emphasizing scarcity of traditional, (governmental/foundational) grant funding and encouraging partnerships with more established organizations and an overall entrepreneurial approach, and (4) instructor knowledge of local funding sources.

# Pedagogical Workarounds Invoking Embedded Agencies

I now outline pedagogical workarounds to at least some of these current access issues in my capacities as grant writing instructor to strengthen students' signaling of expertise and quality in their grant proposals and to overall facilitate the embodiments of their embedded agencies despite organizational and institutionally-ordered constraints. I draw upon experiences teaching this course, as well as previous scholarship. Yet, I proceed with the caveat that working with students individually (Bourelle 179; Roundtree 3) through a combination of methods was key to meeting their needs for the course and more so than any other course I have taught up to this point in light of variegated stimuli, e.g., projects, funding sources, familiarity with grant writing, and general writing skills.

Drafting the Most Common Grant Sections with Attention to Signaling Legitimacy and Quality

After students completed modules introducing the course, selecting a project and funding source, as well as discussing style and boilerplate items to have available (if possible), they drafted major sections for most of the remaining modules. I reviewed these drafted sections, with students incorporating feedback into a proposal template, or what I termed as a "master proposal" that could be drawn from for future opportunities. (As mentioned previously, some students drew from these sections to complete and submit proposals to funders both during and after the course.) At times, students needed to revise in order to complete the following assignment, such as incorporating feedback on initial budgets to submit a revised budget and initial budget narrative draft for the next assignment. Then, toward the end of the course, I reviewed students' master proposal rough drafts and provided additional feedback prior to them turning in the final versions at the course's conclusion. For future courses, I plan to implement peer review, at a minimum, for rough drafts of their master proposals (Wark 2; Wooley).

## Signaling Access in Grant Writing Pedagogy and Practice

During the week I reviewed full-proposal rough drafts, we focused on an overview of post-proposal follow-up (reporting, site visits, and obtaining feedback on unfunded proposals), although students were certainly guided throughout the course on structuring projects in ways that could be feasibly implemented and evaluated per funder organizational-institutional norms to signal sociopolitical and professional legitimacies, as well as quality. As mentioned earlier, this scaffolded process of writing and receiving initial feedback on the proposals by section emerged from my own stored knowledges of grant writing logics. A scaffolding approach to teaching grant writing is, in turn, directly and indirectly supported by various sources (e.g., Roundtree; Bourelle; Leak et al.; Wark).

## Utilizing Examples from Other RFP's and Proposals to Increase RFP Access

I drew from sample RFPs, proposal sections, and full proposals to illustrate rhetorical choices made in each, such as tying together goals, objectives, and how they would be assessed through project activities in an evaluation section. However, in another signaling disruption of access, expertise, and quality, our text did not include an example of a grant writing proposal with all sections included, which would have been helpful to see in terms of how all major sections should fit together. So, it was often up to me to come up with proposal section examples, as proposals found online were not as inclusive of these various sections as I would have liked or were too extensive (i.e. governmental proposals) for my students' projects and funding sources. These concerns regarding the location of appropriate sample proposals were echoed by Flowerdew (6). However, I plan on choosing a new text with full proposals for future courses (Roundtree).

## Taking a Social Entrepreneurial Approach to Funding

As discussed previously, our text, in line with other sources (e.g., Lyons and Kickul; Weber and Spartz; Roundtree), encouraged a social entrepreneurial approach for obtaining funding in light of decreased governmental and foundational resources, especially as funders are increasingly seeking potential grantees with a variety of income streams (Karsh and Fox 293 – 294). As the authors specify, such an approach is vital for small-to-medium-sized nonprofits, which my students either worked for, had started, or were thinking of starting. Suggestions in the text included, for example, sub-leasing operational space and running small businesses that could be staffed by volunteers and/or paid employees. My stored knowledges of

grant writing and donations as key to nonprofit funding did not signal attention to this engendering of market/corporate-based logics, and so, I did not emphasize such an approach in my class. Yet some students took up this advice from the text in ways that ranged from incorporating microenterprise efforts (like bake sales) into their proposals to completing a pharmaceutical company's application for discount pricing on medications. Ultimately, more direct encouragement of such an approach could be helpful for future classes. Even though an entrepreneurial approach might not address current access issues previously discussed (such as obtaining RFPs for current opportunities), this stance can help students cultivate a more realistic attitude about grant funding while also providing opportunities to take steps toward increasing signaling credibility with possible funders and subsequently obtaining access to their RFPs – and ultimately, their financial support.

#### Cultivating Multi-Actor and Institutional Relationships for Class Visits and Projects

Scholarship on grant writing instruction repeatedly brings up the idea of cultivating relationships with nonprofits and/or grant writing experts for class visits and projects. For example, both Natasha Jones and Kathy Mennen describe how students in their courses collaborated with nonprofits to write grant proposals. Wark also discusses a class visit to the campus library's nonprofit resource center (4). Yet, as these authors indicate, students gain access to elements of expertise across actors and orders through these interactions beyond pedagogical logics of the classroom. But significantly, as Jones points out, these partnerships (and the access to funding institutions they enhance) facilitate even greater awareness for students of contextual positionalities (including, as Diane Martinez also mentions, their own) – which, in turn, involves negotiating both inequities and privilege in terms of theirs and others' access to resources. Put another way; these interactions can heighten students' signaling of expertise and, in sum, sociopolitical and pragmatic legitimacies, as well as quality, in ways that can heighten ethical and tactical commitments to their grant writing efforts as they learn how to help earmarked communities from new perspectives.

However, I did not pursue any of these options for the course due to time constraints in course planning. These constraints were further complicated by stimuli and stored knowledges disrupting pedagogical, socially-oriented, and professional logic signaling environments involving the course, some of which have been mentioned previously: (1) my students' proposals predominantly focusing on serving their immediate geographical communities (as well as a significant number of

students selecting funding sources centered on assisting those communities), alongside (2) teaching the course entirely online with students distributed across the southeastern United States at an institution located in a geographical area with which I was gaining familiarity. (I was also based in another region and time zone of the United States from both the institution and my students due to a remote work arrangement stemming from stimuli surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.) But I would certainly consider one or more of these options for future courses.

#### Conclusions and Future Directions

In this exploratory analysis, institutional logics and signal theory have been mobilized to locate enactments and disruptions of funding access in grant writing practices and pedagogies, concluding with pedagogical workarounds to facilitate embedded agencies for grant writing students as individual actors in navigating disruptions within field-level funding signaling environments.

Yet there surely remains room for further analysis, especially empirical studies involving data and qualitative perspectives from funders, and students, as well as grant writing professionals and instructors, among other actors and entities. I offer three possibilities here, but these are certainly only starting points. The first involves analysis of a subsequent grant writing class I taught after implementing one or more pedagogical strategies discussed in this article, this time incorporating student insights. Another line of inquiry could involve tracing impacts on signaling and logics stemming from organizational actors' efforts to increase funding access for smaller and otherwise less-established nonprofits. And finally, studies could focus on funding signaling environments centered outside the U.S. and/or among the U.S. and non-U.S. Ultimately, these and other analyses can facilitate necessary changes in funding logics, especially for the individual and organizational actors needing them most.

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