

M.A. Project Ideas from Susan Conrad

(10/7/08 version)

Reminders about doing a project

1. A project should address a particular practical problem in the field of TESOL or applied linguistics. A project is not an academic research study like a thesis. Instead, a project should focus on producing a solution to a language-related problem in a specific context. For example, a project could design the curriculum for a new level in an existing ESL program, develop training materials for literacy volunteers in a particular program, create materials for teaching pronunciation to specific adult learners, or develop and document online learning materials.
2. A project should be do-able in one quarter. Think small. Then think smaller.
3. Students who do the project option must take the "Empirical Research Writing" course.
4. You need to get necessary background for the project you want to do. This means planning your courses carefully! If you might be interested in one of the projects here, talk with me about background courses you need.

PROJECT IDEAS

1. Develop a plan for integrating grammar instruction into high intermediate and advanced-level speaking/listening and writing (or reading) courses in IELP. Background: Some IELP instructors are wondering how the program could incorporate grammar into speaking/listening, reading, and writing classes at the higher levels, rather than having a separate grammar class. A very useful project would be to determine what grammatical structures should be covered at one of the higher levels, either for speaking/listening or writing courses.
2. Write an article for a teacher magazine/newsletter about why an M.A. in TESOL is worth the time, money, and effort if you want to be an ESL teacher. Alternatively, focus on just one experience you had as part of the M.A. program, describing it and analyzing and discussing its impact on you as a teacher or other language professional.
3. Develop corpus-based grammar or vocabulary teaching materials that can be used as supplements for specific IELP courses or as self-study supplementary materials for IELP students. The materials can be self-contained handouts or lead students through concordancing activities in a computer lab. (Darby Smith and I have a very small grant from ORTESOL for supplies for this project.)
4. Develop materials for teaching academic grammar, vocabulary, and/or generic structure, based on the PSU Corpus of Student Academic Writing, for IELP students or students in another academic intensive English program. (The Corpus of Student Academic Writing could also be used for idea #3.)

5. Expand the PSU Corpus of Student Academic Writing by collecting a large sample of student writing from the IELP or another department at PSU. Update the documentation of the corpus. Give examples of the usefulness of your addition (sample materials, for example).

6. Refine the online concordancer for the PSU Corpus of Student Academic Writing. (Ask me about where to find the latest version.)

7. Write an article for a teacher magazine about how your experience with corpus linguistics has affected your view of language.

8. Design a workshop about corpus linguistics for in-service teacher training. (Several of our graduates have ended up introducing new colleagues to corpus linguistics.)

9. Using Mark Davies' Corpus of Contemporary American English and the online search tools (www.americancorpus.org), create activities for students to supplement units in the Azar grammar books (still the best selling grammar books in the world).

Courses for background (in addition to required courses)

- Corpus Linguistics in Language Teaching – for any project using corpus linguistics
- Grammar for TESOL – for any project related to grammar
- Curriculum Design & Materials Development – especially if you have little teaching or materials writing experience and want to do a project developing materials