

Final Project: Professional White Papers & Presentations

Genre: The term *white paper* refers to a well-researched report of any length on a particular topic. It is designed to help readers in the public, administrative and corporate worlds understand a particular situation, solve a problem, or make a decision. In addition, the business world is increasingly using the term *white paper* to promote a product in marketing.

We will have several communication workshops before the end of the semester to cover resources and genre norms for proposals, report writing, team presentations, and slide design/use.

Motivation: This assignment will give you the opportunity to (1) synthesize what you have learned this semester, (2) explore aspects of American culture and communication that particularly interest you, (3) add to your knowledge of how your own culture and communication context has influenced your reactions to American life, (4) practice communicating in many different genres, including conversation, negotiation, formal presentations, proposals and (5) have an impact on communication culture at MIT.

Description of your assignment: Whether you have been a student at MIT for six months or for three years, you have had to work out how to navigate the communication norms of this academic culture, embedded in the broader US culture. Your experience can be an important source of information for the faculty and administrators who design curricula and learning experiences, establish campus policies, and build communities at MIT. It can also help other MIT students, present and future, recognize and appreciate the interconnections between culture and communication.

As bilingual/bicultural students in 21G.221, you have deepened your understanding of the cultural context—history, language, geography, religion, institutions—in which American values and communication norms are embedded. Now you will have the opportunity to help others at MIT gain cross-cultural literacy.

In small teams you will do one of the following:

1. Produce a coherent and well-supported set of *realistic guidelines* for MIT's International Students Office to support matriculated binational undergraduate, international undergraduate, or international special students (choose *one* group) in their adaptation to MIT culture.

E.g., What are the major barriers to these students' adjustment to MIT? From the students' perspective what conditions, activities, or information could best ease the transition to the MIT?

E.g., How can specific differences in communication styles between the mainstream Anglo-Americans and one or two other countries lead to problems for these bicultural students? Provide guidelines for the ISO to distribute to prospective students.

2. Identify and define *one particular problem* experienced by MIT's international or

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bilingual/bicultural students that most needs attention and recommend *a realistic solution* to the problem in a white paper to an appropriate member of MIT's upper administration (President, Chancellor, Dean).

E.g., What is the impact of the current political situation and discourse on one bicultural or international students? What does MIT need to do better to support students in this context?

E.g., Some say that using the health care system at MIT is complicated, irregular and definitely not user friendly. Why is it so confusing for international students and what can MIT do to remedy the situation?

3. Identify and describe several aspects of the undergraduate support system that have been *particularly successful* and provide concrete examples to support your *positive* assessment; i.e., what is working well?

E.g., What is the impact of the current political situation and discourse on MIT's bilingual/bicultural or international students? What is particularly helpful about the way MIT is dealing with the situation?

E.g., How do the differences in communication styles between the US and one or two other countries free international students from particular cultural/communication restraints?

4. Provide a *substantive background to one particular aspect* of adjusting to life as a bicultural or international student at MIT to help staff involved in undergraduate life better understand the students' perspective?

E.g., What are some surprising taboos at MIT / in the USA that you were unprepared to manage? Why?

E.g., If an important aspect of American life is portrayed in a distorted way in the media of X country, explain how and why this occurs, and how you adapted to the reality when you arrived.

Final Product: White Paper

Depending on its nature, your reports will vary in format and length. For example, you may want to integrate a survey instrument and data set; a FAQ brochure; a series of webpages that could potentially be integrated into the ISO homepage; a series of images; audio or video clips; or an annotated list of mixed media resources for prospective international students.

Final Product: Team Presentations

On the day of your presentation, each team must hand in a hard copy *dossier* that includes the following: All drafts of (1) the proposal, (2) the annotated list of resources, (3) the outline, and (4) presentation slides, printed 4 slides/page.

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The Multi-step Process. Creating the paper and presentation as a team will take place throughout the second half of the semester. It will begin in Week 6, when you will identify the topics that most interest you, and it involves different in-class and homework tasks, as well as plenty of practice and feedback.

Week	%	Tasks
6-11e	5	Annotated bibliography in progress
6-11	5	White paper proposal draft #1
12-13e	5	White paper proposal draft #2, including bibliography + final outline
13-15e	NA	Team presentation rehearsals
14e	10	Final report: Formats may vary
14-15e	10	Team Presentations with Q & A (5% individual; 10% team)

Step #1: The first step is to start identifying broad areas within the context of 21G.221 that interest *you as an individual*, for example:

- Role of argumentation in the US / at MIT
- Difficult conversations in the US / at MIT
- Differences between academic systems in country X and the US: teaching & learning styles; teacher/student relationships; assignments
- Adjusting to English language in daily use
- Fitting in to MIT dormitory and social life
- Understanding American/MIT humor
- Friendships in the US / at MIT: barriers; aids; value
- Taking care of oneself day to day at MIT: schedule; food; sleep; exercise; balance
- American/MIT health care: Doctors; appointments; mental health; treatments
- Free speech in US / at MIT
- Religion in US / at MIT
- Race in US / at MIT
- American/MIT visual communication, for example: fashion, arts, urban form, advertising

Step #2: After conducting a survey, I will put together teams based on your interests. You will be working in small teams of two or three. You may choose any topic or question that intrigues the team—as long as it involves features of American culture(s) and communication norms, enhances your understanding of your life here, and lends itself to appropriate research that will lead to increasing the cultural literacy of other units at MIT.

Your team's first job will be to narrow down the topic so that it can be reasonably developed into a white paper and a **15- to 20-minute presentation**.

Step #3: Your team will be responsible for submitting **Proposal I** + preliminary annotated bibliography.

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This is a two-to-four-page document (1.5 spaced) in which you describe the question or topic that you plan to address and include an initial annotated list of some of the resources you will use. You should be familiar with the notions of common knowledge and citing evidence from varied sources, such as surveys; books and scholarly journals on higher education, culture and communication; as well as films, TV, music and other popular culture.

All materials that you use to illustrate and support your arguments must come from reputable sources. Please be sure to include *at least two of each* of the following: newspaper/magazine articles; articles from scholarly journals; hard copy books; other media (blogs, personal interviews, surveys, on-line resources, feature films, documentaries, TV shows, radio programs, or live performances). All documentation must be internally consistent and cited according to APA or Chicago conventions. See the Stellar Assignment Folder for an example of an annotated bibliography.

Step #4 Proposal II + annotated bibliography + outline

All groups will be expected to add and refine research sources that you have found in the interim between Proposal Version I and Proposal Version II. Depending on my feedback, you may need to substantially revise or simply fine tune and resubmit your original proposal and bibliography. In addition, you must include a tentative outline.

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Depending on its nature, your reports will vary in length. You may want to include, as part of your report, a survey instrument and data set; a FAQs brochure; a series of webpages to potentially integrate into the homepage of an appropriate MIT unit; a series of images, audio or video clips; or an annotated list of mixed media resources to help prospective bicultural or international students adjust to the American context.

Team Presentations

Every team member must speak, so the length of time needed will depend on the number of people on the team. Appropriate visual aids must support the presentations. At the start of the presentation, each team must hand in a hard copy *dossier* that includes the following: All drafts of (1) the proposal, (2) the annotated list of resources, (3) the outline, and (4) presentation slides, printed 4 slides/page.

Before the official presentations, each team will have the opportunity to rehearse and receive extensive feedback. Bring with you an outline of the team presentation and hard copies of your slides. The more complete you can make these materials, the more guidance I can give you for a successful final report and presentation.

Checklist for Effective Proposals

An effective proposal answers the key questions satisfactorily and conform to the reader's expectations about format, contents, level of detail, and tone.

Can you make the following claims about your proposal?

1. My group's proposal shows sensitivity to **audience and purpose**. This is reflected in the

- Format
- Tone
- Amount and quality of background information
- Amount of concrete details

2. My group's proposal has a **strong introduction**, including clear expression of

- Context/background
- Problem/question/issue/motivation
- Objectives

3. My group's proposal provides a detailed description of my **approach** (using future verb forms) that allows the audience to be confident in my competence.

4. My group's proposal clearly states the **benefits/expected outcomes** as a result of my project.

5. My group's proposal includes appropriate **annotated bibliography**.

6. My group's proposal demonstrates the accurate and appropriate use of paragraphs with topic sentences, sentence boundaries, grammar and word choice.

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