

My MSCA Experience

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About me

- PI on the MSCA project *Nation of Mechanics: Animality and Indigeneity in American Automotive Culture (NOMECH)* (2023—)
- Originally from Sheffield, UK. Moved to Norway with my family because of the MSCA.
- Completed my PhD in English Literature (U of Sheffield) in Summer 2022.
- Successful on my first MSCA application (with lots of help and luck!) – but plenty of ups and downs on the way.

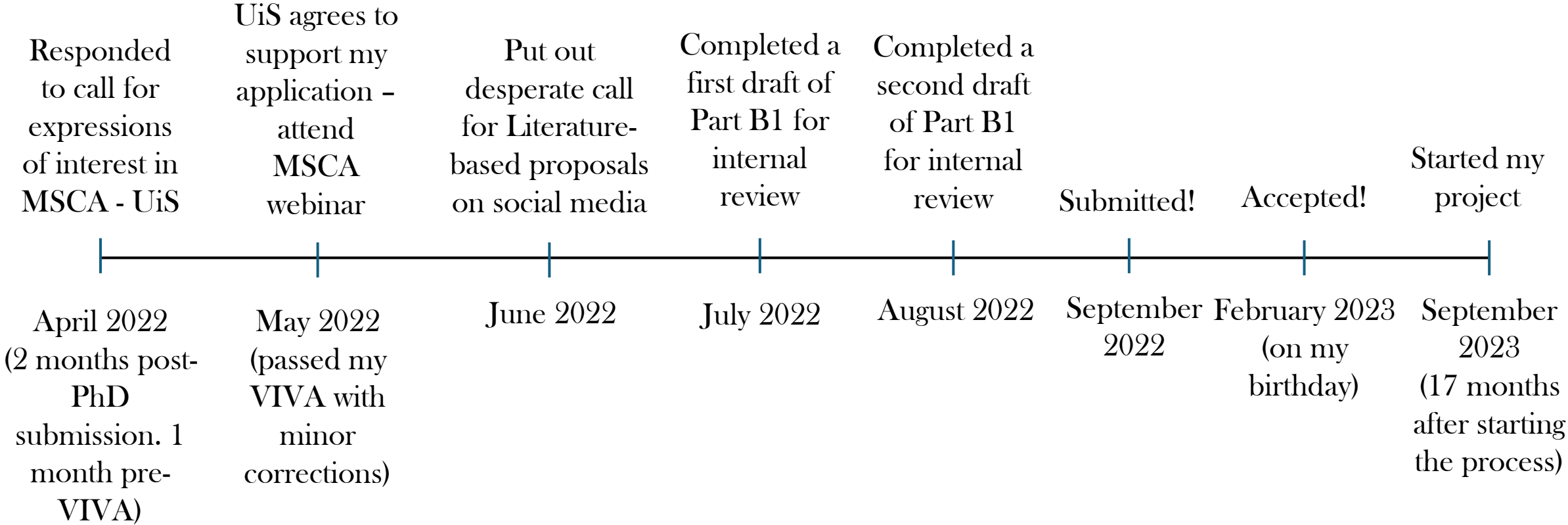
About my project

Examines literary representations of animals, automobiles, and the natural environment – focusing on texts written by Indigenous authors.

Develops a novel approach to reading the road journey in American fiction (a genre which has historically excluded Indigenous writers) by centring Indigenous stories in which the environment is frequently presented as a character in and of itself, in contrast to the colonial tendency to personify the cars and ignore the living nonhuman world under the wheels.

Combining approaches from literary studies and the environmental humanities, **NOMECH** explores the extent to which Indigenous American authors present counter-narratives to the colonial story of automobility in which human contact with the natural environment is defined by driving over it: moving from a relationship based on dominance, conquest, and subjugation to one which places more emphasis on mutually beneficial ways of living with other animals and technology.

Getting here (part 1 of many)



Getting started

Post-PhD:

- Short-term work for University of Sheffield research dept. (kept my library access).
- Had to get a full-time office job (proofreading for a predatory publisher – awful).
- 1 article published in the *Journal of American Studies*, 1 under consideration, 1 in production.
- Applying for 3 entirely different postdocs at the same time. Had not even heard of MSCA prior to seeing a social media call from a Prof. I had crossed paths with.
- Personal life! I was getting married Summer 2022 – feeling a lot of pressure!

Getting help

- UiS agree to support my application – vote of confidence!
- Attended webinars on how to write an application and was shown some examples from UiS.
- These were helpful, but necessarily unspecific. Examples from UiS were from other disciplines.
- Asked my (small) network of social media followers to spread the word that I was looking for examples of successful literary studies MSCA applications – and received one!
- This was by far the most helpful element of writing my first draft, and is my top recommendation!

Drafting

- Tried to write at least one paragraph every evening after work.
- Used the example I had been sent to structure and pace the application (the subjects were, of course, entirely different).
- Treated the first draft as if it were the final draft (completed, within the page range, (nearly) all the references).
- Draft 1 contained some wild claims and ideas (an exhibition in what turns out to be a very small car museum in Stavanger which had already closed down).

Academic Crisis

- Offered a different postdoc on an ERC project in Konstanz, Germany.
- Had not seriously discussed the practicalities of any of these postdocs (all abroad) with my wife (of a few months).
- Was not going to work for us as a family, so had to turn it down.
- Still working on the MSCA, but stopped looking for new academic positions.
- Was able to negotiate some consultancy work on the ERC project, but started retraining as a software engineer!
- Submitted the MSCA application.

Accepted!

- On my birthday, February 2023, found out that my MSCA project had been funded.
- First thought: “how am I going to explain this to my wife?”
- MSCA offer of family and relocation allowance crucial.
- Stavanger was more practical in terms of my family considerations.
- Was very well supported post-acceptance (by host institution).

What they liked about my application (I am happy to share my B1)

- Engaging introduction to the topic (2 paragraphs which framed the challenge and then the project's specific interventions)
- Originality and Innovative concepts section (5 bullet points about exactly what was new and groundbreaking about the project)
- Specificity of the work packages and how they are related to each other (I had a theme running through the names of each WP to make this even clearer)
- I did not overstate my position as a (very) early career researcher, and made it clear about what I hoped the MSCA would do for me (I want to work as a lecturer, this means I need some more publications, I also need to develop skills beyond literary studies)
- Impact beyond academic publications (collaborating with scholars and students from the Indigenous nations I was writing about, public-facing outputs).

Three things I got wrong in early drafts

- I did not make it clear, in simple terms, the academic areas in which I hoped to make impact. In the final version: “This study will make a significant contribution to literary studies and the environmental humanities (EH) by...”
- I did not know what kinds of outputs were realistic while also being suitably ambitious. In the final version: One major output every 6 months (article *submission* or event), with some smaller outputs (conference papers, research talks)
- I did not understand (or know how to present) Deliverables and Milestones. In the final version:

Gantt Chart Details	
Deliverables	Milestones
D1.1 Presentation outlining project aims at The Greenhouse work-in-progress session	M1 Complete plan for first journal article (D1.2)
D1.2 Journal article submission	M2 Review of conference (D2.1) for The Greenhouse
D2.1 Conference paper on Seals’s work	M3 Evaluation of Career Development Plan progress
D2.2 Journal article submission	M4 Visit KWEC
D3.1 Conference paper on Alexie’s work	M5 Final progress review
D3.2 Journal article submission	
D4.1 Presentation at The Greenhouse summarising research trip	
D4.2 Exhibition with KWEC	
D5.1 Creation of Personal Career Development Plan	
D5.2 Popular media article on project outcomes	

My best advice

- Seek help.
- Get internal feedback (2 rounds if possible).
- Be as specific as possible about details of your methodology (“close reading analysis of [these texts] looking specifically for examples of [X, Y, and Z] revealing [what I’ve said I hope to show].”
- Have backup plans (a lot of this is luck)
- Push yourself into new (but related) professional arenas (I’ve now curated a museum exhibition)!

Get in touch!

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For mor information about the NOMECH project,
scan the QR code or visit:

<https://www.uis.no/en/research/the-greenhouse-centre-for-environmental-humanities/environmental-humanities/nation-of>

