

Transnational Writing Program Administration, edited by David Martins.
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“Transnational” and “translingual” are terms increasingly heard in writing studies conversations, but what these terms might mean in the actual teaching of writing—and in the design and management of writing programs—is gradually evolving. The important collection of essays under review here addresses aspects of program design and management that all WPAs will consider vital. Reading this collection of thoughtful and incisive essays will provide readers much food for thought.

However, current WPAs and others looking for models or confident advice on building “transnational” writing-centered initiatives will be hard pressed to find them here. Except for parts of some chapters and the entire essay by Doreen Starke-Meyerring, which describes several successful Globally-Networked Learning Environments (GNLEs), the overwhelming tone of the collection is pessimistic. The essayists tend to be much more emphatic on what to avoid than on what to do.

Coming in for stern attack throughout the collection are U.S. universities that have expanded across borders with programs that try to replicate what has been successful in their home environments in the U.S. The juxtaposed chapters by Danielle Zawodny Wetzel and Dudley W. Reynolds (Carnegie Mellon University) and by Alan S. Weber et al. (Weill Medical College at Cornell) provide detailed narratives of how assumptions behind writing curricula and expectations about students that fit the home campuses failed, as part of the Education City initiative in Qatar. Wetzel and Reynolds give a frank appraisal of how courses, methods, and expectations had to evolve in Qatar in order to fit the language and cultural backgrounds of the students—while also attempting to “protect the brand” of Carnegie Mellon. In the chapter by Weber et al., the segments written by Ian Miller, Rodney Sharkey, and Autumn Watts, all of whom taught at the Doha campus, describe why the original model failed and how all aspects of design and approach had to change to be of service to students.

The chapter by Shanti Bruce is particularly striking in this regard, as it is the only essay in the collection that offers a first-hand account by a WPA of how vital it is for U.S. writing program managers to teach in the cross-borders programs they coordinate. Realizing that she could not know what instructors and students were facing in the five-weekend Bahamian courses being offered by Florida’s Nova Southeastern University until she taught those courses (in business writing and world literature), Bruce proceeded to learn from her

students and from fellow faculty, and the results were a revelation to her as both teacher and WPA.

Closing the collection (save for the Afterword by Bruce Horner), Doreen Starke-Meyerring's chapter on GNLEs provides a refreshing alternative to what most of the essays attack as the "expansionist" and "export" assumptions of much transnational U.S. higher education. As coeditor of the 2008 *Designing Globally Networked Learning Environments: Visionary Partnerships, Policies, and Pedagogies*, she speaks from deep experience in both designing and carrying out what she terms "true" partnerships between universities in "negotiating" and continually refining courses and mutual learning opportunities. In her descriptions of a number of GNLEs in different subject areas, countries, and cross-university partnerships, we see how far the GNLE model of mutual learning by students in different locales travels from the notion of a prefabricated course being "taught" in a different cultural context to students with varied and distinctive goals, strengths, and perceived needs.

Editor David Martins was careful to recognize that, for U.S. WPAs like himself, the concept of "transnational" encompasses not only explicitly country-to-country initiatives such as those described in the essays cited thus far, or in the chapter by Alyssa O'Brien and Christine Alfano that focuses on technological challenges and affordances in country-to-country online and hybrid teaching. Martins also includes a chapter by Chris Anson and Christiane Donahue that illustrates the diversity of the concept of "program," which the authors demonstrate through widely contrasting descriptions of entities in Saudi Arabia, Belgium, and France.

Several of the chapters illuminate a different, but much more widespread definition of "transnational": the sense that U.S. college and university home campuses increasingly serve students who were born outside the U.S. or whose parents emigrated from other countries. The companion concept of "translingual" is especially pertinent in this context, as it describes the highly varied relationships that we teachers and our students experience among the languages that we encounter in different parts of our lives and of which we have varying levels of knowledge. Several chapters of the collection explore this nexus between "transnational" and "translingual" in writing programs occurring largely on U.S. campuses.

For example, two juxtaposed chapters consider a specific transnational/translingual environment, the Mexico-U.S. border region that includes both the University of Texas–El Paso and New Mexico State University. The chapter by Barry Thatcher, Omar Montoya, and Kelly Medina-López describes six cultural groups of persons living in the border region of El Paso–Ciudad Juárez in order to show significant cultural differences that might affect performance and perspectives in writing courses at UTEP and NMSU. The chapter by Beth

Brunk-Chavez et al. is an honest appraisal of how university placement and admissions procedures operate on student models that do not fully recognize this diversity and how writing programs and student affairs offices that on the one hand intend to bring necessary services to diverse students may on the other operate without cross-communication among service units. In both chapters, the writers want their courses and teaching methods, as well as university administrative policies, to avoid the commonplace assumption in the U.S. that speaking and writing like a “monolingual” native speaker of English is the goal of a writing course.

Avoidance of the “monolingual English” assumption in writing programs is a major theme in other chapters, as is the basically flawed idea—critiqued in the chapters listed below—that writing courses can be “standard” and noncontextualized:

- Wendy Olson’s “mapping” of twenty-four community college programs in Washington state that advertise ESL courses as autonomous “commodities”;
- Christine Tardy’s review of twenty-eight college and university websites that proclaim how they “embrace diversity,” while their writing program websites portray language diversity as a reason for extra course requirements;
- Rebecca Dingo, Rachel Riedner, and Jennifer Wingard’s stringent critique of the outsourcing by a University of Houston business law professor of her students’ papers to an online “feedback” service;
- Nancy Bou Ayash’s critique of U.S. assumptions of monolingualism in contrast to multi- and translingual assumptions in Lebanon and Singapore.

Perhaps the most incisive analysis of possible meanings of “translingual” in the collection is Hem Paudel’s close comparison of the similar terms “multilingual” and “plurilingual.” He suggests “mesodiscursivity” as an alternative, a kind of middle space that respects both the local and the larger discursive world. In offering suggestions for WPAs and teachers, Paudel recommends mainstreaming, rather than separate ESL sections, because mainstreaming offers the chance for students to learn “mesodiscursively” from one another’s language journeys and negotiations.

David Martins and the contributing authors deserve congratulations for an engaging, provocative first attempt at helping to establish priorities for transnational writing program administration. As always, such pioneering efforts lead to thoughts of what still needs to be done. I have several thoughts in this regard.

First, for an anthology that takes U.S. higher education to task for its U.S. centrism, this is a very U.S.-centered collection. Almost all of the contributors are associated in some capacity with U.S. writing programs and/or English departments, or with transnational programs run by those universities. To some extent, scholars from other countries are cited in the chapters, but the U.S.-based writers are choosing citations and interpreting them.

Second, the dominant voices in the collection are heard as theoretical commentators and reviewers of theory on the situations they describe. There are almost no teacher voices; hence, teacher voices stand out the few times they occur. Equally important, although every chapter in this collection makes assumptions and draws conclusions about students, student voices are almost completely silent. On occasion, statistics on student enrollment or student pass rates are given, but we do not hear from students themselves.

Third, this is in most chapters a polemical collection. It relies almost exclusively on citations from other writers as evidence. The rich tradition of qualitative and mixed methods research in writing studies and applied linguistics is largely missing, except for the two studies (Tardy's and Olson's) based on their analysis of websites.

Why are these omissions and silences important to correct in future work on this subject? The polemic of the collection contends that the expansionist, export model of U.S. higher education is basically flawed, as it disregards the actual needs and strengths of the people it purportedly serves. As part of this "commodity" model, the assumption of a "standard English" is also basically flawed, holding students to a performance model no longer viable (if it ever was) in a translingual, unceasingly dynamic world. But convincing those who set policies and financial agendas will take more than polemics from insiders. It will require research that includes systematic observation of classrooms, testimony from teachers, the considered arguments of partners in transnational projects, analysis of student texts, interviews with students and teachers, and other forms of research that respect the people our programs purport to serve.

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Work Cited

Starke-Meyerring, Doreen, and Melanie Wilson, eds. *Designing Globally Networked Learning Environments: Visionary Partnerships, Policies, and Pedagogies*. Rotterdam: Sense, 2008. Print.