

Composition Forum 41, Spring 2019

From English-Centric to Multilingual: The Norman M. Eberly Multilingual Writing Center at Dickinson College



Noreen Lape

Abstract: The forces of globalization and the development of English as a lingua franca have made many scholars and practitioners highlight the urgent need for foreign language literacy. The Norman M. Eberly Multilingual Writing Center (MWC) at Dickinson College addresses that need by offering peer writing tutoring in eleven languages. This profile explains the development of the MWC, the rationale and benefits of the model, the collaborative governance structure that undergirds it, and the redefined pedagogical goals of tutor training.

A 2019 report from the Modern Language Association found that U.S. colleges and universities cut 651 foreign language programs between 2013-2016 (Johnson). The cuts come at a time when foreign language literacy “has become more urgent,” as Jean Marie Schultz argues, “because of globalization” (72). Schultz labels English the “Microsoft of languages” for its “dominant role in the marketplace.” She voices the concerns of foreign language scholars who fear that “learning languages other than English will fall away and that the cultural differences that are so valued in the field will be reduced and over time irrevocably lost to the lure of American materialism and economic forces” (69). Schultz’s concerns about the hegemony of the English language are echoed by the 2014 U.S. House and Senate. In a joint letter to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS), they argue:

English is no longer sufficient as a lingua franca—neither at home or abroad. The percentage of the world’s population that speaks English as a first language is declining rapidly; if current demographic trends continue, only 5% will be native English speakers by 2050. At the same time, the ability to communicate in languages other than English has never been more important. (“Letter from Members”; “Letter from U.S.”)

The purpose of this joint letter was to request that the AAAS form a Commission on Language Learning that would study the “current state of language education” (“Commission”). In questioning the sufficiency of a lingua franca, the U.S House and Senate challenge monolingualism, maintaining that foreign language learning breeds “greater international understanding and cooperation,” which is necessary for solving problems—economic, scientific, diplomatic, technological, among others—from a global perspective.

Writing centers, which originated in the U.S., have been mainly English-centric, supporting both monolingual English speakers and multilingual English learners. Most international writing centers, including those located in countries in which English is not the native language, tend to support writers of English.^{1} There is no scholarship on foreign language writing tutoring in English-language writing center publications—*WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*; *Writing Center Journal*; and *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*. Yet there has been growing interest in foreign language writing tutoring as evidenced by posts on the WCENTER listserv.^{2} In addition, some writing centers provide foreign language writing tutoring at least on an ad hoc basis—such as when there is an English writing tutor who is fluent in another language(s).

The Norman M. Eberly Multilingual Writing Center at Dickinson College evolved from an English-centric to a multilingual model. Dickinson’s Multilingual Writing Center (MWC) responds in a unique way to the “CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers,” which urges writing programs to “recognize and take responsibility for the regular presence of second language writers in writing classes, to understand their characteristics, and to develop instructional and administrative practices that are sensitive to their linguistic and cultural needs.” The MWC staff

necessarily views writing and writing center work through a second language lens since over 50% of all visits are from second language writers across eleven languages—namely Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. The tutors are self-identified native and nonnative speakers, including domestic students (some of whom are heritage speakers or bilinguals), matriculated international students, and “foreign” exchange students (called Overseas Assistants or OSAs). Thus, we employ English writing tutors for whom English is an additional language; U.S. speakers of English who tutor writers in a foreign language; and both matriculated international students and exchange students who tutor writing in their home languages and, in some cases, their second or even third languages. Eschewing the remediation model, the MWC serves all writers: proficient native speakers, U.S. students tackling a second or third language, and international students learning a third language in their second language. As is best practice in English-centric writing centers, these tutors assist writers with developing their ideas, understanding genres, organizing material, crafting sentences, and analyzing and correcting patterns of error, among other things. In addition, they help writers to develop a writing process that works in a foreign language, realize the difference between composing and translating, and understand how cultural differences manifest in writing.

This Program Profile explains the genesis of the MWC and the benefits of integrating foreign language writing tutoring into the English writing center. It identifies the model’s two most important features: a collaborative governance structure and specialized tutor training pedagogy. Finally, it ends with advice on why and how a writing center might start the process of becoming multilingual.

The Multilingual Writing Center at Dickinson College

Located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Dickinson College is a highly-selective, private liberal arts college with an enrollment of approximately 2,400 students. The college is nationally recognized as a leader in sustainability and global education. As a global education leader, Dickinson offers internationalized courses across the curriculum. Two-thirds of the students choose to deepen their global engagement by participating in the study abroad programs available in over twenty-three countries, many opting to pursue their studies in another language (“About”). Complementing the internationalized curriculum, the college offers majors and/or minors in twelve foreign languages; all students must attain intermediate-level proficiency in a foreign language in order to graduate.

The Writing Center was established in 1978 to support a new English composition sequence, but it is currently a stand-alone program that serves the college’s three-tiered writing requirement (first-year seminar, writing in the disciplines, and senior capstone courses). At the rank of Associate Provost of Academic Affairs, I direct the Writing Program, including the MWC. While a strategic mission of the college is to develop global citizens, the MWC contributes to this mission by training tutors who are literate in multiple languages and skilled as global citizens to work with writers as they construct their voices—linguistically, rhetorically, and culturally. In light of this mission, in 2010 I extended the Writing Center’s services to include peer writing tutoring in ten foreign languages. In recent years, the MWC has facilitated close to 5000 sessions in English and foreign languages as shown in [Figure 1](#).

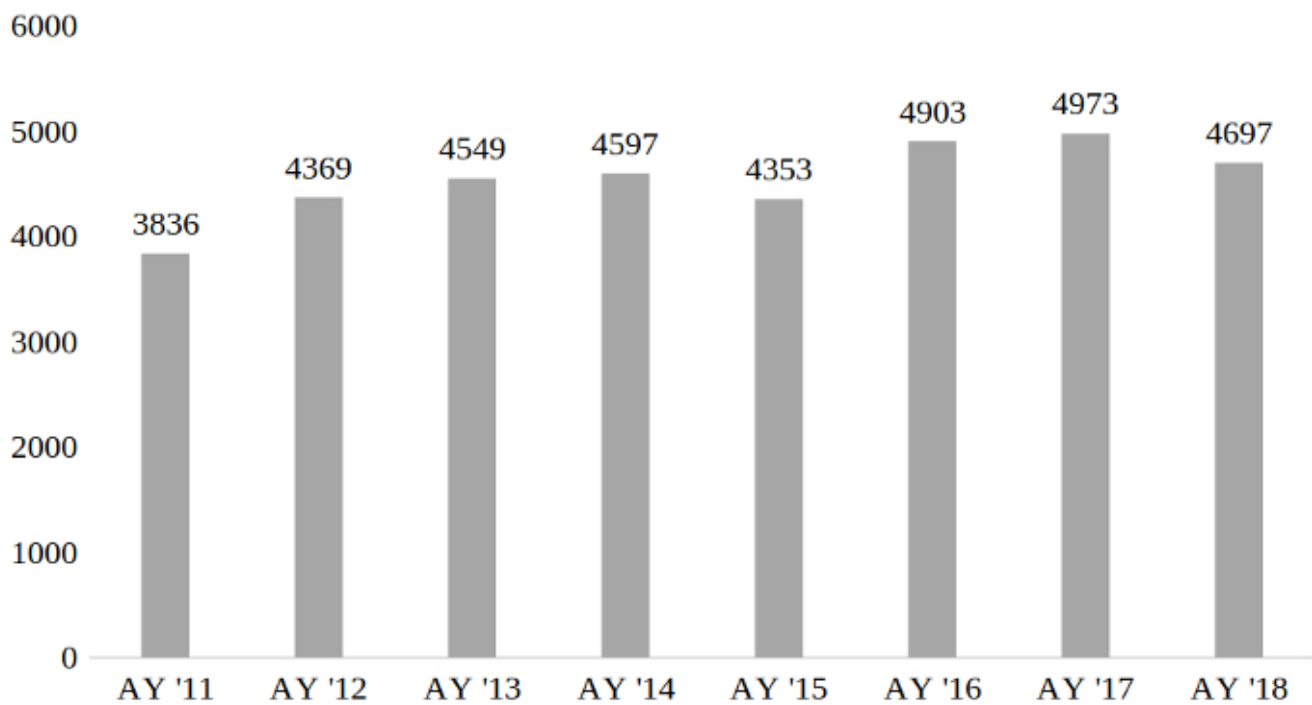


Figure 1. Total Number of English and Foreign Language Visits by Year

At the same time, the number of foreign language visits continues to grow as shown in [Figure 2](#).

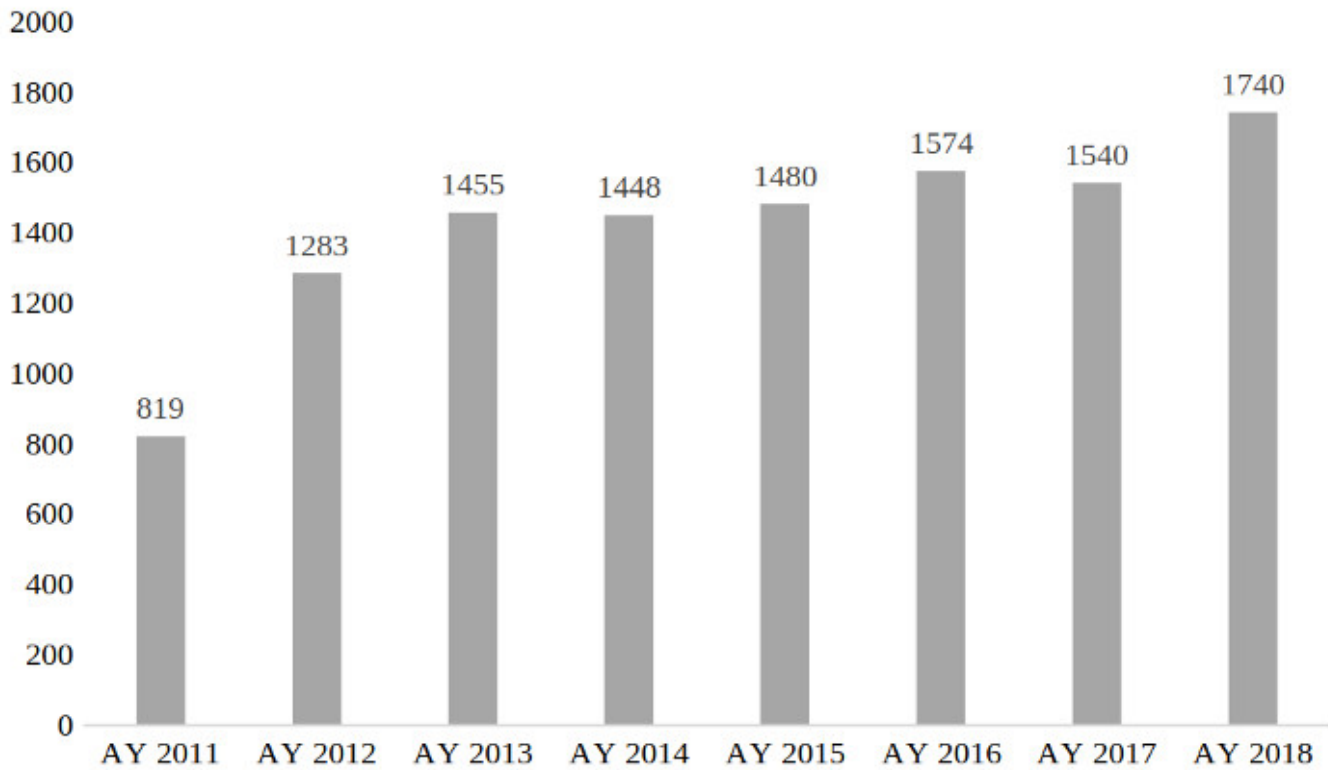


Figure 2. Foreign Language Visits by Academic Year

On average, 450 foreign language writers (or roughly 40% of students enrolled in foreign language courses) work with a writing tutor each year. In addition to face-to-face writing tutoring, the Writing Associates (Fellows) Program—or classroom-based peer tutoring—provides several writing associates each year for writing-intensive foreign language courses. The foreign language writing tutors and writing associates have permeated the writing culture and serve as an essential support for both student writers and teachers of writing.

The Ethnographic Tour

The MWC was the result of the “ethnographic tour” of the writing culture that I undertook during my first year at the college. In *The Impact of Culture on Organizational Decision Making*, William G. Tierney suggests a method for shaping a program to an institution when he outlines an ethnographic approach to administrative work. Rather than rushing to make changes, implement imported models, and/or solve problems, Tierney advises administrators of all kinds to gain “an understanding of [the] organization’s culture” in order to approach “the organization as an ... interpretive undertaking.” Such “cultural understanding” is “essential” for those who want to “foment change in the organization” (3). Tierney cautions administrators not to presume “that all organizations should function similarly” and, instead, to develop “a schema to diagnose their own organizations” (Tierney 39). To do so, he suggests that administrators act as “researchers” who, like participant-observers, “do not enter the field with preconceived notions about the problem to be studied but, instead, attempt to understand the problem ‘from the native’s point of view’” (14). The researcher-administrator explores a “variety of settings” in order to “uncover informational data such as language habits, forms and patterns of written communication, and the agendas and interactions at various kinds of meetings” (15). In diagnosing and interpreting an organization, the researcher-administrator uses the qualitative tools of an ethnographer, like observations and interviews, that are structured and open-ended (Tierney 15).

Following Tierney’s advice, I visited approximately thirty departments and posed the same five questions.

1. How do you implement the “three-tiered” writing requirement in your department—that is first-year seminar, writing intensive, and senior capstone writing courses?
2. Where is writing taught in your curriculum?
3. How do you teach majors the writing specific to your discipline?
4. How do you teach the writing process?
5. What kind of support can the writing program provide for you?

With the language departments, I added one more question: do you teach your students to write American academic discourse in the target language, or do you teach them culturally-based forms and conventions? Positioning myself as a participant-observer, I took copious field notes and collected writing artifacts. In piecing together the departments’ narratives, I formed a composite picture of attitudes, practices, frustrations, needs, and successes related to teaching writing.

The ethnographic tour revealed that foreign language faculty assigned multiple essays in a variety of genres that grew in length and complexity as the students progressed through the curriculum. Most of them had experimented with different writing pedagogies, particularly peer review. Some faculty were wary of the limits of peer review after observing non-fluent L2 learners leading one another astray, but they were reluctant to abandon it all together since they valued revision. They saw a possible solution in a writing center where they could employ carefully selected and trained undergraduate writing tutors to work with their second language writers. Faculty across the languages supported the idea of a centralized writing center staffed by trained and proficient undergraduate peer writing tutors, some of whom were OSAs. The ethnographic tour quickly led to my working with a group of foreign language faculty to propose a multilingual writing center.

A Rationale for the MWC

Why would an English-centric writing center want to become an MWC? My position outside the English Department, the traditional affiliation of writing center directors, and in academic affairs shaped the way I approached my writing program work—that is, in support of writing across the disciplines. The MWC model re-vision the traditional writing center by building a linguistically inclusive and democratic environment, supporting student learning and faculty teaching goals, connecting to broader institutional missions and goals, and making tutors’ study abroad experiences relevant on campus.

The MWC models an inclusive and democratic environment. In institutions with a strong commitment to writing and global education—ones in which foreign language study is encouraged or even required—all students, regardless of citizenship, are first and second language learners. The MWC, then, contests the stereotype of “ESL students” as “problem” students with specially confounding and substandard literacy skills when English learners become a subset of a diverse group of language learners. Instead, the literacy practices of English learners are re-valued when

they serve as “authorities” on their linguistic cultures. At the same time, the existence of foreign language learners as foreign language writing tutors and “ESL students” as English writing tutors calls into question the “de facto authority and privilege” of native speakers as models of “communicative skills” for nonnatives (Kramsch 359). The MWC calls into question the native versus non-native speaker dichotomy when native English speakers on campus become non-native speakers in the MWC. The MWC, then, functions as an inclusive environment that supports “the multiple possibilities for self-expression in language” (Kramsch 368).

The MWC model complements the classroom environment and supports student learning goals. Foreign language writers in the U.S., as opposed to their English-as-an-additional-language counterparts, do not have the experience of linguistic immersion. The needs of these foreign language learners vary considerably depending on whether they are true beginners or previous students of the target language. Although classmates who are heritage learners can be resources for practicing the target language, they may not be comfortable fulfilling that role and may create “linguistic insecurity in students” (Reichelt et al. 25-27). Though not the true linguistic immersion of study abroad, the MWC constructs a language community in which writers practice the target language with proficient tutors. MWC tutors, who are not in classes with writers, can be trained to attend to the anxieties of second language learners. In addition, the “compartmentalization” of student and teacher learning goals can “lead to a misalignment between teacher and student.” For example, Lourdes Ortega cites a study of Spanish instructors who used writing to help students learn the language. The study revealed that the instructors failed to recognize the learning needs of heritage speakers who wanted to learn to write—that is, develop their writing skills in Spanish (243). MWC tutors can align themselves with writers by helping writers identify and pursue their learning goals. While the MWC model supports the individual needs of student learners, it also enables foreign language faculty to develop their approaches to teaching writing, as I will discuss below.

The MWC model potentially links the writing center to central institutional missions, like global education and foreign language literacy. Many students in U.S. colleges make plans to enroll in foreign language courses and study abroad in languages other than English. A report issued by the Modern Language Association based on 2013 data reveals that there were over 1.5 million students enrolled in modern language courses other than English (Goldberg, Looney, and Lusin 2). Further, 16.7% of all undergraduate enrollments in the modern languages were in advanced (defined as third and fourth year) courses (Goldberg, Looney, and Lusin 40). Language students stand to benefit from the assistance of trained peer writing tutors who can support their literacy needs. In addition, while many twenty-first century students aspire to careers in the global arena, their immediate goals often include study abroad. According to the Open Doors Report published by the Institute of International Education (IIE), a non-profit founded in 1919 with the purpose of creating educational connections between the U.S. and other nations, there was a 65% increase in the number of students who studied abroad between 2003 and 2013. Among the top study abroad destinations were Italy (10%), Spain (9%), France (6%), China (5%), Germany (3%), Costa Rica (3%), and Japan (2%). Recently, the IIE proposed the Generation Study Abroad initiative, which aims to provide resources for 600,000 U.S. students to study abroad by 2019. Given this trend in higher education, the MWC is specially positioned to bridge the home and abroad environments by providing writing tutors who can mediate the complex factors that impede the development of foreign language writers. Thus, the MWC contributes to the internationalization of the campus and curriculum, a dominant trend in colleges and universities across the country.

The MWC ameliorates “study abroad re-entry shock” or “reverse culture shock.” Upon returning from study abroad, some students “have changed and have learned to accept and value new ways of thinking and doing things,” only to experience stress and anxiety when they “discover that things at home have changed or that their expectations of return have been inaccurate” (Westwood et al. 223). To stave off “potential difficulties,” many study abroad programs offer re-entry workshops that prepare students to return to the home institution. The MWC serves as a positive re-entry experience by making tutors’ study abroad experiences relevant on campus. In the MWC, tutors share narratives detailing the “new ways of thinking and doing things” that they learned at international universities and use those narratives to help their peers headed for study abroad make the transition to a new academic culture.

Collaborative Governance Structure

Having determined a need and purpose for the MWC, I convened the MWC Planning Committee. Consisting of me, my Associate Director (a multilingual writing specialist), the Director of International Student Services, and faculty representatives from the foreign language departments, the Planning Committee crafted a proposal. We identified a mission, values, and learning outcomes, [3](#) composed a budget, and determined a staffing plan that was in proportion to the varying enrollments in different languages. Collaborative governance results in faculty buy-in, which helps persuade administrators to fund a project. The MWC ran on soft money for its pilot year and then was granted a permanent budget. Ultimately, the Planning Committee conferred the leadership role on the Writing Center. The foreign language faculty saw the benefits of a centralized budget, a designated space, and experts in writing

pedagogy. In its current configuration, the MWC reinforces the goals of the foreign language departments even as it maintains its integrity as a writing center.

Anticipating that only a collaborative governance structure would sustain the MWC, the Planning Committee became the Advisory Committee. While retaining the representative membership of the Planning Committee, the Advisory Committee took on new functions—namely, recommending potential tutors, training them, and establishing policies. The single most important goal for any writing center director is to recruit and develop the best possible staff. Unless a director is a genuine polyglot, it would be impossible for one person to vet the writing abilities of tutor recruits in multiple languages. Instead, writing center directors must rely on foreign language experts on the Advisory Committee. Those invested stakeholders discuss potential tutors with their departments and then compile a list of recruits as determined by departmental consensus. Not only does this process identify excellent tutors, but it also strengthens buy-in as faculty feel comfortable promoting to their students an MWC staffed by tutors whom they have agreed are the most competent and capable.

The Advisory Committee also helps to shape and deliver training. At the start of the academic year, foreign language writing tutors attend a mandatory full-day training followed by monthly staff meetings throughout the year. My associate director and I conduct the first part of the training, which focuses on best practices for tutoring writers: agency and ownership, scaffolding a tutoring session, directive and nondirective questioning, tutoring for language acquisition, tutoring to develop and organize ideas, and working with writers to compose (rather than translate). For the second part of the training, the foreign language faculty on the Advisory Committee facilitate breakout groups with the tutors regarding language-specific tutoring issues. For the final meeting of the semester, foreign language faculty, Advisory Committee members, and tutors attend a luncheon during which the tutors share their insights on second language writing with classroom instructors. Finally, the Advisory Committee functions as a deliberative body that establishes policies.^{4}

Training Foreign Language Writing Tutors

Like traditional English-centric writing centers, an MWC is not focused solely on proofreading, editing, or linguistic correctness. While holistic foreign language writing tutors do not shy away from assisting with grammatical correctness, they are trained to consider the complexity of learning to write in a foreign language. Holistic writing tutors interrelate (rather than hierarchize) global and sentence-level concerns, evaluate the functionality of the writer's process and its impact on linguistic output, fashion a positive learning environment that mediates foreign language anxiety, and explore the relationship between writing and culture.

Best practices for foreign language writing tutors differ from those of first language writing tutors because many foreign language writers are simultaneously acquiring a language and learning to write. The traditional strategy of offering feedback to monolingual writers emphasizes higher-order concerns (HOCs) over lower-order/late-order concerns (LOCs). The MWC challenges the effectiveness of that binary with foreign language writers and poses, as an alternative, the first aspect of holistic tutoring: the toggling between HOCs and LOCs with an awareness of their interconnection. Holistic tutors recognize that foreign language writers are developing a second language writing process, learning writing conventions, and acquiring the language—all at the same time. As Ilona Leki's observes, "learning-to-write and writing-to-learn [the language] feed each other in ever expanding cycles" (105). A practical reflection of this theorizing, holistic tutoring involves the interplay between form, meaning, and writing process.

First, while some writers reduce the written product to an exercise in language acquisition, holistic writing tutors toggle between global and sentence-level concerns with an awareness of their interconnection. Among the techniques they use are noticing, hypothesis testing, metalinguistic reflection, and negotiated interaction.^{5} Second, while some foreign language writers truncate the writing process into two steps (composing and editing) or three (composing in the first language, translating into the second language, and then editing), holistic writing tutors enlarge writers' repertoires of process skills. Tutors can assist writers who draft in the native language and then translate into the target language by distinguishing between translating and composing or thinking not in terms of literal words but in terms of meaning. Inevitably, conversations about meaning lead to questions about purpose and organization. By tracing problems with the written product back to the writer's process and exploring the interplay between language acquisition and writing, foreign language writing tutors can help writers make connections between the parts and the whole.

Another aspect of holistic tutor training involves tutoring the whole person by focusing on how to create a positive learning environment so as to prevent or buffer the very real phenomenon of foreign language anxiety. Countering assumptions that foreign language anxiety is generalized anxiety transferred to the foreign language situation, Elaine Horwitz, Michael B. Horwitz, and Joann Cope posit that foreign language anxiety is actually a constellation of

“performance anxieties” rooted in dysfunctional self-perceptions, specifically about foreign language learning (127). By understanding the research on self-perceptions and their connection to writing, foreign language writing tutors can construct a learning environment that offsets anxious and dysfunctional thinking, regardless of whether the student is overtly panicked or not. Because learning environment either exacerbates or soothes anxiety, foreign language writing tutors can intentionally build a foundation upon which language learning flourishes. Foreign language writing tutors are trained proactively to create a supportive relationship with writers rather than reactively respond to “difficult” writers, especially given that anxious writers are not always easy to spot from mere observation. Such an approach focuses tutors on what they can control (learning environment) rather than on what they cannot control (emotional writers). In training, tutors discuss the obstacles foreign language anxiety creates for language learners and the means to creating a supportive learning environment that attenuates anxiety.

Another dimension of holistic tutor training involves the connection between the writer and the target culture. Many foreign language writing assignments task writers with acquiring cultural knowledge, addressing cultural audiences, and/or understanding intercultural rhetoric. In an MWC that seeks to be truly internationalized, foreign language writing tutors, particularly those who have studied abroad, may need to mediate “writing culture shock.” As part of their training, tutors analyze the conditions that create writing culture shock—namely, culture-specific academic genres and conventions, absence of support for the writing process, and conflicting definitions of “good writing.” Then they learn ways to help writers develop the intercultural competence that will enable them to reframe their shock and navigate a new writing culture. Training in intercultural competence prepares foreign language writing tutors to tackle their multiple and shifting roles: to help students understand culturally specific genres and rhetorics, to serve as useful guides who can help prepare students for the transition to another writing culture, and to impart the tools that would enable them to resolve writing culture shock.

Becoming Multilingual

In the last few decades, writing centers have continued to evolve and expand their work. It is not unusual for writing centers to support reading, learning skills, oral communication, and multimodal projects, to name a few. Foreign language writing is another logical extension of writing center work given writing centers’ privileging of language and literacy development, collaboration, peer-to-peer conversation, and intercultural competence. Yet when I have presented on the idea of the MWC, it has occasionally been met with skepticism. One colleague from a large research university asserted that the MWC at Dickinson does not speak to a common context—that is, it is not transferable to other institutions. True, not all writing centers are meant to support multiple languages just as not all writing centers assist with speaking or multimodal assignments. While certain unique institutional configurations and politics make some projects more feasible than others, I argue that the MWC model is transferable to any academic institution that values internationalization. That said, writing centers interested in exploring collaborative opportunities with foreign language colleagues might benefit from the following concrete, logistical advice.

1. Consider adopting the MWC model if your institution has a strong commitment to internationalization.

Despite the MLA’s disheartening report on foreign language education in the U.S., to quote Bénédicte de Montlaur, “The future in America, and everywhere, is multilingual. And so is the present.” In a *New York Times* editorial response to the MLA report, de Montlaur, cultural counselor of the French Embassy in the U.S., describes a “nationwide” move toward “holistic language education” vis a vis “grass-roots initiatives to provide foreign language learning” at every level of the education system. In higher education, she mentions two particularly innovative, internationalized programs: a graduate program at Georgia Tech that combines foreign language and cultural studies and an undergraduate program at the University of Rhode Island in which students earn dual degrees in foreign language and engineering—in both cases to prepare students for careers in the global arena. In institutions whose missions emphasize internationalization, writing centers would go far to consolidate their hard-earned respectability by contributing to the success of highly-innovative and nationally-recognized programs.

2. Breach the silos and form communities of practice.

The MWC would not be possible without the interdisciplinary and inter-departmental collaboration of writing program administrators, global education staff, foreign language faculty, and peer writing tutors. I recognize, though, that silos exist on college and university campuses. On the one hand, silos serve as markers of identity and affiliation, and they enable programs to safeguard territory and resources. On the other hand, they keep many faculty and administrators from developing the collaborative partnerships that produce innovative educational experiences. In an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Holden Thorp and Buck Goldstein explain “How to Create a Problem-Solving

Institution.” They argue that the “silo mentality” often undermines not only “discussions of innovation and how to attack big problems” but also efforts to “build a collaborative mind-set based on mutual self-interest.” Clearly, at the University of Rhode Island, for one example, engineering and foreign language faculty breached the silos to create their internationalized engineering program. Resisting the silo mentality has not only enabled me and my colleagues to reimagine the writing center but also to transform the MWC Advisory Committee. At Dickinson, MWC Advisory Committee often functions as a “community of practice,” interrogating the interplay between writing center pedagogy, classroom practice, and the development of writing ability. As Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, and William M. Snyder explain, “communities of practice” are “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (4). Unlike co-workers in silos, colleagues in a community of practice “share information, insight, and advice” and “help each other solve problems” despite the fact that they may not interact every day (5). The faculty across several foreign language departments shared a concern about how to balance different uses of writing: as a tool to practice grammar for language acquisition and as a form of communication. The members of the Advisory Committee not only found likeminded individuals with similar concerns but also a potential solution to their conundrum in the idea of the MWC. For example, before the MWC existed, the Japanese language faculty had begun to question their use of writing solely to support language acquisition. They valued writing for communicative purposes, but they wondered how they would fit it into a packed curriculum. The solution came through the MWC, which allowed them to experiment with “more ambitious” writing goals. The MWC community of practice helped them to create a rubric “that emphasizes depth and organization” in addition to “complexity and accuracy.” This then transformed their classroom pedagogy as they began to “discuss key writing strategies in class.” Their efforts to teach writing are supported by the “amazing resource” that students have “to help them through the issues...with their drafts.”^[6] The true alternative to silos, communities of practice like the MWC articulate common concerns and problems, share information, and explore solutions together.

3. Understand the values and practices of your collaborators—foreign language faculty.

Foreign language instructors see the four skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—as interrelated, and so many design courses around these skills. Yet during their graduate training, they learn more about developing speakers than about developing writers, receiving very little instruction in how to teach writing or how to write in the target language. Their writing center colleagues, who have expertise in writing pedagogy, can provide valuable insights for those foreign language instructors who did not receive training in how to teach foreign language writing. At the same time, those writing center directors who wish to adopt the multilingual model need to understand the prominent pedagogy for foreign language instructors, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and the implications for foreign language writing tutoring. CLT practitioners teach “languages so that students use them to communicate with native speakers of the language” (21st). To focus foreign language instruction on communication (as opposed to grammatical accuracy), practitioners stress “communicative competence” (a term used by the sociolinguist Dell Hymes) in the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Savignon, “Communicative Competence” 4). Communicative competence places the making of meaning above the mastery of grammatical forms, stresses the importance of sociocultural understanding, and advocates using language for different purposes (Savignon, “Communicative Language” 6). CLT does not dispense with grammar instruction; instead, grammatical competence is built “not by stating a rule but by using a rule” as CLT integrates “form-focused exercises and meaning-focused experience” (Savignon, “Communicative Language” 7, 9). Students’ meaning-focused experiences take into account social and cultural contexts of language use: “social conventions ... appropriateness of content, nonverbal language, and tone” as well as “cultural knowledge” and “cultural sensitivity” (Savignon, “Communicative Language” 10). Meaning-focused experiences engage students in using “language for a variety of purposes,” like writing an email (interpersonal), composing an academic essay (presentational), or analyzing a film (interpretive) (ACTFL). These three modes of communication—interpersonal, presentational, and interpretive—frame the proficiency benchmarks and performance indicators of the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the national organization of U.S. language educators and administrators. CLT pedagogy and the ACTFL guidelines inform the way foreign language instructors think about the four skills, including writing, in their courses. Thus, many foreign language instructors value “writing-to-learn approaches” in which writing is a “vehicle for language practice” and means to “proficient communicative abilities,” and “learning-to-write approaches” in which students “become skilled writers” in the language (Reichelt et al. 28-29). MWC tutors must be trained and prepared to tutor writing for language acquisition as well as for a variety of communicative purposes.

4. Start small, assess your progress, and use assessment results to build on successful collaborations.

Given the small, often collegial community and high degree of interdisciplinarity at liberal arts colleges, I was able to

collaborate with seven foreign language departments in planning the MWC. Then in the second year of operation, three other foreign language departments joined in after hearing about the benefits of having trained writing tutors support foreign language learning. In a larger school with more silos, a writing center director and one or more interested faculty members could pilot a tutoring program for foreign language writers. To grow the program, it would be important to collect usage data as well as student and faculty feedback surveys. Both quantitative and qualitative data would be useful in conversations with other interested faculty and administrators who make budget decisions. Though a pilot program might be small, it should be strategically designed with a purpose—that is, with an eventual proposal for a larger program as the end game.

Final Thoughts

The writing center as MWC builds a more inclusive and egalitarian understanding of language and language learners, contributes to students' intercultural competence, and bolsters the possibilities for language learning and pedagogy. In addition, the MWC challenges writing center directors worldwide to reflect seriously on our direction as a field. Are we supporting English monolingualism at the expense of linguistic diversity? Consider, for example, the International Writing Center Association's "Diversity Initiative" that "recognizes the necessity of cultivating and honoring the participation and leadership of historically excluded and marginalized peoples. "Marginalized communities" are "defined in terms of race, sexualities, abilities, economic needs, and linguistic expression." Who is excluded or marginalized by writing centers that promote the English language and North American rhetorics, genres, and educational practices in international sites? To what extent do English-medium writing centers help the West dominate the intellectual community and at what cost? While not directly addressing linguistic diversity, the IWCA statement carves a space for it—and for linguistically diverse writing centers. Multilingual Writing Centers may be the next phase for writing centers in an increasingly globalized and internationalized academia.

Notes

1. As of last year, the International Writing Center Association (IWCA) directory listed the contact information for member writing centers from sixty-six countries ("Directory of Writing Centers"). (The Directory no longer exists on the webpage.) Seeking to identify writing centers that serve languages other than English, I reviewed writing center websites except for those in countries in which English is the official language: Australia, Canada (except Quebec), Fiji, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Instead, I focused on writing centers in countries whose official language(s) is not English. In examining the websites, I categorized ninety-five writing centers from thirty-seven countries using the following categories that emerged from the data: multilingual (offering writing tutoring in foreign languages in addition to English and/or the official language), English-only, both English and the official language, or the official language-only.

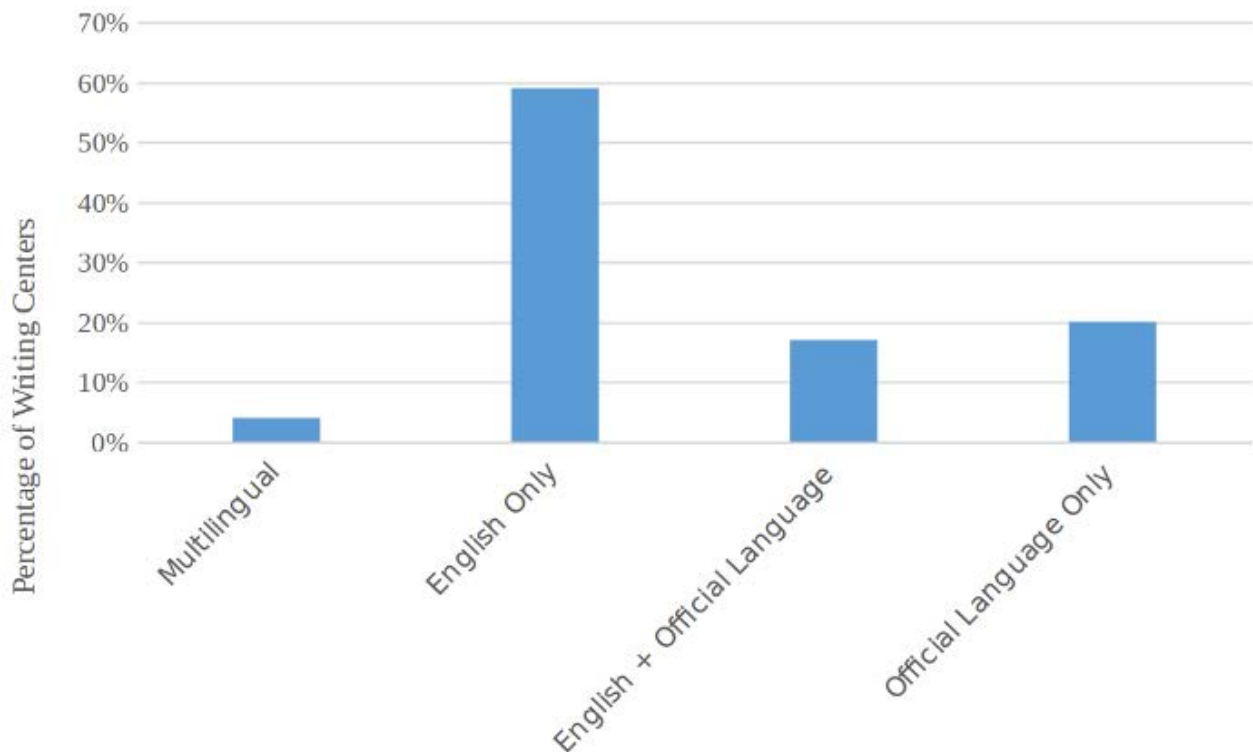


Figure 3. Writing centers in countries in which English is not the official language

The results show that only 4% of writing centers are multilingual. Instead, the majority offer English writing tutoring—with 59% offering only English and 17% English plus the official language of the country. The remaining 20% provide writing tutoring only in the official language of the country. ([Return to text.](#))

- For example, in 2015 Ann Gardiner, a Writing Center Administrator (WCA) in Switzerland, posted on the WCENTER listserv:

I am new to this list and really appreciate the many conversations taking place here! These conversations have helped tremendously as the Writing and Learning Center where I work in Switzerland takes on new responsibilities. One of these new developments is a language tutoring program, similar to our writing tutor program. My colleague and I are having difficulty finding training materials specifically aimed at language tutoring. The tutors work closely with professors in 100-level Italian, French, and German languages, the languages of Switzerland.

Does anyone have any ideas about resources for training language tutors? We do continuous training at the moment and are borrowing much from well-known works for writing tutors. Any ideas would be much appreciated.

Almost a year later, the conversation arose again when a dozen WCAs participated in the thread “Writing in Various Languages.” Pam Bromley, a WCA in the U.S., shared:

We do consultations with students in languages other than English—what languages depends on what languages the current staff have. Always French and Spanish, often Korean, Russian, and Chinese. We match students with an appropriate tutor by hand—I’d say we do at least 50 of these consultations a year. We underscore that the assistance we offer is geared towards HOCs [higher order concerns]—coming up with a thesis, restructuring the paper. If students want help with their grammar or sentence construction, we refer them to our language lab. It is a bit of an awkward division, but it has worked well enough for us.

([Return to text.](#))

- The mission, values and learning outcomes can be found here https://www.dickinson.edu/info/20158/writing_program/2829/the_norman_m_eberly_multilingual_writing_cente

r and here https://www.dickinson.edu/info/20158/writing_program/794/multilingual_writing_center. (Return to text.)

4. For one example, the writing tutors reported that students were coming for sessions to work on the personal statement for study abroad applications. When I reported this to the Advisory Committee, some of them saw the value in discussing the personal statement with a foreign language writing tutor while others did not, explaining that they used the personal statement to vet the applicant's readiness to study abroad in the target language. As a result, we developed a policy that identified the language tutors who could assist with these personal statements and those who were prohibited. (Return to text.)
5. Although Rosa Manchon addresses foreign language instructors, the best practices she identifies are transferable to writing tutors seeking to provide feedback for acquisition:
 1. *Noticing*: To acquire language, learners must notice the gap between actual and intended meaning. When writers produce language, foreign language writing tutors can help them identify what they are unable to do, making the writers aware of their gaps in learning.
 2. *Hypothesis Testing*: To acquire language, learners use trial and error to test how the language works. Their own "internal feedback" or "instructor feedback" triggers hypothesis testing. In addition, foreign language writing tutor feedback can initiate hypothesis testing as well as prompt writers to "compare [instructor] feedback to what they actually wrote."
 3. *Metalinguistic Awareness*: To acquire language, learners must become aware of the forms of language. When writers seek to master a new skill, like verb tense or transitions, foreign language writing tutors can heighten their awareness of how they are shaping language by asking them to reflect on the "forms, rules, and form-function relationship" of language (Manchon 48).
 4. *Negotiated Interaction*: To acquire language, learners must negotiate meaning with interlocutors. Foreign language writing tutors begin with noticing—that is, the writer and tutor realize that they have "different understandings and, through negotiation, arrive at a mutual one" (Williams 81, 83).

(Return to text.)

6. This is quoted from a personal email from a faculty member who teaches Japanese. (Return to text.)

Works Cited

- 21st Century Skills World Languages. Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2011. <http://www.p21.org/component/content/article/1994>. Accessed 10 July 2018.
- "About." Dickinson College, <http://www.dickinson.edu/about/>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2017.
- American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). <https://www.actfl.org/>. Accessed 10 July 2018.
- Bromley, Pam. "Re: Writing in Various Languages." WCENTER, 12 Aug. 2016, wcenter@lyris.ttu.edu. Accessed 27 July 2018.
- "CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers." *Conference on College Composition and Communication*, 2014, <https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/secondlangwriting>. Accessed 1 Apr. 2019.
- "Commission on Language Learning." *American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, <http://www.amacad.org/content.aspx?d=21896>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2016.
- de Montlaur, Benedicte. "Do You Speak My Language? You Should." *The New York Times*, 26 Mar. 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/26/opinion/learn-foreign-language.html>. Accessed 28 Mar. 2019.
- "Directory of Writing Centers." International Writing Center Association, <http://writingcenters.org/>. Accessed 9 Sept. 2015.
- "Diversity Initiative." IWCA Position Statements, http://writingcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/iwca_diversity_initiative1.pdf. Accessed 26 Oct. 2016.

- Gardiner, Ann. "Resources for Language Tutors." WCENTER, 20 Oct. 2015, wcenter@lyris.ttu.edu. Accessed 27 July 2018.
- Goldberg, David, Dennis Looney, and Natalia Lusin. *Enrollments in Languages Other than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education*. Feb. 2015. http://www.mla.org/pdf/2013_enrollment_survey.pdf. Accessed 10 Apr. 2016.
- Horwitz, Elaine K., Michael B. Horwitz, and Joann Cope. "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety." *The Modern Language Journal*, vol. 70, no. 2, 1986, pp.125-32.
- Institute of International Education (IIE). *Open Doors Data: U.S. Study Abroad*. 2015. <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/US-Study-Abroad>. Accessed 10 Apr. 2016.
- Johnson, Stephen. "Colleges Lose a 'Stunning' 651 Foreign-Language Programs in 3 Years." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 22 Jan. 2019. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Colleges-Lose-a-Stunning-/245526>. Accessed 1 Mar. 2019.
- Kramsch, Claire. "The Privilege of the Nonnative Speaker." *PMLA*, vol. 112, no.3, 1997, pp. 359-369.
- Leki, Ilona. "Learning to Write in a Second Language: Multilingual Graduates and Undergraduates Expanding Genre Repertoires." *Learning-to-Write and Writing-to-Learn in an Additional Language*, edited by Rosa Manchon, John Benjamins Publishing, 2011, pp. 85-109.
- "Letter from Members of the House of Representatives." *American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, <http://www.amacad.org/multimedia/pdfs/AAASHouseLetter.pdf>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2016.
- "Letter from U.S. Senators." *American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, <http://www.amacad.org/multimedia/pdfs/AAASenateLetter.pdf>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2016.
- Manchon, Rosa M. "The Language Learning Potential of Writing in Foreign Language Contexts: Lessons from Research." *Foreign Language Writing Instruction: Principles and Practices*, edited by Tony Cimasko and Melinda Reichelt, Parlor Press, 2011, pp. 44-64.
- Ortega, Lourdes. "Reflections on the Learning-to-Write and Writing-to-Learn Dimensions of Second Language Writing." *Learning-to-Write and Writing-to-Learn in an Additional Language*, edited by Rosa Manchon, John Benjamins Publishing, 2011, pp. 237-250.
- Reichelt, Melinda, Natalie Lefkowitz, Carol Rinnert, and Jean Marie Schultz. "Key Issues in Foreign Language Writing." *Foreign Language Annals*, vol. 45, 2012, pp. 22-41.
- Savignon, Sandra J. "Communicative Competence." *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*, edited by John I. Lontos, John Wiley & Sons, 2018, pp. 1-7.
- . "Communicative Language Teaching: Linguistic Theory and Classroom Practice." *Interpreting Communicative Language Teaching: Contexts and Concerns in Teacher Education*, edited by Sandra J. Savignon, Yale University Press, 2002, pp. 1-27.
- Schultz, Jean Marie. "Foreign Language Writing in the Era of Globalization." *Foreign Language Writing Instruction*, edited by Tony Cimasko and Melinda Reichelt, Parlor, 2011, pp. 65-82.
- Thorp, Holden and Buck Goldstein. "How to Create a Problem-Solving Institution." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 29 Aug. 2010, <http://www.chronicle.com/article/How-to-Create-a/124153/>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2017.
- Tierney, William G. *The Impact of Culture on Organizational Decision Making*. Stylus Publishing, 2008.
- Wenger, Etienne, Richard McDermott, and William M. Snyder. *Cultivating Communities of Practice*. Harvard Business School Press, 2002.
- Westwood, Marvin J., W. Scott Lawrence, and David Paul. "Preparing for Re-Entry: A Program for the Sojourning Student." *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, vol. 9, 1986, pp. 221-310.
- Williams, Jessica. "Undergraduate Second Language Writers in the Writing Center." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 21, 2002, pp. 73-91.

"From English-Centric to Multilingual" from *Composition Forum* 41 (Spring 2019)

© Copyright 2019 Noreen Lape.

Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License](#).



Return to [Composition Forum 41 table of contents](#).

Composition Forum is published by the Association of Teachers of Advanced Composition with the support and generous financial assistance of Penn State University. *Composition Forum* ISSN: 1522-7502.