

Second Language Writers and Writing Program Administrators

The student population in U.S. higher education is becoming increasingly diverse linguistically and culturally as institutions continue their efforts to diversify and internationalize the student population, thus—often unwittingly—recruiting a growing number of students who did not grow up using the privileged variety of English. As a result, the need to address language issues in writing programs has become undeniably clear (Matsuda), and it has become difficult, if not impossible, to run an effective and ethical writing program without some understanding of second language issues; second language writing is a *sine qua non* of writing program administration today. Perhaps that idea is no news to writing program administrators at urban or open admissions institutions that have traditionally enrolled large numbers of so-called language minority students and nonnative English speakers. But today, WPAs are facing similar issues even at institutions like the University of New Hampshire, where the student population is highly homogeneous by the national standard, where the number of international students is relatively small, and where there are separate sections of first-year writing for second language writers.

Issues in second language writing permeate many aspects of our work as writing program administrators. We need to prepare new instructors and retool existing instructors to work with an ever-growing population of second language writers in writing courses traditionally designed for native English speakers from privileged language backgrounds (Braine). We need to design new courses or modify existing courses to provide placement options appropriate for the changing student population as well as placement procedures that are sensitive to language differences (Crusan; Kroll; Matsuda and Silva; Silva). We also need to work closely with second language specialists on campus, who may or may not have the expertise in writing issues but who do have expertise in second language issues—the expertise that WPAs and writing instructors alike could benefit from considerably. Such collaboration

is necessary because second language courses and programs are often administered separately; in many cases, they are housed in a separate program or even in a different department (Williams).

While some institutions have writing program administrators who also have expertise in second language writing, that situation has yet to become the norm. Traditionally, the professional preparation for writing program administrators has not included issues in second language writing; even today, only a handful of doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition studies offer courses related to second language writing. Even if such courses are available, they are not always taught by second language writing specialists who also understand the issues and concerns that writing program administrators face; the number of individuals with such dual specialization is only beginning to increase. Furthermore, while they are often expected to “take care of” second language issues, they do not always have the necessary institutional support nor are they sufficiently compensated for such time-consuming work that requires special knowledge and skills. To address the nationwide growth of language difference in writing programs, then, second language writing issues need to be fully integrated into writing program administration—both the institutional structure and the professional discourse.

Our primary goal in editing this special issue of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* is to facilitate the process of integrating second language issues into the field of writing program administration by providing an overview of some of the key issues and by exploring possible approaches to such integration. For this purpose, we have sought to bring together the perspectives of second language writing and writing program administration by working with authors and reviewers who represent differing disciplinary perspectives.

The first article is “Assessing the Needs of Linguistically Diverse First-Year Students: Bringing Together and Telling Apart International ESL, Resident ESL and Monolingual Basic Writers,” by Patricia Friedrich, a writing program administrator with backgrounds in sociolinguistics, world Englishes, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). She provides a broad overview of student populations by contrasting three major categories of student writers: basic writers, resident ESL writers, and international ESL writers. While any attempt to categorize students risks the danger of overgeneralization, it can also serve an important heuristic function as WPAs make sense of the complex reality of the increasingly multilingual student population.

The implications of the linguistic diversity in writing programs are further explored in “Preparing for the Tipping Point: Designing Writing Programs to Meet the Needs of the Changing Population” by Ana Preto-Bay and Kristine Hansen, who bring together the perspectives of a second language writing specialist and a writing program administrator, respectively. They provide a telling critique of the current status of second language issues in writing programs and the professional literature. They also provide specific suggestions as writing programs continue to evolve in response to the presence of second language writers who are quickly reaching the “tipping point” at various institutions.

Gail Shuck, in “Combating Monolingualism: A Novice Administrator’s Challenge,” presents the perspective of a WPA with an expertise in second language writing. She provides a situated account of her work as a tenure-track faculty member in a university English department with the administrative responsibility of coordinating English language support programs, including second language writing courses. She concludes by presenting practical suggestions that WPAs might consider as they develop or modify programs for the linguistically diverse student population. Her article also raises many important issues to consider as more institutions create additional administrative positions to address second language writing issues.

In “Geography Lessons, Bridge Building, and Second-Language Writers,” Talinn Phillips, Candace Stewart and Robert Stewart—a doctoral student in composition with a TESOL background, a former writing center director and current composition director, and a master’s student in TESOL with a background in tutoring second language writers—discuss the importance of developing multiple and creative ways of addressing the presence and needs of second language writers. By reflecting on their collaborative efforts, these authors show how the writing center can serve as a site of interdisciplinary collaboration in preparing U.S. higher education for today’s linguistically diverse college student population.

We hope this special issue of *WPA* will provide the necessary background and resources to help the field of writing program administration integrate a second language perspective into its institutional and discursive practices. We also hope that these articles, by providing models of fruitful interdisciplinary collaboration, encourage further inquiry by WPAs and second language specialists, and further dialogue between their respective fields.

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