

Gateways, Thresholds, and Portals: Dialogues about International Higher Education Writing Research

In the US, composition as a field pioneered the multiple strands of teaching, research, activism, and development that constitute CCCC work today. The field's sense of international work, however, has often been framed in Western expansionist narratives and "export" modes. Now in its fifth year, this workshop serves to counter these forms of movement by creating new portals, new pathways for multiple and equal exchanges—for gates that open in both directions. Rather than assuming export models of US writing studies research, this workshop highlights multicultural and multilingual perspectives and dialogue, as participants discover, share and participate in innovative, powerful research outside the US.

In the workshop, both facilitators and attendees work together on specific higher education writing research projects from physical and disciplinary sites often missing in US discussions. This dialogic exchange is essential to the evolution of all of our disciplinary communities. At last year's CCCC, Paul Prior noted that national boundaries are not the best intellectual boundaries. The same might be said of the US disciplinary boundaries attached to "composition" as a relatively closed and defined domain. International researchers from many institutional, cultural, disciplinary and methodological contexts bring to the table transformative questions, projects, approaches, and bodies of knowledge about which we are often unaware, to our detriment. Their work broadens and reshapes our horizons, while the linguistic and discursive challenges the workshop introduces help to move us from a monolingual space to an open embrace of translingual modes of work.

The workshop's focus on international research also addresses current calls (Haswell, Russell) to rekindle US writing studies research, by creating a space for full, substantial discussion of evolving and developed research projects. The texts from 24 research projects by 35 scholars from 14 countries will provide topics from diverse national, cross-national, and multilingual contexts, including writing instruction, writing center effectiveness, graduate student writing, the Common European Framework of Reference for Language, archival research, English for Specific Purposes competencies, sociocultural perspectives on literacy and education, and writing in anthropology, the sciences, visual and performing arts, and engineering.

Format:

When researchers from different geopolitical, theoretical, national, and institutional contexts get together to do real work, a critical element is

time—time to understand each other and to encounter and negotiate multiple discursive orientations, from the simplest terminology to the deepest theoretical grounding. Translating practices, institutional research purposes, and projects across national, cultural, and linguistic borders requires both exchanging materials well in advance of the conference meeting, and extended time together during the workshop, to avoid the misunderstandings and superficial understandings that can occur without this extended kind of work.

The workshop thus unfolds in three activities, two of which are before the CCCC gathering to enable ongoing exchanges well in advance:

1) Workshop facilitators will post draft research texts on a wiki by January. All workshop participants (facilitators and registrants) will read the texts from January to March, freeing up all actual workshop time for discussion and exchange about these drafts.

The texts, several co-authored, will be grouped into clusters on the wiki. Each participant will choose a text relevant to his or her interests from each cluster. At the workshop, all participants thus work in small groups several times, once with the author(s) of each of six texts. In this unique format, workshop facilitators become learner-participants alongside registrants when not leading a group discussing their own draft, thus encountering the writing research from other countries represented and the different emergent or well-established methods and research questions.

2) With their texts, workshop facilitators will also post:

– A brief institutional description as it factors into their research about writing.

– A glossary of any potentially context/culture-specific terms, both practical and profound; the glossary collectively produced will be further discussed during the workshop itself.

– A digest of key theorists and frames used in the choice of methods and research design.

3) The workshop chairs will maintain focus on broad questions that frame both the pre-workshop exchanges and the actual workshop discussions:

- What is meant by “research”? What are the research methodologies in use in different contexts? Why? Do we need new methods to collaborate internationally?

- What are the objects of research? The research questions, populations, courses, programs, assessments, practices? How do questions of identity, access, discursive mobility and power, and positionality affect the nature, culture, and practice of writing research across institutional and geopolitical contexts?

- What questions of student, teacher, or researcher languages, of institutional or national languages, inform the research being done?
- Does English act as portal or gatekeeper for some international writing research exchange?
- What do we take as the evolving meanings of “international” and “global” for our collective concerns?

Through these framing questions, each project will receive attentive discussion, as we undo assumptions, negotiate tensions and differences, model practices that resist simple dichotomies, and broaden perspectives. We will thus construct a group sense of possible responses: a gateway of its own, enabling flows of relationships and foregrounding what all the participants learn, gain, and give.

Morning session:

9:00–9:15 Introduction

9:15–10:00 Texts from cluster one, 4 small–group discussions

10:00–10:15 Break

10:15–11:00 Cluster two, 4 small–group discussions

11:00–11:45 Cluster three, 4 small–group discussions

11:45–12:30 Plenary discussion, comparing notes from clusters

Afternoon session:

1:30–1:45 Review of the morning discussion.

1:45–2:30 Cluster four, 4 small–group discussions

2:30–2:45 Break

2:45–3:30 Cluster five, 4 small–group discussions

3:30–4:15 Cluster six, 4 small–group discussions

4:15–5:00 Plenary discussion: What’s at stake in this exchange?

At the end of the day, all participants will leave the workshop itself with a broader knowledge of international writing research, a sense of the very real complications and satisfactions of undertaking international collaborations, and contacts for future work that will move international exchange and understanding forward.

