

ESCRITURA, SAU NTAWV, 写作, PAGSULAT, AND WRITING: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ESL/ELL WRITING CENTER SERVICES PROVIDED BY PUBLIC FLAGSHIP INSTITUTIONS

Zachary Wayne Taylor
The University of Texas at Austin
zt@utexas.edu

More so than any other disruptive technology of the past twenty years, the internet has forever changed the way universities communicate with their students. Like other institutional offices, departments, divisions, and programs, university writing centers (UWCs) use this technology: every public flagship university in the United States includes a unique UWC website on their institution's ".edu" web domain. This web presence has a particularly unique set of consequences for English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Language Learning (ELL) postsecondary students.

First, ESL and ELL students are the fastest growing segment of the public school population, as the National Education Association (NEA) prognosticates that 25% of public school students will be ESL or ELL by 2025 (NEA). Although there exists no national-level research that details ESL or ELL postsecondary placement and attainment outside of Klein et al.'s 2004 report, institutions of higher education (IHEs) should see an influx of these students in the coming years (Kanno and Cromley 89). This undergirding research strongly implies an increased demand for ESL/ELL UWC services because of these shifting demographics. Thus, the UWC's institutional website will undoubtedly serve as an increasingly important resource for current and prospective ESL/ELL students.

Second, ESL/ELL postsecondary students—and the postsecondary student body at large—are as likely to use the internet to learn more about a postsecondary institution as any other traditional source of information such as email, telephone calls, informational brochures, or campus visits (Burdett 2). For UWCs, it is therefore especially important for ESL/ELL services to be easily accessible and understood on the UWC's institutional website to allow current and prospective postsecondary ESL/ELL students knowledge of the services they can receive if they attend a given institution. Subsequently, the UWC and the services it offers—complemented by its institutional website—may serve as an important recruiting or retention tool for university leadership hoping to diversify their student population.

However, the only national-level research examining ESL/ELL services offered by IHEs was a 1995 study by Powers and Nelson: the researchers surveyed seventy-five writing centers at graduate institutions, focusing on the use of writing conferences. Consequently, in over two decades, no national-level research has examined what ESL/ELL services UWCs are providing and if the center is making those services apparent and accessible online. Furthermore, another gap in the research exists: do UWCs adhere to best practices focused on supporting ESL/ELL writers on campus? Filling a crucial gap in the literature, this study aims to evaluate ESL/ELL-specific UWC services articulated by each public flagship's UWC website to determine the type of services offered and the extent to which those services support ESL and ELL students, the fastest growing segment of public school students.

Literature Review

Although no single ESL/ELL composition theory will satisfy all scholars, extant research has established several general best practices for university writing centers to consider when supporting postsecondary ESL/ELL students.

Given that ESL/ELL writers come from diverse backgrounds, writing center tutors must focus on the individual student and their idiosyncratic writing abilities, evaluate their knowledge of English, and engage with the student at an appropriate, comfortable level of English. This attention to detail typically requires that writing center tutors have some degree of familiarity with an ESL/ELL student's first language, as well as specialized training in how to best support these students (Thonus 19-20). Thus, university writing centers should provide ESL/ELL-trained tutors from diverse backgrounds (Thonus 22), even though very few university writing center tutors are specifically trained in ESL (Ronesi).

Postsecondary ESL/ELL writers also benefit from peer interaction in a classroom setting, akin to a workshop, where ESL/ELL writers can review their writing and revise it effectively, while using their peers and their writing tutors as mutually supportive systems

(Williams 83). Furthermore, these workshops must be held in friendly, encouraging atmospheres where ESL/ELL writers can feel comfortable to share their writing, receive constructive criticism, and improve their English composition (Bruce and Rafoth 29). Fostering this sense of intellectual and academic comfort encourages ESL/ELL student participation in university writing centers, which in turn leads to improved academic writing (Cogie 65).

Finally, university writing center tutors and staff must possess a heightened awareness of multiculturalism and the subsequent “cultural preferences that are reflected in writing,” (Harris and Silva 527). These cultural preferences often differ from those demonstrated in speech, and the writing center tutor must distinguish between language proficiency and writing ability; this evaluative discretion is crucial for properly addressing an ESL/ELL writer’s difficulties and to provide informed guidelines for improving their writing (Harris and Silva 529). Furthermore, being unaware of cultural preferences often promotes “deficit thinking” on the part of the tutor, which can cause an ESL/ELL student to feel unprepared or confused during a writing center conference or workshop. Instead, tutors need “to introduce preferences and conventions of American discourse for what they are—alternate conventions and preferences” (Harris and Silva 527).

Ultimately, these best practices—providing ESL/ELL-specific services, tutors, and workshops—should be reflected on a UWC’s website, as current and prospective postsecondary ESL/ELL students must be made aware of the ESL/ELL specific services offered by a UWC to maximize their resources and ultimately earn their degrees.

Methodology

Given the volume of IHEs in the United States, a method of standardization was required before data collection. An examination of public flagships ($n = 50$) seemed appropriate, as these schools are typically large, public, land-grant institutions considered the leading institution in their state in terms of research, graduate education, and professional programs (Berdahl). Furthermore, after an initial review, it was discovered that all public flagships featured a UWC website on their institutional web domain (.edu), rendering the public flagships a high-quality, appropriate subsection of IHEs to examine. Once this degree of standardization was achieved, I used each institution’s domain-embedded search tool to locate the UWC’s website. This search was performed in November 2016 and lasted two weeks in duration.

Once each UWC website was located, I employed Neuendorf’s (2002) content analysis—using the Readability Studio software suite—to textually analyze each UWC’s website by extracting every URL associated with the site and inputting it into Readability Studio. Readability Studio isolated all text from a given URL and sorted that text data into alphabetized terms of frequency and page location. This methodology allowed me to input hundreds of URLs into the program and search for the keywords “ESL,” “ELL,” “English,” “language,” “learner,” and “second” to learn if a given webpage included these keywords. If a webpage included a keyword, I coded the webpage as “Mentioning ESL/ELL-specific services.” Then, I examined all pages that included any keywords to determine if a UWC provided ESL/ELL-specific tutors and/or workshops, mirroring the best practices included in the literature review of this paper. Employing a quantitative linguistic software program to scan webpages for ESL/ELL relevant keywords successfully eliminated research bias and subjectivity, providing another level of rigorous standardization to this study.

After locating UWC webpages and their ESL/ELL service, tutor, and workshop data. I created a database using a binary code (0 = no, 1 = yes); this database included the name of the institution, title of their UWC, root URL of the UWC’s website, and separate columns for “Mentions ESL/ELL services,” “Provides ESL/ELL-specific tutors,” and “Facilitates ESL/ELL-specific workshops.” Furthermore, I collected the variable data “Offers bilingual/multilingual website and/or web translation widget,” meaning an institution’s UWC webpage(s) allow(s) users to translate the English web content into another language of the user’s choice, or the webpage featured a widget that allows the user to toggle back and forth between English and another language of the user’s choice. This variable was included in response to related research that found that allowing ESL/ELL students to speak and read in their first language helps improve their English- or second- language writing (Woodall 7), as well as the fact that web translation services is becoming an increasingly common internet technology (University Language Services). It is my position that conveying university information in a student’s first language could lead to greater participation in university-sponsored programs, such as university writing centers. Therefore, I felt this characteristic—a bilingual and/or multilingual website—was worthy of inclusion in this study and could be used to inform future research.

Findings

ESL/ELL services that university writing centers provide and that are included on writing center websites can be found in Table 1 (see Appendix). Of the fifty public flagship institutions examined in this study, 56% of their UWC websites indicate they serve ESL/ELL students. Furthermore, 44% explicitly mention providing ESL/ELL-specific tutors, 20% explicitly mention facilitating ESL/ELL-specific workshops, and 0% offers bilingual or multilingual web content and/or web translation widgets/services. Only 16% of public flagship institutions mention serving ESL/ELL students, provide ESL/ELL-specific writing center tutors, and facilitate ESL/ELL-specific writing center workshops.

Discussion

To begin, the major surprise of the findings was that only 56% of UWCs mentioned ESL/ELL-specific writing center services on their websites. This percentage represents only twenty-eight of fifty public flagship institutions in the United States. Harkening back to the words of UC Berkeley Chancellor Robert Berdahl in his convocation address to Texas A&M University, public flagship institutions are often considered leaders in the fields of research, graduate education, and professional programs (Berdahl). However, as the data show, public flagships are not leaders in ESL/ELL services provided by UWCs. Troublesome still is only 16% of public flagships make it readily apparent that their UWC provides specific ESL/ELL writing center services, tutors, and workshops, and there is no current, ongoing effort to collect national-level ESL/ELL-specific data from postsecondary institutions, especially data that targets academic services meant to support retention efforts and degree attainment.

Perhaps more surprising is that no public flagship UWC offers any of their online content in a language other than English. Emerging language recognition and translation technologies, such as Google Translate, allow websites to translate their content into hundreds of different languages by adding a mere ten lines of computer code to an existing HTML file, yet no public flagships employ such a revolutionary internet technology to deliver their programmatic information (e.g., writing center services) to diverse, multilingual audiences. This is particularly troublesome for prospective postsecondary ESL/ELL students who visit institutional websites hoping to learn more about the academic resources and services available to them at a given institution, only to be met with a potentially unfamiliar language. Considering the 2016 Open

Doors report that found a 5.8% and 4% increase in international undergraduate and graduate students from 2013-2014 to 2014-2015 academic year, it is clear that international students are continuing to attend America's institutions of higher education in record numbers (Institute of International Education). Granted, not all incoming international students are ESL/ELL, but providing bilingual/multilingual web content would surely work to recruit and retain international students and better serve current international students whose first language is not English.

Ultimately, ESL/ELL students are the ones who most need high-quality writing services, yet the data show that, overwhelmingly, public flagship UWCs do not appear to provide these services or make these services apparent on their websites.

Implications and Conclusion

The implications and conclusions drawn from this study are numerous and profound. First, it is clear that public flagship institutions—if they are providing ESL/ELL-specific services in their writing centers—do not adequately articulate the provision of these services on their institutional websites: this must change. One particularly effective UWC website is the University of Maine's, which features a clear, concise menu and lists "ESL Specialists" among the "General Info" included on the writing center's website landing page (Writing Center). Another high quality page belongs to the University of Connecticut's Writing Center, whose page clearly states:

Several of our tutors have experience with ELL-specific issues, and we can support writers in planning a series of writing tutorials. Our goal in working with ELL writers remains the same as our goal for native speakers of English – that is, to support and guide an ongoing learning process. ("How Our Tutorials Work")

Here, not only does the University of Connecticut's writing center provide tutors with ELL experience, but they also facilitate "series of writing tutorials," which mirrors recommendations supplied by extant research. This level of support aligns with best practices meant to provide ESL/ELL students with the academic services they need to thrive in a linguistically unfamiliar environment. However, the vast majority of public flagship institutions do not prioritize or advertise ESL/ELL UWC services. On their outward-facing websites, few public flagships understand best practices and lucidly articulate these best practices; 84% of public flagships do not provide these basic UWC services that greatly benefit the writing skills and

academic growth of ESL/ELL students, an ever-growing subpopulation of America's postsecondary-student demographic.

Second, a modest percentage (56%) of public flagship UWCs provide some degree of ESL/ELL student support, yet this percentage can be improved upon by writing center directors, coordinators, and tutors acknowledging the changing postsecondary student demographic that will undoubtedly include greater numbers of ESL/ELL students. This effort must begin with the staffing and training of writing center tutors from a wide variety of language backgrounds. Here, linguistic diversity of UWC faculty is essential. This human-resources philosophy starts with the director of the writing center understanding their university's idiosyncratic student population and staffing—then training—the appropriate graduate students or full-time employees to serve ESL/ELL students with unique needs and circumstances. Subsequently, UWCs must make these ESL/ELL-trained tutors visible on UWC websites. It is entirely possible that a prospective postsecondary ESL/ELL student navigates to a UWC website, discovers a lack or apparent lack of ESL/ELL-specific writing center services, and decides to not attend that institution. This is inexcusable.

Perhaps more salient, UWCs must enhance their web presence to reflect their actual services. UWCs must prioritize web communication and the outward-facing image they project on their institutional website. This prioritization starts with a UWC evaluating its own practices and clearly, concisely articulating those practices on its website, including the provision of ESL/ELL-specific services. And in many cases, this web refresh would only require a few lines of computer code, which could easily be performed by a university's communication staff if a writing center does not have the capacity to perform the update. In short, this small gesture could change the way international students and ESL/ELL students envision themselves at an institution of higher education.

Finally, this demonstrated lack—or perceived lack—of transparency displayed by UWCs reveals a major gap in higher-education research that specifically focuses on the academic services provided to ESL/ELL students. US universities have always represented an incredible educational opportunity for students from around the world, and even though writing might mean *escritura*, *sau ntawv*, 写作, or *pagsulat*, public flagships and IHEs across the country have the responsibility to support their increasingly diverse student population and their writing. This responsibility can begin at the university writing center.

Works Cited

- Berdahl, Robert. M. "The Future of Flagship Universities." Texas A&M University, 5 Oct. 1998, Convocation, College Station, TX. Speech.
- Bruce, Shanti, and Ben Rafoth. *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*. 2nd ed., Heinemann, 2009.
- Burdett, K. R. *How Students Choose a College: Understanding the Role of Internet Based Resources in the College Choice Process*. Dissertation, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, 2013.
- Cogie, Jane. "ESL Student Participation in Writing Center Sessions." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2006, pp. 48-66.
- Harris, Muriel, and Tony Silva. "Tutoring ESL Students: Issues and Options." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 44, no. 4, Dec. 1993, pp. 525-37.
- "How Our Tutorials Work." *University of Connecticut Writing Center*, <http://writingcenter.uconn.edu/how-our-tutorials-work/>.
- Institute of International Education. "New International Student Enrollment, 2005/06 - 2015/16." *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*, 2016. Web. Accessed Dec. 2016. <http://www.iie.org/opendoors>
- Kanno, Yasuko, and Jennifer G. Cromley. "English Language Learners' Access to and Attainment in Postsecondary Education." *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 1, Mar. 2013, pp. 89-121.
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Language Minorities and Their Educational and Labor Market Indicators—Recent Trends*. NCES 2004-009, by Steven Klein, Rosio Bugarin, Renee Beltranea, and Edith McArthur. Washington, DC, June 2004. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED485433.pdf>.
- National Education Association. *English Language Learners Face Unique Challenges*. PB05 2008, by NEA Education Policy and Practice Department, NEA Human and Civil Rights Department, and Center for Great Public Schools, Washington, DC, 2008. [www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/ELL_Policy_Brief_Fall_08_\(2\).pdf](http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/ELL_Policy_Brief_Fall_08_(2).pdf). Accessed 2016.
- Neuendorf, Kimberly A. *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. Sage, 2002.
- Powers, Judith K., and Jane V. Nelson. "L2 Writers and the Writing Center: A National Survey

-
- of Writing Center Conferencing at Graduate Institutions.” *Journal of Second Language Writing*, vol. 4, no. 2, May 1995, pp. 113-138.
- Ronesi, Lynne. “Meeting in the Writing Center: The Field of ESL.” *TESL-EJ: The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language*, vol. 1, no. 3, Mar. 1995.
- Thonus, Terese. “Tutors as Teachers: Assisting ESL/EFL Students in the Writing Center.” *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2, Spring 1993, pp. 13-26.
- University Language Services. “Translating College Websites.” *University Language Services*, 2016, <https://www.universitylanguage.com/school-services/website-translation/>.
- Williams, Jennifer. “Undergraduate Second Language Writers in the Writing Center.” *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 21, no. 2, Fall 2002, pp. 73-91.
- Woodall, Billy R. “Language-Switching: Using the First Language While Writing in a Second Language.” *Journal of Second Language Writing*, vol. 11, no. 1, Feb. 2002, pp. 7-28.
- Writing Center. *University of Maine*, <https://umaine.edu/wcenter/>.

Appendix

Table 1. University Writing Centers that Provide ESL/ELL Services, Tutors, Workshops, and Multilingual Websites. Data Extracted from University Writing Center Websites (n=50).

Percentage of university writing centers:

Mentioning ESL/ELL-specific services:	56%
Providing ESL/ELL-specific writing tutors:	44%
Facilitating ESL/ELL-specific writing workshops:	20%
Mentioning services, providing tutors, and facilitating workshops:	16%
Offers bilingual/multilingual web content (in part or entirely):	0%

Figure 1. ESL/ELL Writing Center Services Provided by Public Flagship Universities (n=50)

