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Writing Centers and Neocolonialism: How Writing Centers Are Being Commodified and Exported as U.S. Neocolonial Tools

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Abstract In this paper, we explore the complicity of Western writing centers in global neocolonialism despite its resounding rejection within Western writing center scholarship, in which Romeo García contends that writing tutors can be “decolonial agents.” We show that higher education is used by Western governments as a neocolonial tool and situate international U.S. writing center initiatives within this context. Writing centers have remained complicit in global neocolonialism involving the commodification and exportation of American English as well as Western-style institutions, curricula, and pedagogies. This is most explicit in recent writing center initiatives undertaken by the U.S. Department of State in South America, Eastern Europe, and Central and Southeast Asia. Our analysis of the IWCA and the global community of writing center organizations reveals that few institutions in the field are well positioned to address this important issue. Indeed, the IWCA has remained silent on the complicity of Western writing centers in neocolonialism despite the resounding rejection of neocolonialism within the writing center community.

Keywords cultural diplomacy, writing centers, colonization, neocolonialism, IWCA, Brazil

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Introduction

Issues of colonization have been at the forefront of writing center scholarship and practice now for two decades (Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999; Condon, 2007; Garcia, 2017; Green, 2018; Howard, 2004; Inoue, 2016; Zawodny & Reynolds, 2014). At the joint 2003 International Writing Centers Association/National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (IWCA/NCPTW) conference where postcoloniality was the theme, keynote speaker Rebecca Moore

Howard called upon writing center practitioners to recognize their complicity in the hegemony of educational institutions, helping to “maintain linguistic and rhetorical standards” (2004, p. 6) in a system that requires “members of historically underrepresented groups join the academy only on the condition that they uncritically accept its premises” (p. 13). Sixteen years later, Asao Inoue repeated this message in his 2019 Chair’s Address to the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), challenging white

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instructors to recognize their “inevitable and embodied whiteness” that can be “thick in the air,” insisting on the problematization of “white language supremacy” as a cage that imprisons (Inoue, 2019).

With the commitment to decolonial approaches well established at the center of writing center conversations about North American writing instruction and support, we have been intrigued to observe the use of writing centers as neocolonial tools by the U.S. Department of State (DOS) over the last 15 years. We observe this currently occurring in Brazil and Russia, where DOS regional English language officers (RELOs), “a kind of . . . teacher-diplomat” (Uhler, 2021), support the establishment and national organization of writing centers as U.S. *cultural diplomacy* initiatives to “support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics” (*Assistance Listings*, 2021). Serving as the boots-on-the-ground, RELOs’ mission is “[c]ounseling and assisting U.S. [diplomatic] mission officials in determining and developing the most effective use of English language programs and services” to carry out the diplomatic goals of the U.S. government (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). In this way, the U.S. government is exploiting the globalized commodification of American English, a practice long established in TEFL and TESOL contexts (Altbach, 1977) but relatively new for writing centers. This cooption of writing centers in service to the interests of Western governments is a betrayal of the long struggle to control writing center identity (North, 1984), especially as writing centers are considered to be sites of resistance and social justice work (Coenen et al., 2019; Inoue, 2016; Salem, 2014).

In this paper, we explore these DOS writing center initiatives and set them against a backdrop of literature on international writing centers that has remained silent on the complicity of higher education (HE) in U.S. neocolonialism, as well as a map of the global community of writing center organizations and what it reveals about capacity for resistance. Our exploration leads us to ask two questions: (1) Is the decolonial rhetoric that is prevalent in American

writing center literature about domestic U.S. writing center work also taken up in studies of/reports on the exportation of U.S. writing centers models internationally? (2) Does the U.S. Department of State’s orchestration of the global writing center community limit the community’s power to resist the U.S. government’s use of writing centers as neocolonial tools? We recognize that these are challenging questions as they ask many of us, the authors included, to courageously confront the writing center community’s complicity in present and ongoing neocolonial projects. Investing in this work, however, is necessary to fulfill the community’s aspirations for decolonization.

Our Vantage Point

We write as settlers from English Canadian perspectives as well as writing center teacher-scholars. Canada’s writing center landscape is small, diverse, and bifurcated along English and French Canadian lines. The domestic landscape of writing support in Canadian HE is, in part, a story of competing colonial forces: French and English. While English Canada has sought to avoid (if not consciously resist) American-style first-year composition in favor of the provision of writing support “in the disciplines” in response to localized needs (Graves, 1993; Graves & Graves, 2006), French Canadian contexts of writing support in Québec have developed in response to cultural protection from British English and culture and the maintenance of language purity and correctness as established by the French Academy, founded in 1635 (Graves, 1993). The result of these evolutionary forces is a bifurcated community along language lines with a range of relatively small, unique programs.

However, the story of writing support in Canada does not begin and end with a battle between colonial juggernauts, Britain and France. The plan to establish the first university in the late 1700s in what would become Canada was specifically to discourage white colonial males from studying in the United States to guard against the influence of American Republicanism (Vroom, 1941, p. 10). What is also clear from this beginning is that colonial

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linguistic dominance over Indigenous and immigrant students has been a centerpiece of Canadian education since its outset. The founders of the first university made this clear:

A very principal object of the new institution would be accomplished by assimilating the manner of the rising generation to those of the parent state . . . to teach the genuine use, practice and pronunciation of the English language, which in distant colonies is to apt to degenerate, and that the purity of the language, undebased by local or national accents and solecisms, is undeniably to be found in the Kingdom of England. (Vroom, 1941, p. 37)

In the mid-19th century, the role of university education in assimilating Canada's Indigenous peoples became instantiated in law with the federal Indian Act (1880). In section 99(4) of this act, Indigenous persons admitted to any "University of Learning" qualified for "enfranchisement," which involved loss of their treaty rights in exchange for an allotment of land from their band's territory. From 1830 to 1996, at lower educational levels, the government of Canada used state-sponsored religious schools, known as residential schools, to forcefully and violently assimilate Indigenous youth in an attempt at cultural genocide. Thousands of Indigenous children were sexually assaulted, murdered, and died due to neglect at the hands of these church officials, deaths that are still unreported and unrecorded. A legacy of this colonialization are the mass graves of these children still being discovered (Deer, 2021).

In the global post-WWII context, governments of Canada and HE institutions collaborated to use HE institutions as a neocolonial foreign policy tool. Since the 1970s, this collaboration developed projects, like Canadian Studies Programs Abroad, intended to raise Canada's international profile and image (see Trilokekar, 2010). In the 1990s, as government funding for universities decreased, HE institutions in Canada (as well as Australia and the UK) increasingly sought to find additional sources of revenue and to look abroad "to seek additional funding from a diverse set of host

countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and South America" (Siltaoja et al., 2019, p. 77). In 1995, a foreign policy review formally recognized academics as a "third pillar in Canada's foreign policy objectives" (p. 135). Through the 2000s, Canada's approach involved the *internationalization of higher education* whereby recruited international students pay higher tuition fees for the economic benefit of Canada's domestic institutions. For example, in the province of Nova Scotia, Canadian undergraduate students pay on average \$9,028, while international undergraduate students pay \$20,397—a 126% increase. (*Canadian and international tuition fees*, 2021). These neocolonial projects are often carried out at the institutional level, supported by government-funded agencies such as the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) (*Current programs*, 2021).

Education and Neocolonialism in the Global Context

In Canada, as elsewhere, education serves foreign policy as a neocolonial enterprise, and the language(s) of teaching and learning are tools of cultural assimilation (see Altbach, 2004; Canagarajah, 2002, 2004; Nye, 2005; Pennycook, 1998). *Neocolonialism*, sometimes "referred to as academic imperialism" (Rakowski, 1993, p. 59), is "the continuation of Western colonialism after the end of the colonial era" where the "former colonizers continue to economically, culturally, financially, militarily and ideologically dominate" formerly colonized peoples (Siltaoja, et al. 2019, p. 77, quoting Chilisa, 2005, p. 660). Mignolo (2014) describes neocolonialism as being a condition of "global coloniality" involving "re-fashioned colonial relations which maps the world according to Western interests even when the West is no longer in complete charge" (p. 226). In contrast to colonialism, neocolonialism is inconspicuous, with the arrangement of cover for colonization's continuation through a façade of independence and self-government of the former colonized people (Wickens & Sandlin, 2007, p. 278). The provision of education and literacy (typically using the rhetoric of

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support and development) serve as effective façades while hegemonic forces work to maintain Western dominance by gaining consent from the subordinate (Nye, 1990). Consent is manufactured when Western education and language are symbolically and economically aligned with power.

At a national-global level, “powerful universities have always dominated the production and distribution of knowledge, while weaker institutions and systems with fewer resources and lower academic standards have tended to follow in their wake” (Altbach, 2004, p. 7). Those institutions and governments outside these power structures are unable to develop local education policy, as they are deeply impacted by international education trends outside their control. International organizations, such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), dictate education policies down to local curricula. National education systems, languages (including local Englishes), and local teaching pedagogies and practices are weakened, discarded, or ignored in the wake of these neocolonial projects. Western governments collaborate with willing and complicit HE institutions to impose Western academic models as a means of neocolonial control, employing and commodifying written and spoken language (Pennycook, 1998)—first British English, and now American English—as an export product; they prey on the pragmatic necessity of their creation. Canagarajah (2002) captures the role of academic writing in this scenario, especially as it pertains to non-Western scholars. He demonstrates that because academic writing in the West “holds a central place in the process of constructing, disseminating, and legitimizing knowledge” (p. 6), non-Western scholars are excluded, their knowledge dismissed or appropriated by Westerners. In this way, academic writing and publishing contributes to the “ideological hegemony of the West” (p. 6).

Need for Writing Training in English

As neocolonial commodities, U.S. writing courses and writing centers are also easily exported, especially as American English is the *lingua franca* of knowledge acquisition and

publication (Altbach, 2004, pp. 7, 10; Canagarajah, 2006; Donahue, 2009, p. 216; Drubin & Kellogg, 2012; Jenkins, 2009). Belcher (2007) describes the geopolitical landscape of English-only academic knowledge production as a “growing monoculture” in light of the fact that since the early 2000s, “31% of all papers published in the world’s leading journals emanated in the United States” (p. 2). This monoculture has been fed by bias toward multilingual scholars and their English-language proficiency, which has sidelined many EAL scholars in the Western-controlled landscape of academic publishing while simultaneously fueling an imperative to publish in prestigious, English-language journals (Jerskey, 2013, p. 197).

Indeed, demand for greater English language training has fueled U.S. writing center internationalization, which has been occurring since the 1990s. This is evident in the “unidirectional” (Scott, 2016) flow of writing instruction models outward from the United States to countries such as Brazil (Rezende et al., 2019), Bermuda (Bruce, 2015), China and Taiwan (Chang, 2013; Epley et al., 2018; Tan, 2011), India (Gupta, 2021; Kunde et al., 2015), Japan (Johnston et al., 2010; Okuda, 2017), Kyrgyzstan (*Writing and Academic Resource Center*, 2021), the Middle East (Barnawi, 2018; Eusafzai, 2018; Weber et al., 2015), South Africa (Papay, 2002), South Korea (Turner, 2006), and Ukraine and Russia (Smith, 2017), as examples. DOS’ writing center development in Brazil is a result of the pressure for Brazilian students and academics to publish in English, despite the fact that Brazil is monolingual Portuguese (Batista, 2020, p. 135, 138). Despite this, there is increasing pressure on Brazilian students and scholars to publish in English “to internationalise their research and teaching in order to keep up with the academic debate, which takes place primarily in English” (p. 135), while “Portuguese now makes up less than 15 percent of Brazil’s output in the Web of Science database of indexed research, down from almost 30 percent in 2009” (Baker, 2021, n.p.). This is measured against the fact that only 5.2% of Brazilians aged 25–34 and 13.3% of those in the “Upper and Middle classes” speak English (*Learning English in Brazil*, 2014, p. 8). In Brazil,

there is not only a concern that English is becoming the dominant language of scholarship, but also the fear that “the countries in South America are being reduced to . . . mere satellite nations” of the United States (Rajagopalan, 2005, p. 108).

Writing Centers as Public Diplomacy

U.S. international writing center initiatives are funded by the U.S. Department of State and carried out through DOS’ Bureau of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (PDPA). Under PDPA are several entities (see Figure 1), including the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), founded by the U.S. Congress in 1961 (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, n.d.). ECA’s task is to “increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange that assist in the development of peaceful relations” (About the Bureau, n.d.). ECA oversees DOS’ cultural exchange programs; the total ECA budget for educational and cultural exchange programs in 2021 was \$741 million (*United States Department of State: Fiscal Year 2021 Agency Financial Report*, 2021), though this total doesn’t include other DOS project-specific funding.

Under ECA are two entities, the Office of Academic Exchange and the Office of English Language Programs (ELP). Within the Office of English Language Programs are four programs,

including the English Language Fellow Program and the English Language Specialist Program (see Figure 2).

Collaborating U.S. HE writing centers, writing center faculty and instructors, and their institutions apply to these two programs through ELP (see Figure 3). Regional English language officers (RELOs) operating from U.S. consulates and embassies (English Teaching & Learning, n.d.) organize and oversee ELP regional programs, activities, and employees, as well as English language fellows and English language specialists. These specialists and fellows create writing centers and tutoring programs, build resources, and train and mentor host faculty and administrators for DOS to further its mission of public diplomacy.

The term *public diplomacy* was coined in 1965 by Edmund Guillon, an American professor and DOS employee, as a synonym for propaganda (Zamorano, 2016, p. 168). It has become affiliated with the advancement of U.S. national political and economic interests using nonmilitaristic *soft power* (Nye, 1990). This involves a multipronged and multi-institutional spread of culture and values to construct “shared” understandings that improve relationships between nations with the aspiration of benefiting politically and economically (Nye, 1990, 2008; Zamorano, 2016). Soft power’s public diplomacy is further segmented to *cultural diplomacy* (Regional English Language Office, n.d.), defined as “any practice that is related to purposeful cultural cooperation between nations or groups of nations” (Ang et al., 2015, p. 366).

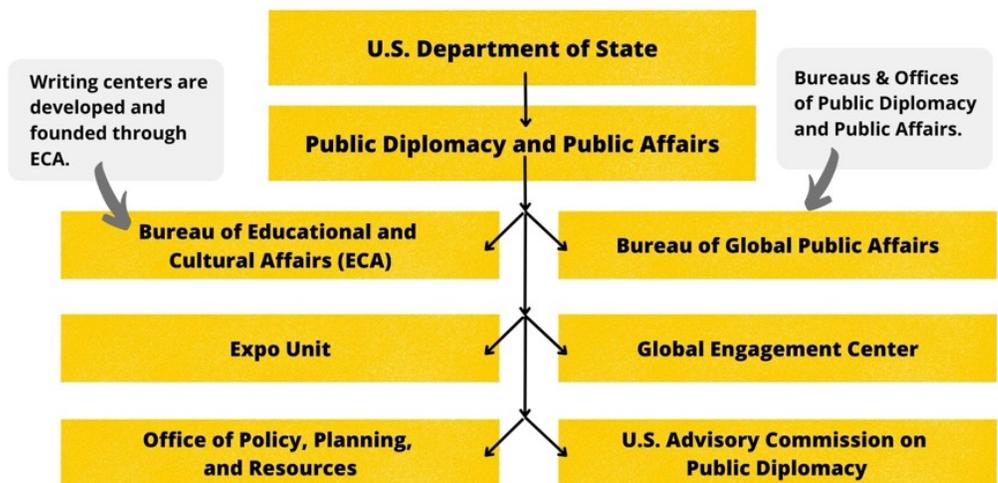


Figure 1. Structure of the Bureau of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

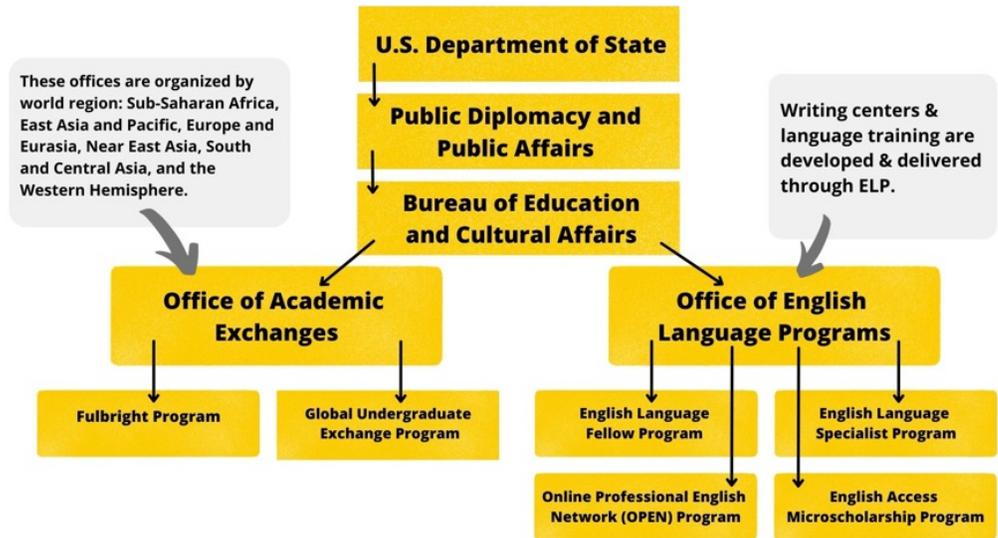


Figure 2. Structure of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

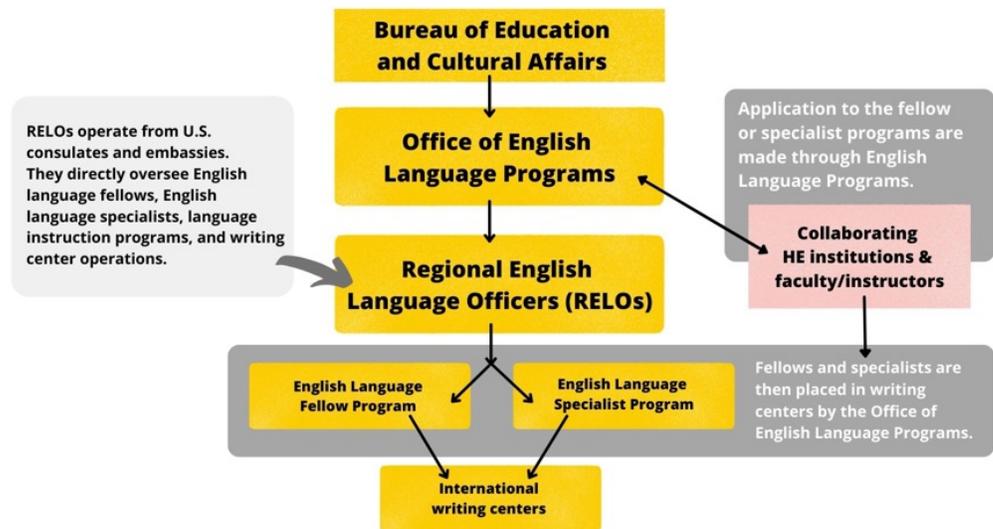


Figure 3. Programs coordinated by ECA regional English language officers.

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Soft power and its tools, public and cultural diplomacy, are increasingly multilayered, involving governmental agencies as well as “business people, artists, emigrants,” and educators—all of whom spread U.S. culture, promote U.S. national identity, and, thereby, map the world according to Western interests.

The writing center Centro de Assessoria de Publicação Acadêmica (CAPA) at the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR) in Curitiba, Brazil, as well as the organization Writing Centers of Brazil (WCB) were created and are currently directed by DOS to take advantage of this need for Brazilian students and scholars to publish in English to further its diplomatic mission. This is an example of U.S. public diplomacy through writing centers on a global scale. CAPA’s

writing center goals are to address the English-writing “deficiency” of Brazilian scholars and students and to aid their academic publishing “in English-medium international journals” (Cons & Martinez, 2021), the majority of which are published in the United States.

CAPA was “founded in 2016 by Professor Ron Martinez,” an employee of both DOS and University of California, Berkeley, which Cons and Martinez claim to be “the first true writing center in Brazil” (Cons & Martinez, 2021). Martinez, an ECA English language writing fellow, is also the founder of the Writing Centers of Brazil (WCB), which claims over “300 members,” and which has led to the creation of “at least four other” U.S.-style writing centers “around Brazil” (Cons & Martinez, 2021). In his capacity

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as an employee of DOS, Martinez directs CAPA, its programs (see, for example, Academic Writing and Research Development (AWARD) (Ron Martinez, n.d.), and WCB, a success story of U.S. public diplomacy and neocolonization.

To aid in DOS' neocolonization work are several U.S. HE writing centers directly involved with CAPA, including Ohio University's Graduate Writing and Research Center, whose director, Talinn Phillips, was "selected" by the DOS in 2020 to support the development of "a nationwide writing center network in Brazil at the Federal University of Paraná" (*U.S. Department of State selects . . .*, 2020). Other writing center-CAPA collaborators include the Center for Writing & Rhetoric at Claremont College and the Writing Center at the University of Iowa (*Academic Writing and Research . . .*, n.d.), producing webinars, guides, and workbooks based on U.S. writing center models (see, for example, *How to Organize a Writing Center [2021]* and *What Is a Writing Center? Resources for Developing Writing Centers Across Brazil* [Phillips, n.d.]).

This expansion of American-style writing centers in South America, as well as Eastern Europe and Central and Southeast Asia, since the early 2000s marks a distinct change in the course of writing center participation in neocolonial trends as public diplomacy tools of the U.S. government. The establishment of writing centers and flourishing of writing center communities such as the National Writing Center Consortium (NWCC) in Russia and the Writing Centers of Brazil (WCB) Facebook community follow trails laid by ECA regional English language officers (RELOs) and English language fellows (English Teaching & Learning, n.d.; Jennifer Uhler, n.d.; Ron Martinez was . . . , 2021; Smith, 2017; UFPR, P.-G. em L., 2020). ECA provides writing center instructional materials written or recorded in American English: how-to materials on establishing writing centers (e.g., Cheatle & Contos, 2020; Phillips, n.d.; Smith, 2017;), writing center workshops and webinars (e.g., RELO Andes Webinars, 2021; Ron Martinez was . . . , 2021; Uhler, 2019), and resources for tutoring students (e.g., Essay Writing Resource Center, n.d.; Smith, 2017). Given their public diplomacy missions, it is not surprising that RELOs have expansive visions

for the proliferation of U.S.-style writing centers, along with their TESOL and TEFL programs (At-a-Glance, n.d.). This is explicit in, for example, DOS' publication for establishing writing centers internationally, *Writing Centers in Multilingual Settings: A Workbook* (Smith, 2017). Written by Eve Smith, the workbook is based in "writing center theory and practice in the United States" (Smith, 2017, p. iii), and the sources in the reference section are nearly all from U.S.-based publications (pp. 97–98). Smith, a 15-year DOS employee, writes, "While this publication was originally written for a Russian audience, the material can be easily adapted and used worldwide" (p. iii), making no reference to any adaptation of U.S. writing center pedagogy for local education cultures, local Englishes, or other education practices or pedagogies. Smith's first point in the workbook under "needs analysis" for establishing a writing center is, "What is the writing center going to be called?" (Smith, 2017, p. 10). Whether this lack of any comprehension of adaptation to local pedagogies or cultures is deliberate is notwithstanding: DOS encourages the imposition of U.S.-developed pedagogy into the administrative functioning of international HE institutions. In addition to this publication, the DOS-funded MOOC, *Establishing Academic Writing Centers at International Higher Education Institutions*, was delivered in 2021 by Iowa State University faculty (Cheatle & Contos, 2020). The MOOC was advertised on several RELO Facebook pages, including RELO Cairo, RELO North Africa, RELO Pakistan, RELO Archipelago, RELO Manila, and RELO Russia.

A Critical Reading of the Literature on U.S.–Non-U.S. Collaborations

The literature on international writing centers is largely silent on issues of neocolonialism, race, or power (Anson & Donahue, 2014; Donahue, 2009; Zenger, 2016). Donahue (2009) observes that the process of exporting and importing American writing curricula, and corresponding "discourses of assessment and administration" (pp. 215–216), occurs "uncritically" and tends to be couched in the

rhetorics of cooperation, partnership, cultural and knowledge exchange—*cultural diplomacy*. Donahue also finds that these projects enact erasures of local pedagogies and rhetorics by constructing a void to fill as they frame local languages as incorrect or insufficient for academic purposes (Donahue, 2009, p. 216). Our review of the literature two decades later suggests that Donahue’s assessment remains accurate.

The literature documenting international writing center projects emanating from the United States engages in a recurring narrative of writing instruction’s history beginning (and continuing) with an American focus (Scott, 2016), a strategy used in the colonial “production of the ‘other’” (García & Baca, 2019, p. 2). We see this repeatedly in descriptions of U.S. writing center exportation, with superficial reference to the roots and development of approaches to writing and/or writing instruction outside the United States (see, for example, Baker & Chung, 2018; Bruce, 2015; Chang, 2013; Johnston et al., 2010; Kunde et al., 2015; Stassen & Jansen, 2012; Tan, 2011; Turner, 2006). This literature is silent on the robust body of research on non-Western rhetorical traditions and approaches to teaching writing (see Campbell, 2006; Chitez et al., 2018; Graves & Graves, 2006; Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2012; Ochieng, n.d.; Vitale & Salazar, 2013). These cultural rhetorics are rendered invisible in the literature on the internationalization of American writing centers, which presumes absence and enacts a form of erasure. Anson and Donahue (2014) propose that this erasure “has grown out of our tendency to look for what we know and, not seeing it, proclaim that it doesn’t exist” (p. 22). An outcome of this erasure is that countries with “different, complex, but well-established traditions in both writing research and writing instruction” are viewed as deficient and “behind the times” (Donahue, 2009, pp. 213–214).

This perspective of deficiency and a need for modernization is evident in surprised reactions to the need for adaptation of American-style writing center programs, which recur in the literature (Weber et al., 2015). For example, Epley et al. (2018) reflect on their experience

To our detriment, we came with ideas already formed and neglected consultation. Perhaps the first year should have consisted of interviews and needs assessment and then based on this canvassing, a more effective approach to the implementation of the writing center would have been developed. (p. 269)

The assumption of a blank canvas on which to replicate an American model is a product of the erasure at work in the neocolonial valorization of English and Western educational models. Epley et al.’s admission here also suggests that limited to no research is invested in justifying the importation and adaptation of American writing center models.

In another example, Bruce (2015), a writing instructor, admits being surprised to find significant cultural differences between their U.S. Floridian home campus and their Bahamian branch campus: “I thought the U.S. academic culture would have been transplanted along with the campus and the professors, especially since quick flights and day cruises regularly transport Floridians and Bahamians between the two countries” (p. 127). Bruce is equally surprised that Bahamians “are full of information about the local environment and their experiences in the classroom” (p. 135)—the colonized helping the colonizer shape writing pedagogy in the neocolonial project. What is seen in the literature of these transplanted U.S. writing centers and writing programs is the attempt to transplant the culture of a U.S. institution onto a partner institution without (at least initially) consideration for local, regional, or national realities and conditions, not to mention reflexive examination of whether adaptation remains a hegemonic imposition.

The emphasis on overcoming difficulties with transplanting U.S. structures has resulted in widespread realization that writing center practice must be “adapted, not transplanted, from the origin to the hosting environment” (Weber et al., 2015, p. 87), even in the case of international branch campuses (see Hodges et al., 2019), many of which are supported or established by DOS (Cons & Martinez, 2021; Smith, 2017). As no ubiquitous U.S. writing center formula exists (Salem, 2014) as a template

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to export, the literature shows individual U.S. institutions adapting their writing center in their partner institution abroad in institution-to-institution collaborations. For instance, Johnston, Cornwall, and Yoshida (2010) describe this phenomenon in Japan: “Since there was no communication between universities in Japan when these writing centers began, each developed based on information from the US or from websites such as the IWCA’s or from communicating with writing centers in the US” (p. 189). While adaptation to local contexts is a worthy exercise, the isolated nature of these U.S.-to-international institution relationships limits the strength of local voices and gives more power to U.S. models and influences.

Having constructed a void to fill, U.S. writing center scholars participate in the long history of education in the rhetorics of salvation and modernity (Heredia, 2012; Siltaoja et al., 2019), which “cloak logics of domination” (García & Baca, 2019, p. 2). We see this rhetoric of salvation across the published literature on exporting American writing centers in work by Bruce (2015), Chang (2013), and Kunde et al. (2015), to name a few. To illustrate, consider Papay’s (2002) description of U.S. writing center practices in South Africa: collaborative writing center pedagogy “is surely a primary means of rendering the very alien academic world more accessible to those so long denied decent education in South Africa” (p. 19). This description of bestowing academics upon deprived South Africans is in keeping with salvation terms, the colonizer saving the colonized from themselves, fundamental colonial ideology, ideology mobilization through positive illusions that aim to construct a sense of empowerment through ‘the rhetoric of equality, care, and succor’” (Siltaoja et al., 2019, p. 91, quoting Fleming, 2005, p. 1484), a rhetoric embedded in writing center practices.

Zenger (2016) stands out among international writing center scholars noting that “global relations of power” (p. 27) need to be explicitly considered in this literature (p. 29). Zenger responds to calls for studies mapping and documenting regional development of writing centers outside the United States with Mignolo’s caution that “[r]egions are not objects of study or mines from which to extract ‘cultural

resources’ to be processed in the industrial epistemic centres of Western Europe and the United States” (p. 29). Zenger goes a long way toward calling for a critical approach to studies and work within international writing centers. George Mwangi et al. (2018) explain that HE research operating within a “critical paradigm” goes beyond superficial acknowledgments of power relations to engage in critiques of “how knowledge production and academic standards normalize and reinforce Western oppression and ways of knowing” (p. 1092).

Capacity for Resistance

Decolonial Theory and Scholarship

Despite the relative silence on decolonization and neocolonialism in literature describing U.S. writing center internationalization, U.S.-based scholarship on decolonizing writing center practice within domestic U.S. HE institutions has only grown over the last two decades. There is now a sophisticated understanding of academic English’s long-established colonial nature and the neocolonial service of writing instruction, what Hurstfield (1975) describes as *internal colonization*, where U.S. HE institutions are “seen as instruments of White domination over colonized minorities” (p. 147). This research can serve as common ground from which to reflect upon and rethink writing center internationalization.

For instance, American scholars Bawarshi and Pelkowski (1999) describe academic discourse as “dangerously hegemonic” when student writers are not explicitly and carefully taught how to navigate and negotiate their subject positioning in relation to it. They explain that American writing centers help the university “force marginalized students to consent to the discursive practices of education by first reminding them that they are Other and in need of remediation, and then convincing them that being academically literate is the most prestigious, most civilized state of being” (p. 49). This conversation was picked up in Howard’s (2004) proposal that domestic U.S. students (and writing center directors and tutors) engage in “backwriting” to “critique,

respond to, confront, and revise the dominant academic structures” (p. 7); in Ruiz and Sánchez’s (2016) expansion of decolonial theory to the Latinx community and the introduction of the concept of epistemic delinking; and in García’s (2017) contention that writing tutors are well positioned to become “decolonial agents” by practicing a pedagogy of listening in order to both ensure that all students are seen and heard and to “nuance what it means to talk about race and difference(s)” (p. 52). Although there has been little engagement with this decolonial research within scholarship describing international writing center projects, the research exists to be called upon going forward; editors and peer reviewers must insist that it is.

Writing Center Associations and Leadership

Leadership from the global community of writing center organizations is also required to address this intensification and demand that critical approaches be applied to this work. Unfortunately, the most well-funded international writing center organization, and the only multiregional organization to adopt the title “international,” the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), is not well positioned to rebuff this trend. Many of IWCA’s member writing centers are complicit in DOS’ work, either in training, supporting, or providing faculty, staff, and student exchanges for the development and creation of U.S. writing centers, writing programs, and American English instruction outside the United States. This extends to members of the IWCA board, some of whom are directly involved in DOS writing center initiatives. The IWCA’s U.S. focus is also a limiting factor. Despite the IWCA’s mission to provide “an international forum for writing center concerns” (Mission, n.d.), all IWCA annual conferences up to 2021 have taken place in the United States and each with keynote speakers representing U.S. tertiary institutions at the time of writing. Since 2000, award and grant recipients have been primarily U.S.-based. Just one of 22 IWCA outstanding article awards has been awarded to non-American authors (2006) and only two of 51 IWCA

research grants awarded for research by non-Americans and/or with a focus outside the United States (IWCA Grants and Awards, n.d.).

The U.S. National Writing Center Association

The National Writing Center Association (NWCA) was created in 1983 and became the IWCA in 2000. NWCA (IWCA) was created as (and remains) an assembly (or special interest group [SIG]) of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (Assemblies, n.d.). NCTE, a U.S. national organization, has no international focus that we could find. As a SIG of NCTE, the IWCA is “authorized by the [NCTE] Executive Committee to serve the interests and purposes of persons who share special interests or who have jobs alike” (Constitution, n.d.) and abide by the purpose of the NCTE, which includes improving “the quality of instruction in English”; encouraging “research, experimentation, and investigation in the teaching of English”; and facilitating “professional cooperation of the members” (Constitution, n.d.), without mentioning international projects, programs, or focus. This structure locates the IWCA as a SIG of a U.S. national organization, limiting its claim to international status to representation among its membership and on its board of directors.

The IWCA has not had a significant restructuring since its renaming as the IWCA in 2000. The IWCA’s 2021 board of directors is composed primarily of individuals from U.S. tertiary institutions, with just three of 29 board members representing non-American tertiary institutions, none of whom are among the executive group. The board structure creates equivalency between representatives of five international affiliate organizations and representatives of 12 U.S. regional organizations. Regional affiliates have always had a place on the organization’s board; Harris and Simpson (in Kinkead, 2015) recount that the NWCA was created in such a way as to include representatives from each U.S. regional writing center organization in response to concerns that a national organization would limit regional dialogue (p. 7). When the NWCA became the IWCA in 2000, international and national

affiliates simply began to be added alongside U.S. regional writing center organizations without distinction (IWCA Bylaws, n.d.). Positioned in this manner, as others within a national organization in everything but name, international affiliates have limited power to advocate for the restructuring required for IWCA to shift away from its origins as a U.S. national organization. While IWCA board minutes are not transparent to the public, the authors can attest to suggesting at a recent board meeting that a reconstituted NWCA become an affiliate of a restructured IWCA with an executive group comprised of representatives from national and multinational “writing center” organizations or networks. This suggestion was met with silence from the nearly all-U.S. IWCA board.

The Global Landscape of National and Multinational Writing Center Associations

As a U.S. national organization with members (including board members) involved in U.S. government initiatives, the IWCA is not well positioned to negotiate complicity of writing centers in neocolonial trends that commodify American English. Our analysis of writing center organizations outside of North America suggest that none of these organizations are particularly well positioned to do so either. We have found nine writing center communities outside of the United States, some more formally constituted than others:

- Canadian Writing Centres Association/ Association canadienne des centres de rédaction (CWCA/ACCR), founded 2007
- European Writing Centers Association (EWCA), founded 1998
- Latin America Network of Writing Centers and Programs (RLCPE), founded 2014²
- Middle East North Africa Writing Center Alliance (MENAWCA), founded 2007
- National Writing Center Consortium (NWCC, Russia), founded 2017
- South Africa Writing Centre Group (SA WC group), informal group
- Writing Center Association of China (WCAC), founded 2017

- Writing Center Association of Japan (WCAJ), founded 2011
- Writing Centers of Brazil/CAPA (WCB), founded 2020

When we map the relationships between these organizations, we find that while all are connected to IWCA, DOS, and/or U.S. writing center “pedagogical heritage” in some combination (Richards et al., 2019), none are connected to each other, except on an ad hoc basis or between individuals. The map of the global community, then, is an outstretched hand with relationships orchestrated by the United States (see Figure 4). This isolation from each other severely limits trans-regional dialogue, with low likelihood that, for instance, the WCB community’s desire to explore practices of resistance (see Rezende et al., 2019) connects them to the development and theorization of such practices among the SA WC network (see Clarence, 2019; Richards et al., 2019) outside a reading of the literature.

As Figure 4 shows, relationships between international organizations and the IWCA vary in nature. EWCA and MENAWCA are connected hierarchically, with stipulations in their constitutions to provide the IWCA with reports when asked, for assisting in the work of the IWCA, and following the Guidelines for Regional Organizations as stated in the IWCA By-Laws. In addition, MENAWCA board members are required to be IWCA members. The CWCA/ACCR and RLCPE are also IWCA affiliates, appearing in the IWCA’s list of affiliates, but without the same reporting structures in their bylaws, and have the privilege of sitting on the IWCA’s board without the obligation of reporting to it (see Figure 1). These close affiliations with the IWCA limit what can be politely said.

Individually, however, none of these international writing center organizations are free from U.S. influence pushed by neocolonial trends toward a standardized American English. This is explicit in the WCAJ’s origin story, with Delgrego (2016) explaining that the growth of Japan’s writing center community was spurred on by the Japanese Ministry of Education’s prioritization of English language learning. The WCAJ’s creation as a forum of national idea exchange came about

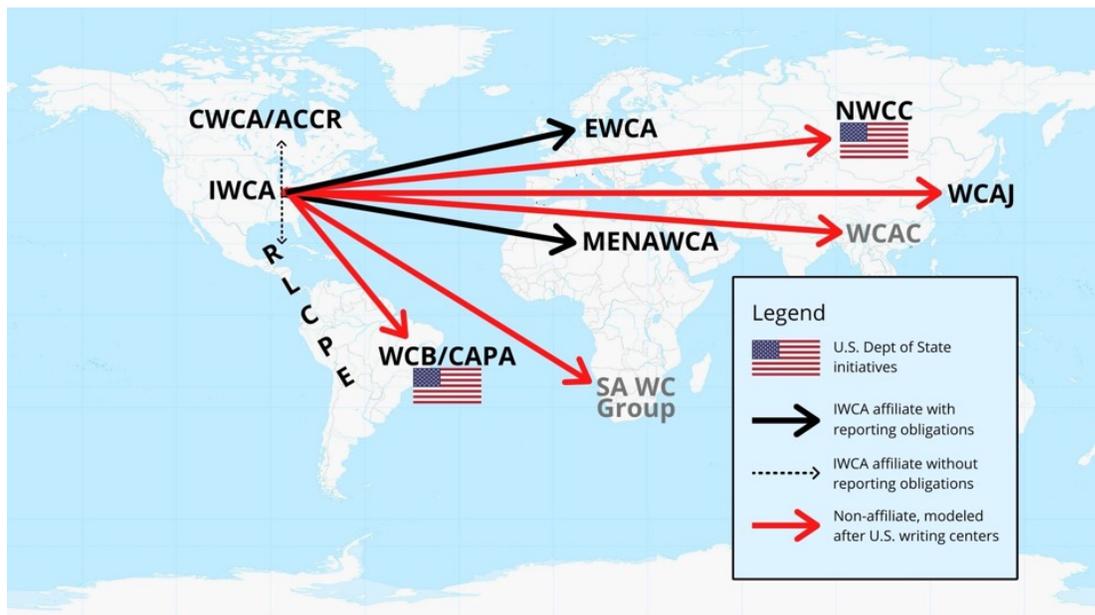


Figure 4. Map of writing center organizations around the world.

with the shared need to adapt U.S. writing center models for this ELL focus. The influence of neocolonial trends here does not mean that the WCAJ is well positioned to rebuff the use of international writing centers as neocolonial enterprises.

Many other organizations also cite the influence of U.S. models in their foundation. The WCAC, for example, has been hosting writing center conferences since 2017 featuring keynote speakers from U.S. tertiary institutions. Song (2018) documents a unidirectional U.S.-China flow of writing centers, with the first U.S. Chinese writing center initiated by virtue of an exchange program between Bowling Green State University in Ohio and Xi'an International Studies University (see Fan, 2020, and Song, 2018). The EWCA is a much more well-established organization that has grown apart from its U.S.-focused roots. The EWCA was founded by Anna Challenger (American College of Thessaloniki, Greece) and Tracy Santa (American University in Bulgaria), although Tan (2011) explains that the EWCA membership has grown from primarily American tertiary institutions operating in Europe to include a much broader pan-European membership. However, the EWCA's ability to provide leadership to the global community is limited by its loose organizational structure. Cleary of the University of Limerick explained that the

EWCA operates without membership dues on principles of inclusion and access, and that the board is relatively inactive (personal communication, May 13, 2021). "Side-of-desk" work is fairly common for writing center professionals.

Like the EWCA, the SA WC group appears to have grown away from U.S. models that inspired initial writing centers. In fact, South African writing center scholarship articulates sharp critiques of their U.S. writing center "pedagogical heritage," which is "born out of certain privileges" (Richards et al., 2019, p. iv). This heritage is separate and distinct from the approaches required by the unique South African landscape of teaching and learning, marked by deep cultural inequities that cut firmly along racial lines. In this context, Clarence (2019) warns about the uncritical adoption of American "safe space" descriptions of writing centers—where students are safe from reproach as they learn to more accurately approximate dominant discourses of the academy—and to instead conceptualize writing centers as "safe spaces" for decolonizing activity with students and tutors collaboratively engaging in a critical examination of "what counts as knowledge" (p. 124). Despite the leadership potential suggested by this critical literature, however, the SA WC group is informally constituted. Richards et al. (2019) explains that the informal SA WC group became

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connected in the early 2000s and functions as a special interest group at the national conference of the Higher Education in Learning and Teaching Association of South Africa. Richards et al. cite a preference for independence combined with a lack of resources required for formally organizing as reasons for the group's continuing informality.

This review of the global writing center community reveals that national and transnational organizations outside of the United States operate in isolation from one another, despite shared experiences negotiating what Richards, Lackay, and Delpont (2019) term a U.S. "pedagogical heritage." Where this negotiation is most advanced, organizational strength for leadership is lacking. In other places, there does not appear to be capacity for resistance in light of government enthusiasm for the teaching of American English, especially when this teaching is funded by DOS/ECA. While IWCA does act as a convening point where representatives of at least four international associations come together, it is both too preoccupied with the U.S. site of practice and too imbricated in neocolonial viewpoints to facilitate the sort of transnational dialogue needed to rebuff neocolonial projects and resist the present and future of writing centers in the service of U.S. public diplomacy.

Major Observations and Recommendations

The potential future in which writing centers are increasingly coopted as neocolonial public diplomacy initiatives should be upsetting to any writing center scholar or practitioner invested in the decolonial aspirations of the field. However, it does not appear that the scholarly literature has done much to flag the potential for international writing centers to be seen as neocolonial enterprises, despite the robust theorization of writing center decolonization focused on domestic U.S. writing center pedagogy, rhetoric, and practice. It is as though international writing center scholarship is being conducted in isolation, with peer reviewers and editors failing to call for a critical approach to be brought to bear elsewhere in the field.

Moreover, we have not found the capacity for leadership on this issue from the international community of writing center organizations. With the international organization distracted by national U.S. activities and multi-regional organizations elsewhere either too deeply entrenched in U.S. interests to see the issue or lacking the organizational strength or leadership to speak loudly enough to be heard, there is no available leadership engaged in the construction of a more just and equitable future. The U.S. orchestration of writing center organizations is also at play. The unidirectional flow of U.S. "pedagogical heritage" (Richards et al., 2019) and the isolated connections to the IWCA obstruct meaningful interassociation conversation and fail to connect and empower colonized voices. With the non-U.S. writing center community as a whole fragmented, isolated, and unheard, smaller associations are left with diminished voices and trans-regional organizing powers.

Beginning to Work against Neocolonial Writing Centers

A lack of both policies and position statements from the IWCA regarding writing center pedagogy and rhetoric exploitation as neocolonial tools has left writing centers open to be used as blunt tools of DOS hegemony and neocolonial efforts. IWCA members' collaboration with and condonation of DOS together with the silence of the IWCA stands in stark contrast to the conception of writing centers as places of social justice work and anti-neocolonial projects. Recognizing and addressing the global coloniality of the international writing center landscape requires a close examination of IWCA's structure and U.S. focus. Creation of a multiregional organizational structure networked with multidirectional dialoguing and coequal collaboration and cooperation would begin to address IWCA's U.S.-centered structures. These multidirectional relationships would be sustainable with transparency around multiregional affiliations and would provide strong public denunciations of any cooperation by writing centers and the cooption of writing center models and pedagogies by DOS cultural diplomacy initiatives.

IWCA's leadership should consider the publication of position statements regarding transnational relationships between writing centers, recommending that Western writing center scholars inform themselves of host languages and language cultures, pedagogies and teaching practices, and educational histories and traditions; consider the ways in which U.S. writing center models and pedagogies are an imposition over the local; and confront the a priori power dynamic of transnational collaborative enterprises. Such leadership would call upon Western writing center professionals to attend to the decolonizing strategies theorized by scholars such as Bawarshi and Pelkowski (1999), Howard (2004), Canagarajah (2004), Condon (2007), Zawodny and Reynolds (2014), Inoue (2016), García (2017), and Green (2018) when entering transnational relationships and act not as agents of change but rather as listeners to local realities and allies to local concerns.

In addition to the IWCA, journals and other publication venues in the field have opportunities to take on leadership roles in the work of decolonizing writing centers. Journals in the field must recognize that decolonization work will not be sustainable without the prioritization of critical approaches to studies of transnational writing center collaborations and enhanced scholarly attention to non-U.S. cultures of writing and rhetoric, especially as authored by non-American scholars. To this end, journals in the field should be explicitly asking for submissions to address power relations, social justice, and indigeneity and feature forms of writing instruction and mentorship not conceived in Western terms or oriented toward an American or Standard English. They should also be seeking further illumination of the realities of writing centers in the context of global coloniality with a focus on regional impacts of U.S. writing center initiatives, especially those state-sponsored, public-diplomacy initiatives. This research is warranted by studies such as Tuinamua's (2005), which shows that the imposition of IMF and World Bank "directives" on local Fijian education curricula resulted in changes to local education realities (e.g., Education Fiji 2020 and "new managerialism") (pp. 202–203), as well as the fact that this fits

a pattern of local discourses being engulfed by neocolonial forces, captured in Canagarajah's (2005) edited volume. These are hard truths for a community within HE that tends to see itself through narratives of social justice, inclusion, and access.

Finally, IWCA's basic structure needs to be reconsidered and reordered. IWCA should separate from NCTE. The U.S. regional affiliates could then consider reforming as a national organization (American Writing Centers Association, for example) to exist alongside other national associations. A new international association could then be formed with a reconstituted board-group composed of representatives from national and multinational associations organized as a global, multilingual, anti-neocolonial congress of international writing centers.

Notes

1. For example, see DOS' \$500,000 funding through Columbia University "To Support English Language Fellow and Specialist Programs Managed by Regional English Language Office of U.S. Embassy Beijing" (19.040: Public Diplomacy Programs, 2021).
2. Also important is the Associação Latino-Americana de Estudos da Escrita na Educação Superior e em Contextos Profissionais (ALES), <https://www.estudiosdelaescritura.org/>

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