



Amy Hodges, Lynne Ronesi, and Amy Zenger

Learning from/in Middle East and North Africa Writing Centers: Negotiating Access and Diversity

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region comprises a vast area among three continents—Europe, Asia, and Africa. While there are no standardized lists of MENA countries, the following countries and territories, in alphabetical order, are most generally included: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, West Bank and Gaza, and Yemen. Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Sudan, and Turkey may also be named. While this lack of standardization makes it difficult to settle on a population size, the Middle East North Africa Regional Architecture project estimates the number at 569 million (McKee, Keulertz, Habibi, Mulligan, & Woertz, 2017). The MENA region is widely diverse economically, encompassing both wealthy, oil-rich states and resource-scarce countries. Although Islam is the dominant religion in most of the MENA countries, Islam itself contains many sects, and a

A version of this address was delivered at the International Writing Centers Association conference in Atlanta, Georgia, October 12, 2018. This was the first-ever IWCA virtual keynote, with the authors presenting from three countries—Lebanon, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates—via videoconference to the audience in Atlanta.



plurality of Christian and other religions are also practiced. The region is similarly diverse linguistically. While Modern Standard Arabic is widely used in formal situations and understood across national contexts, spoken dialects of Arabic vary a great deal. English or French may serve as a *lingua franca* in some areas, as a legacy of colonization or other ties. Education within and across these national contexts, including higher education, is also very diverse, following various academic traditions and offered in different languages of instruction, reflecting the complex histories of the region.

Writing centers began to appear in universities in the region in the early years of this century. In some cases, new writing centers were integral to a program adopted whole cloth from institutions in the United States or other countries, as in the international branch-campus programs established in Education City, Qatar, several of which included writing centers. In other instances, the impetus came from accreditation recommendations, as at the American University of Beirut and Lebanese American University, where the centers were introduced as innovations within the existing programs.

Noting the phenomenon, writing center administrators in the region worked with IWCA to found an affiliate organization: the Middle East–North Africa Writing Center Alliance (MENAWCA). The list of MENA writing centers posted on the MENAWCA website (www.menawca.org), while not exhaustive, offers an idea of the number and diversity of centers that now exist, some 15 years into the initial wave of growth. In 2007, the first MENAWCA symposium was convened in Doha with about 50 MENA-region writing center tutors and directors and facilitated by then IWCA Vice President Michele Eodice. Since then, MENAWCA has sponsored conferences every two years, often inviting writing scholars from the United States, such as recent speakers Dana Driscoll, Clint Gardner, Terry Myers Zawacki, and Ann Mott (from the American University of Paris). The biennial conference and the virtual networks created by the organization have been vital to regional writing center practitioners, who may be the only people in their country working in the field. The conference routinely draws a wider regional audience of writing teachers, English-language instructors, and researchers with interests in language and linguistics in addition to writing. In roughly the same time frame as the establishment of MENAWCA, composition and rhetoric studies began to internationalize their scope and reach out to established modes of research in other fields (Donahue, 2009; Hesford, 2006; Horner & Koppelson, 2014; Thaiss, Bräuer, Carlino, Ganobcsik-Williams, & Sinha, 2012), and MENA-based writing research began to emerge as a body of scholarship.

Academics trained in the United States and working in the MENA region tend to bring specific disciplinary conceptions of what writing is or is not, and, consequently, what writing program administration looks like. Recent collections of research on writing instruction and writing center work in the Middle East–North Africa region (e.g., Arnold, Nebel, & Ronesi, 2017; Barnawi, 2018; Martins, 2015; Rajakumar, 2018) have been published in venues familiar to most U.S. writing center practitioners: the WAC Clearinghouse and traditional scholarly book publishers. However, in order to understand the work of international writing centers, U.S. academics must also investigate fields international writing center scholars draw from. International writing center directors and tutors often have a wide range of expertise in fields such as TESOL and applied linguistics, English for specific purposes (ESP) or English for academic purposes (EAP), English across the curriculum (EAC), academic literacies, world Englishes, and content and integrated learning (CLIL). As writing center scholars have engaged in a complex and at times fraught debate over how to work with multilingual writers, these fields often start with the presumption that writers bring a rich and diverse set of language experiences with them.

While the theory, history, and scholarship of U.S. writing centers and writing pedagogy models have been helpful for practitioners in MENA writing centers (McHarg, 2014), it is important for us to take the contexts of MENA writing centers into account and continually to rework writing center pedagogy to respond to our tutor and writer populations. In so doing, we heed Christiane Donahue’s (2009) call to “begin thinking about where our work fits in with the world rather than where the world’s work fits into ours, and move beyond an ‘us–them’ paradigm, particularly as it appears in ‘discovery of difference’ scholarship” (p. 214). By understanding the many traditions of researching writing and the teaching of writing, directors and tutors everywhere can continue the hard work of making their centers globalized.

To support that understanding, we three MENA-based writing center scholars representing three very different institutions—the American University of Beirut, a longstanding, American-model, liberal arts university in Lebanon; the American University of Sharjah, an independent university just over two decades old in the United Arab Emirates; and Texas A&M University at Qatar, a branch campus just under two decades old in Qatar—are pleased to share with *The Writing Center Journal* readers some context on our institutions and writing centers and highlight our common challenges, which, for us, largely revolve around access and diversity. Our observations respond to and expand on Erin Zimmerman’s

recent review in *The Writing Center Journal* of two books that explore writing and writing centers in the MENA region.

Writing Centers in the MENA Region American University of Beirut

The American University of Beirut, founded in 1866 by missionaries from New England, is American in its liberal arts model, which asks undergraduate students to take courses in a number of areas outside their majors. It is also accredited through the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and maintains extensive ties to the United States through its faculty members and academic exchanges, its New York office, its alumni, and grants received from U.S. donors. At the same time, the university is deeply rooted in Lebanon and has long played an important role in the country, the region, and the global Lebanese diaspora. Because of its location, and throughout its history, the university has also been called upon to respond to urgent sociopolitical crises, including famine, armed conflicts, and waves of refugees. Today, AUB is made up of seven faculties (Agriculture and Food Sciences, Arts and Sciences, Business, Engineering and Architecture, Medicine, Nursing, and Public Health) and enrolls 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students. English is the primary language of instruction, and undergraduate students take two required English communication-skills courses; Arabic is also a required communication course for most students (American University of Beirut, 2018, p. 48). The academic backgrounds of AUB students reflect the diversity of pedagogical traditions and languages informing education in Lebanon itself. By design, the national curriculum ensures all students are grounded fairly extensively in French, Arabic, and English. Pedagogical traditions that can be traced to France, Britain, Armenia, or Germany coexist with Arabic educational traditions, resulting in a vibrant mix of language ideologies, written student genres, and literacy practices.

In 2004, AUB opened a small writing center, which has grown and thrived continuously ever since. Tutors currently include undergraduate work-study students, graduate assistants, and instructors with MA or PhD degrees—about 17 tutors in all. The Department of English offers a course in writing center tutoring, though for logistical reasons, it is not workable to make the course a prerequisite for tutors who are hired. Tutor education is at the center of writing center practice here: an extensive orientation workshop is followed by weekly reading and discussion meetings, and tutors engage in observations and some research. Since 2010, the writing center has also been involved in supporting writing in the disciplines at the undergraduate level, primarily by collaborating with faculty members

to identify writing goals for their courses and programs, and in developing assignments, syllabi, and practices for teaching writing. In some cases, the collaboration can include specialized tutoring sessions or in-class workshops.

American University of Sharjah

The American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates was established in 1997 by the ruler of the emirate of Sharjah, His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi. It is an independent, English-medium university accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, with four schools/colleges—the College of Architecture, Art and Design; the College of Arts and Sciences; the School of Business Administration; and College of Engineering. AUS’s bachelor of science degree program in engineering is accredited by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). In its mission statement, AUS describes itself in what might seem polemic pairings: “based on an American model of higher education and grounded in the culture of the Gulf region” and “integrat[ing] liberal studies and professional education.” (American University of Sharjah, n.d., 2018–2019, p. 1) Indeed, it is at the intersection of these seeming polarities that AUS situates itself.

That intersection plays out in various ways. In the MENA region, great esteem is accorded to engineering, and nearly half of AUS undergraduates are enrolled in the College of Engineering. At this coeducational institution—the only mixed-gender university in the emirate of Sharjah—females represent half the AUS student population (American University of Sharjah, “Fast,” n.d.) and one-third of engineering majors (American University of Sharjah, “College,” n.d.). As an American university, AUS requires students to take general education courses in disciplines outside their majors through the College of Arts and Sciences; one of the core requirements is History and Culture of the Arab World.

Additionally, AUS claims two hallmarks of U.S. higher education—first-year writing and a writing center. At AUS, first-year writing is a series of three courses, acknowledging the learning curve students face becoming proficient in university-level writing in English. This situation is due primarily to the heterogeneity of their secondary schooling—in a language medium (Arabic, English, Russian, etc.) and in national curriculum (Emirati, British, American, Pakistani, Jordanian, etc.). Out of 5,550 students, student nationalities number 95 (American University of Sharjah, “Fast,” n.d.). Many AUS students are UAE residents who have been born or raised in the UAE, away from their country of origin. Accordingly, the AUS writing center, running since 2004, boasts a multilingual staff

of 30 undergraduate peer tutors and writing fellows; these peer tutors are trained in a semester-long credit-bearing course established in 2007. The current training class, recruited based on recommendations by the writing instructors, contains native speakers of Arabic, Bosnian, Greek, Hausa, Hindi, and Urdu.

Texas A&M University at Qatar

Texas A&M University at Qatar (TAMUQ) was founded in 2003 as the result of an invitation from His Highness the Father Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani, and his second wife, Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser al-Missned. Sheikha Moza, was the driving force behind the development of Education City: the community of six U.S. branch campuses, two European institutions, and one local university (Hamad bin Khalifa University).

TAMUQ is a branch campus of Texas A&M University that offers four engineering majors, with the exact same curriculum as the main campus in College Station, Texas—right down to the required courses in American History and Texas State Government (Texas A&M University at Qatar, 2018). However exact the replication appears on paper, the reality of student, faculty, and staff interaction produces very different results on the ground. The student body is small (around 450 undergraduates and 50 graduate students), and the male/female ratio is about 50/50. These students represent over 40 nationalities (J. L. Bolch, personal communication, October 31, 2018). About half the students are Qatari citizens, and the other half are called *international students*, but that term does not quite capture the complexity of their ethnic and national status. Many have grown up in Qatar as the children of expats, and they may carry one or more passports from nations in the MENA and South Asia region. Almost all TAMUQ students have learned English as a second or third language, although many started at a young age or have some English spoken in the home.

The Center for Teaching and Learning provides faculty-development and student-learning support across the disciplines, and our math, science, and writing tutoring services are very popular with the students. There is no tutor-training class, so the eleven STEM and writing peer tutors attend weekly mandatory trainings focusing on common tutoring issues. There are also three part-time writing consultants and a full-time multimedia staff member who provide in-class workshops and individual and group consultations on team writing, peer review, presentations, and technical reports.

Building upon Current Work in Writing, Language, and Diversity

Writing centers have traveled into the MENA region along the routes established by academic writing instruction in English. Unlike the U.S. context, where the English language is dominant and writing pedagogies, while allowing for different camps, bear many commonalities, languages and writing are very heterogeneous in our environment. If we adopt writing as our frame of reference, and we study writing within the geographical scope of the MENA region, it is evident that writing in the region, even within national boundaries, encompasses many more languages and scripts, practices and genres, and pedagogies. It is not unusual for these differences to be compartmentalized, whether they differ from one class of institutions to another, or whether they share an institutional environment, or whether they are brought together in the experiences of a single individual.

One way MENA writing centers can help U.S. and other international practitioners resituate their work is through our experience with and understanding of “superdiversity” (Vertovec, 2007), particularly in terms of linguistic abilities. Superdiversity describes both the diversity of a particular society and the diversity within the groups that make up the society. For example, if IWCA members wanted to make a road trip to visit the authors at their respective institutions in the UAE, Qatar, and Lebanon, their vehicles would travel over 3,000 kilometers and take over 30 hours, not counting any border crossings. During that road trip, IWCA members might encounter a portion of the over 30 dialects of Arabic, some of which are mutually unintelligible. Students from the MENA region often learn at least one Arabic dialect spoken in the home and learn a different version of Arabic (Modern Standard Arabic) taught at schools and in religious institutions. They would also no doubt encounter other languages, certainly French and Armenian, in Lebanon, and very likely “Malayalam, Nepali, Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, Balochi, Urdu, Tagalog, Indonesian, Persian, Sinhalese, Amharic, Pashto, among others” (Hillman & Ocampo Eibenschutz, 2018, p. 233), reflecting the languages of the diverse international workforce in the region. In view of these realities, the work of MENA-region scholars reflects the nuances and realities of complex multilingualism, where problematic terms like “first language” and “second language learner” do not really apply to people who negotiate lives in this context (Nebel, 2017).

For writing center tutorials, this language diversity often means navigating multiple layers of language acquisition and identity, on the part of both the writer and the tutor. For some tutors and students, this

negotiation can be a challenge. In some ways, MENA writing centers are no different than others—we also meet students who, despite their rich and varied linguistic background, have internalized ideologies about the prestige of some standardized English dialects, and they come to tutorials with requests to “fix their grammar.” However, as Jerry Won Lee and Christopher Jenks (2016) remind us, “Translingual dispositions, like English, are multifaceted and reflect students’ varied and evolving lives” (p. 340). Especially with repeat clients, writing centers can help students come to terms with the complex influences on their language in schools, universities, and in home communities (Haviland, Mullin, & Zenger, 2014). Through their conversations, tutors and writers can investigate and reflect upon the following questions:

1. What is the writer trying to *do* with the English in this assignment? What is the writer trying to *do* with English overall?
2. What language(s) does the writer seek to use for their own benefit now or in the future?
3. What are the consequences of adhering to the ideological force of “standardized English” in this situation? To what extent are these consequences part of the lived reality for the writer and tutor?

This shared knowledge on the intersections of culture, race, and gender for writing center clients and practitioners can foster understanding of superdiversity. It is a helpful concept to capture the complicated lives of many students we know that would otherwise be too simplistically labeled as *ESL*, such as the Iraqi student who grew up in Syria, went to university in Qatar, performs poetry in Modern Standard Arabic, and is now trying to write a technical report in English for his Pakistani professor. We share the recent call for scholarship that “move[s] beyond just a focus on English and Arabic and consider[s] the way that a number of other languages used in [MENA countries] contribute[s] to the sociolinguistic landscape and to identity” (Hillman & Ocampo-Eibenschutz, 2018, p. 243).

To spread this understanding of writing center consultations with superdiverse clients, we call upon writing centers in the United States to research *with* students from the region instead of *on* them. The recent *Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors* (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016) represents a much-needed movement in the field towards undergraduate student research, but none of the pieces in the book were written by tutors outside a U.S. university. If U.S. writing centers are involved in a relationship with writing centers outside the United States, it should be structured as an exchange between equal partners instead of a consultancy that suggests

knowledge only flows from West to East. Increased efforts in this area will foreground the voices of young scholars in the region and share crucial cultural context helpful to all of us.

Access in the MENA Region

In her review of two recent books on writing in the MENA region—*Writing Centers in the Higher Education Landscape*, edited by Osman Barnawi, and *Emerging Writing Research from the Middle East-North Africa Region*, edited by Lisa R. Arnold, Anne Nebel, and Lynne Ronesi—Erin Zimmerman (currently at the American University of Beirut) touches on the multidimensional problem of access faced by writing students, instructors, and scholars in the MENA region. Zimmerman notes that MENA-oriented information and learning materials are limited in both texts and digital spaces, affecting students' ability to pursue paper topics and their research on relevant issues in the region. She also addresses the difficulty MENA scholars face in accessing research due to the high costs of shipping materials to the MENA region. We would like to follow up on Zimmerman's observations and elaborate on her points with the types of "day-to-day challenges" and observations useful to readers seeking to understand the MENA context. We will treat student access issues first, then access relevant to our scholarship.

As noted, locating learning materials that are relevant, culturally sensitive, and pitched at the appropriate level for our students is a continuing challenge MENA instructors work creatively to address. In the case of branch campuses, instructors may be encouraged, perhaps even obliged, to use the texts used by the "home" institution. Independent universities often have more latitude for seeking or creating instructional materials. An attempt to create a custom-made, culturally relevant, and level-appropriate writing textbook at AUB has met with longstanding success, and the composition program has just published the fifth edition of its course reader: *Pages Apart: A Reader for Academic Writing* (Ward, Hodeib, Lincoln, Moghabghab, Rantisi, & Sinno, 2018). The project addresses some of the problems the program has experienced in accessing textbooks published abroad. First, editors can include works authored by writers from the region or take up topics of specific interest to students and faculty here, along with texts of more general interest. The editing project may also foreground conversations among instructors about the place of reading in writing classrooms, the choice of readings, and how to teach reading. Finally, because the book is published by a local press, the program can ensure that it will be available, negotiate the cost, and ensure copyright laws are not being violated. Beyond that AUB textbook,

anthologies of excellent student writing, which help model the typical assignments required of students, are another in-house means of creating MENA-oriented student-learning materials and are published by AUS, TAMUQ, and Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar.

As one might expect, emerging MENA-region writing center scholarship translates into an increasing number of locally relevant tutor-training materials. In fall 2018, Ken Nielsen's "There May Have Been Other Stuff Going On: Affective Labor and the Writing Center as a Safe House"—a chapter from the Barnawi (2018) volume reviewed by Zimmerman—was added to the AUS peer-tutor-training course syllabus. Undertaken at New York University's Abu Dhabi branch campus, the writing center case studies addressed in this chapter feature scenarios familiar to the AUS context. For the AUS tutor trainees, this chapter constitutes a third reading out of their 15 assigned readings that treats writing center response to a UAE-based student population like theirs.

Of course, writing-tutor training should involve familiarizing tutors with the support infrastructure available to students; this is a particularly important consideration for MENA students who may not be savvy or feel comfortable about seeking help. To support this, AUS tutor training involves the library in several ways. Tutor trainees attend an information-literacy session run by a research librarian updating them on strategies for approaching new research topics and locating relevant scholarship in the library shelves and databases; the trainees are also required to visit a research librarian for their own course research project. Naturally, these exercises support their own scholarly efforts even as the goal of these requirements is to instruct the trainees how to assist their peers in their tutorial sessions: not only do the trainees benefit from personal assistance from reference librarians, but the session also provides the basis on which the trainees can attest the usefulness of research-librarian assistance to the students they will tutor in the writing center. Beyond that, the partnership between the writing center and the library has a spiraling beneficial effect. Because the AUS library is a repository for local documents such as government reports and statistics, as well as university theses and dissertations, tutor trainees can access sources of regional relevance for their research; this accessibility supports student research that analyzes the training course, tutorials, the writing center, and writing courses or curriculum from a locally relevant perspective. These topics are strongly encouraged. Moreover, the tutors' research ideas provide the research librarians insight into the tutor's writing center-based concerns and interests, which then are conveyed to collection specialists. Zimmerman is correct that collaboration and outreach within institutions—that is, between the writing center and the library, and between regional libraries and institutions—are

valuable ways to build both relationships and the potential for resource sharing. Within their own institutional contexts, MENA writing center practitioners should consider working closely with their librarians beyond simply locating sources for their research or recommending purchases or subscriptions for the institutional collection.

Zimmerman also notes that sites like the WAC Clearinghouse are immensely helpful. Notably, many MENA colleagues make use of open-access materials, such as *Writing Spaces* on the WAC Clearinghouse site (Lowe & Zemliansky, 2010, 2011) or *Writing Commons* for student learning materials. To keep up with writing center issues and for tutor-training readings and ideas, we are fortunate to have access to *Writing Lab Newsletter*, whose past issues are freely available online in PDF form. *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* is another excellent online, open-access source for us, as is the more recent *Peer Review*, featuring the work of student writing center researchers. We in the MENA region are looking forward to more open-access resources cropping up.

Turning from access to practitioner scholarship, Zimmerman points out that MENA scholars face difficulty accessing materials published in the United States, citing shipping costs of materials. It is also the case that ebooks and journal subscriptions—both online and print—are expensive, and many libraries, especially in MENA's economically or resource-challenged countries, do not have those kinds of budgets. In the instances when needed sources are not available through either free-access online journals or our libraries, MENA-based scholars often rely on the help of friends and colleagues abroad to track them down.

As concerns writing center scholarship, access is a mixed bag. Certainly, MENAWCA—our region's writing center forum and regional affiliate to IWCA—has given us some international exposure. We are proud of the consistent contributions from MENA—from Qatar, Lebanon, Turkey, and Oman in recent memory—to the *Writing Lab Newsletter* blog *Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders*. The IWCA 2018 conference planners invited the three of us to participate in a virtual keynote panel at the conference, and, in that capacity, and in this published form of our keynote address, we have had this wonderful opportunity to share with our international colleagues some insight on issues and challenges for writing centers in the MENA region.

Yet it may very well be that few in the MENA region see Zimmerman's review or read this commentary, as access to *The Writing Center Journal* is rather more challenging. Not all MENA institutions subscribe to *The Writing Center Journal* or to the JSTOR indexes in which it is located. At AUB and TAMUQ, *The Writing Center Journal* is available with a one-year lag through library databases. AUS has only recently subscribed.

Unfortunately, most—if not all—postsecondary institutions in the MENA region share our challenges accessing *The Writing Center Journal*.¹

This situation illustrates a rather ironic twist: it is fairly easy for North American researchers to access MENA-based scholarship in international publications and at conferences, but it is much harder for MENA scholars to locate MENA research published internationally. In short, MENA scholars often have limited access to MENA-based scholarship—particularly peer-reviewed, quality scholarship.

Looking Forward: Negotiating Access in the Region

One meaningful way to extend scholarly conversations with and about writing centers in the MENA region will be to continue to nurture and develop MENAWCA. The alliance has strong potential for supporting writing center research and practice, but it is also vulnerable as an organization. As a body that crosses international borders from Morocco to Oman, MENAWCA benefits from its internal variety; at the same time, this openness can present obstacles for administration and communication. Rules of international finance have made it impossible for MENAWCA to open its own bank account, for example, and after a decade of operation, the treasurer of the group is still managing our budget “in a coffee can.” Regional tensions can curtail our ability to travel or even to communicate online with each other: recently, the 24th TESOL Arabia International Conference has been deferred until further notice, and a MENAWCA conference scheduled for 2018 has been postponed until spring 2019. The nature of jobs in the region also means turnover is high, and that destabilizes the organization. Happily, despite these challenges, MENAWCA continues to exist and to innovate. While MENAWCA has invested most of its resources in hosting a biannual meeting, it is now working to modify its organizational structure and to develop other ways for members to engage and collaborate beyond the conference. Redesigning the organization’s website has been one step in creating online spaces where such collaborations can grow. The organization is planning to use the site to highlight relevant current publications and encourage the research initiatives of its members. The MENAWCA executive board is also looking for ways to promote mentoring or other collaborations online through its website at www.menawca.org. We have also become aware that it is important to preserve documents and a history of the

1 Editors’ note: We are pleased that institutions will soon be able to purchase online access to back issues of *The Writing Center Journal* via JSTOR at a bit more than the cost of a yearly print subscription.

organization, which can help with sustainability, even as we look at more long-ranging plans for the future.

Encouraging the development of academic programs in the region for writing studies and research can also contribute to ongoing scholarly conversations. Linking writing programs with knowledge production and teaching in the field is an important way to make sense out of quickly moving changes. As Nancy Grimm (1999) argues in *Good Intentions*, theorizing is important for promoting more just and equitable writing center practices. She reminds us that we can work to provide support for the perceived needs for competence in English and academic writing, but we should do so while questioning the provenance of received standards and studying the consequences for learners of our teaching. While new writing programs, including writing centers, continue to be established and to grow in the MENA region, degree programs that graduate the teachers and researchers who staff these programs are primarily in literature, education, TESOL, and other related fields. Disciplines like composition and rhetoric and sociolinguistics of writing would add to and inform these existing programs, and new programs focused on writing studies can also be established. A proposal for a master's degree in rhetoric and composition at AUB is currently stalled at the level of the university senate as the university pauses to reassess its strategic priorities. A number of students from this region have graduated with writing center experience and are continuing their education in U.S. universities. For instance, the low-residency doctoral program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania has welcomed several stellar instructors of writing from Lebanon, who are able to take classes in the United States in the summer and continue with their work in Lebanon during the rest of the year. Access to a program closer to home would not only be more convenient for students who wish to continue to an MA or PhD but would also become a locus for ongoing scholarly work and for participation in international exchanges.

Developing academic programs and professional organizations are long-term efforts that require high investments in time and other resources. International exchanges, which are also very productive, can be much more flexible. Our universities have hosted visiting speakers, consultants tasked with particular jobs or investigations, short-term visiting faculty members, and affiliated researchers. Tutor exchanges are another possibility, although travel restrictions can prevent tutor participation as well as funding from U.S. sources.

Conclusion

The challenges for those who lead, work within, and make use of writing centers in the region are complex. If writing centers already struggle with asserting their place as research sites and places for theorizing, the complexities of access and diversity we have outlined in this discussion make that struggle even more demanding. The current lack of representation of MENA writing centers in the broader set of research reinforces the perceptions of our writing centers as places for practice only and as places that can easily be replicated. Even as our scholarship grows, we scholars in the MENA region face challenges accessing that work. The need for stronger connections in communication has been recognized, with Arnold, Nebel, and Ronesi (2017) noting that when sending out the CFPs for their volume, there were “very few avenues for reaching out to and connecting with writing scholars and practitioners in the region” (p. 7). We need MENA scholars to step up to the plate to create these links. An idea being considered is the creation of a repository, similar to a MENA-oriented CompPile, on the MENAWCA site—an endeavor we MENA practitioners will need to actively support to make successful. As we have noted, our best solutions for our continued development are free-access online endeavors; MENA-based and international writing scholarship that is accessible online is essential to writing center practitioners and to scholars who need to stay current, particularly in quickly moving fields like multilingualism and superdiversity. The challenges we have described, however, should not distract us from the opportunities for reflection, theorizing, and research that the proliferation of writing centers represents. By learning from and with writing centers in the Middle East-North Africa region, writing center practitioners everywhere can continue to work towards equal access, opportunity, and support for all writers in their own contexts.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Nicole Caswell and the 2018 IWCA Conference team for inviting us to share our perspectives. We also thank Pamela Bromley and Eliana Schonberg for their feedback on the written version of this talk.

References

- American University of Beirut. (2018). "General Education Requirements." *Undergraduate Catalogue 2018–19*. Retrieved from <http://www.aub.edu.lb/Registrar/Documents/catalogue/undergraduate18-19/general-university.pdf>
- American University of Sharjah. (n.d.). *2018–2019 Catalog, Undergraduate*. Retrieved from <https://www.aus.edu/aus-catalogs>
- American University of Sharjah. (n.d.). "College Facts." Retrieved from <https://www.aus.edu/cen/college-facts-0>
- American University of Sharjah. (n.d.). "Fast Facts–Fall 2017." <https://www.aus.edu/fast-facts-fall-2017>
- Arnold, L. R., Nebel, A., & Ronesi, L. (Eds.). (2017). *Emerging writing research from the Middle East–North Africa Region*. Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse and University Press of Colorado.
- Barnawi, O.Z. (Ed.). (2018). *Writing centers in the higher education landscape of the Arabian Gulf*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Donahue, C. (2009). "Internationalization" and composition studies: Reorienting the discourse. *College Composition and Communication*, 61(2), 212–243.
- Grimm, N. (1999). *Good intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Haviland, C. P., Mullin, J., & Zenger, A. (2014). "Import/export work?: Using cross-cultural theories to rethink Englishes, identities, and genres in writing centers." B. Horner & K. Koppelson (Eds.), *Reworking English in rhetoric and composition: Global interrogations, local interventions*, (150–165). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Hesford, W. (2006). Global turns and cautions in rhetoric and composition studies. *PMLA*, 121(3), 787–801.
- Hillman, S., & Ocampo Eibenschutz, E. (2018). English, super-diversity, and identity in the State of Qatar. *World Englishes*, 37(2), 228–247.

- Horner, B., & Koppelson, K. (Eds.) (2014). *Reworking English in Rhetoric and Composition: Global Interrogations, Local Interventions*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Ianetta, M., & Fitzgerald, L. (2016). *The Oxford guide for writing tutors*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lee, J. W., & Jenks, C. (2016). Doing translingual dispositions. *College Composition and Communication*, 68(2), 317–344.
- Lowe, C., & Zemliansky, P. (Eds.). (2010). *Writing spaces: Readings on writing, Volume 1*. West Lafayette, IN: Parlor. Available at <https://wac.colostate.edu/books/writingspaces1/>
- . (2011). *Writing spaces: Readings on writing, Volume 2*. Anderson, SC: Parlor. Available at <https://wac.colostate.edu/books/writingspaces2/>
- Martins, D. S. (Ed.). (2015). *Transnational writing program administration*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- McHarg, M. (2014). Reconceptualizing the writing center in the wake of local admissions: Redefining writing centers in Qatar. *Arab World Englishes Journal*, 5(3), 77–85.
- McKee, M., Keulertz, M., Habibi, N., Mulligan, M., & Woertz, E. (October 2017). *Demographic and economic material factors in the MENA region* (Working Papers No. 3). Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture. Retrieved from www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_wp_3.pdf
- Nebel, A. (2017). Linguistic superdiversity and English–medium higher education in Qatar. In L. Arnold, A. Nebel, & L. Ronesi (Eds.), *Emerging writing research from the Middle East–North Africa region* (pp. 27–40). Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse and University Press of Colorado.
- Nielsen, K. (2018). There may have been other stuff going on: Affective labor and the writing centre as a safe house. In O. Z. Barnawi (Ed.), *Writing centers in the higher education landscape of the Arabian Gulf* (pp. 129–144). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Rajakumar, M. (2018). *Western Higher Education in Global Contexts*. Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Lexington Books.
- Texas A&M University at Qatar. (2018). About. Retrieved from <https://www.qatar.tamu.edu/about/>
- Thaiss, C., Bräuer, G., Carlino, P., Ganobcsik-Williams, L., & Sinha, A. (Eds.). (2012). *Writing programs worldwide: Profiles of academic writing in many places*. Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse and University Press of Colorado.
- Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(6), 1024–1054.
- Ward, A., Hodeib, H., Lincoln, K., Moghabghab, E., Rantisi, R., & Sinno, Z. (Eds.). (2018). *Pages apart: A reader for academic writing*. Beirut: Educart (Middle East).
- Zimmerman, E. (2018). Review of the books *Writing Centers in the Higher Education Landscape*, edited by O. Barnawi, and *Emerging Writing Research from the Middle East-North Africa Region*, edited by L. R. Arnold, A. Nebel, and L. Ronesi. *Writing Center Journal*, 37(1), 131–140.

Amy Hodges is an instructional assistant professor of English and Writing Across the Curriculum Coordinator at Texas A&M University at Qatar. Her research focuses on multilingual writers in transnational workplaces, and she is the current President of the Middle East North Africa Writing Centers Alliance.

Lynne Ronesi is associate professor in the Department of Writing Studies at the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. She has been training undergraduate peer writing tutors since 2003 and is currently collaborating on a research project on engineering-major writing tutors at her institution.

Amy Zenger is Director of the Writing Center and Writing in the Disciplines at the American University of Beirut. In current research projects, she is studying disciplinarity and writing in relation to world-systems analysis, as well as studying participatory planning practices for writing program administration.

