

On Our Own Terms: Editors' Introduction

Halle M. Neiderman, Sarah Elcheikhali, Dorota Fleszar, Marwa Mehio, and Amy Zenger

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *MENA Writing Studies Journal*. When the editorial board sat together to brainstorm how a regional publication could speak to the experiences of faculty and administrators navigating composition across the Middle East and North Africa, our answers went in three directions. We want to provide the practices and theories of writing that we see in our local spaces, we want to explicate the infrastructures that lead to successes and others that should be warnings, and we want to build relationships across institutional and national borders that provide support and insight for our faculty and administrators. While the internationalization of writing studies has been building for decades (Donahue & Horner, 2022; Martins, 2015; Thaiss, et al, 2012), the basis of programmatic work and disciplinarity has been scantily documented for the region (Arnold, Nebel, & Ronesi, 2017). Much of the theory of the internationalization of composition in higher education calls for linguistic mixing and the students' right to their own language (Donahue, 2009; Horner, 2018). While we are invested in amplifying how composing and programmatic theories can be productive for our students, particularly the translingual possibilities of our students, *MENA Writing Studies Journal* also wants to promote the ways programmatic infrastructures can and need to be adjusted for composition studies in MENA institutions and for locations and geographies we oscillate between and collaborate with.

We landed upon the theme of “On Our Own Terms” to acknowledge the practical and theoretical methods developed and utilized by regional writing programs, despite the lack of centralized scholarship. Often our work is included in a larger disciplinary context (Diab, 2006; Donahue & Horner, 2023; Esseili, 2014; Mehio, 2023; Zenger, 2018), which means providing background information in ways that may not be fruitful to findings and replication across the region. Furthermore, because scholarship is across writing studies' multiple sites of publication, finding and compiling region-specific research becomes an issue of time and access. This volume (and those to follow) provides writing faculty, administrators, and program developers the opportunity to cultivate space highlighting our laboring pedagogies, administrations, and innovations through the affordances and constraints that are familiar to the region. We see this first volume as building a community through the documentation of composing practices that reaches across universities and man-made boundaries to inform us on who exists, what tensions we navigate, and what successes we forge.

The joys within the challenges of teaching transnational composition are in the ways faculty can mesh cultures to bring about discovery and innovation within students. In “Embracing Multiple Perspectives: Dynamics of Harmony and Dissonance in English Classroom Discussions,” Li and Watson explore their pedagogical journey of growing to understand first-year composition students' discussions as dialectical, multivocal harmonies reflective of collectivistic societies rather than the individualistic argumentative dissonances they were accustomed to hearing in Western classrooms. The authors combine Fairclough's framework for analyzing the discourse of student discussions with a blend of Western and Arabic musical lenses of sound and echo or syncopated instrumentals and improvised solos to describe the rhythm of discursive meaning-making in their Saudi Arabian classrooms.

For disciplines that are seemingly not writing intensive, faculty are often not aware of the amount of writing required across the discipline until the curriculum is reviewed. In “Measuring Writing Across the Curriculum in Nursing Education: The Role and Support of Learning to Write by Writing,” authors Keaschuck, Bowman, and Tweedie discuss how the process of revising the nursing curriculum at their Qatar international branch campus disclosed new dimensions of the significance of writing in the nursing curriculum. The curriculum revision found that writing in the discipline and the field emerges in formal and informal processes. To encourage the maintenance of writing in the nursing curriculum, authors highlight the practice of Learning to Write by Writing (LWW) and recognize the role of writing centers in helping students connect writing with disciplinary practice and discovery. “Measuring Writing Across the Curriculum” illustrates where and how writing is expected within the nursing profession in the region, highlighting writing’s significance beyond FYC.

Habre’s “Starting and Sustaining Writing Centers in Lebanese Schools” details the process her university writing center followed to support the conception of high school writing centers throughout Lebanon. Her work reveals the ways in which differing institutions have differing understandings of writing, the extent to which English-speaking schools across the nation desired writing center implementation, and the means through which institutional constraints limited the participation and sustenance of writing centers. As Habre details the process of implementing writing centers and writing pedagogies, she explains how each high school had to navigate their institutional constraints to establish thriving writing support. Not only is Habre’s work novel to her university and her context, her manuscript and initiative indicate the exigence for high school writing centers and for reciprocal alignment with the university.

A constant in transnational education is linguistic hierarchy. In “English as Capital vs. Language as Cultural: An Autoethnography of an Iranian Writer,” Amiri provides us with a glimpse of how she navigates Iran, the United States, schooling, and her professional life as a person who is multilingual. In her autoethnography on language learning and identity negotiation, Amiri weaves a story of her linguistic development in Iran, exploring her acquisition of the English language alongside the assimilation of Western culture and ideas. Living in a context of national and cultural tension and change, she moves between resistance to the infiltration of these ideas and appreciation of how they can elucidate another culture. Amiri grapples with the hierarchies of languages and what she has gained and lost of her Persian as a result of learning English in Iran and learning English from an early age. Amiri’s work is an important part of our collection because she calls for a flattening of all languages’ value, noting their importance in differing arenas, and moving away from, or complicating, the reactionary “language of the colonizer” stance.

“Unravelling the Dilemma: Examining the Adverse Effects of AI Writing Tools on STEM Student Motivation – Insights from an Academic Writing Center” discusses a Qatari writing center’s approach to mitigating negative Generative AI practices among STEM students. Charummal et al.

pose the problem that Generative AI has a negative impact on students' intrinsic motivation when used as a shortcut for completing assignments. As writing center personnel, the authors see this as an opportunity to teach students to use AI productively to enhance writing, learning, and inquiry. Focusing particularly on the writing center's role as a student resource that can mediate production between the academic disciplines, they provide a sampling of how writing center personnel interact with the academic units. This article is important to our collection because it moves the conversation of AI away from a pro/con debate and into a what and how heuristic.

In the interview, "Reflections on the Symposium on The Teaching of Writing in Lebanon: An Interview with Malakeh R. Khoury," Dorota Fleszar and Amy Zenger met with Malakeh R. Khoury to discuss the Symposium on the Teaching of Writing in Lebanon, an event that aimed to connect teachers of writing across English language medium universities and took place annually over a period of six years. Khoury, who was instrumental in organizing the event, highlights the value of the original vision of the symposium to bring practitioners together to share observations about student practices and pedagogical approaches in the multilingual context of Lebanon. As the symposium grew, it came to include secondary school teachers and focused more on networking and providing workshops for instructors. The interview aims to invite others to archive and build a memory of the symposium, which has been on hold since 2019. To gain insight from the experience of the event, Fleszar and Zenger include reflections on Khoury's interview that highlight the complexities of importing and localizing "best practices;" ways to structure professional empowerment and development; and the need for deepening our research on teaching writing in English language medium contexts.

References

- Arnold, L. R., Nebel, A. L., & Ronesi, L. (Eds.). (2017). *Emerging writing research from the Middle East-North Africa region*. WAC Clearinghouse.
- Diab, R. L. (2006). University students' beliefs about learning English and French in Lebanon. *System*, 34(1), 80–96.
- Donahue, C. & Horner, B. (2023). Introduction: Teaching and studying transnational composition. In C. Donahue & B. Horner (Eds.), *Teaching and studying transnational composition*, (pp. 1–14). Modern Language Association.
- Esseili, F., Bailey, K. M., & Damerow, R. M. (2014). English Language Teaching in Lebanese Schools: Trends and Challenges. In, K. M. Bailey & R. M. Damerow (Eds.), *Teaching and Learning English in the Arabic-Speaking World* (1st ed., pp. 101–114). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315818856-7>
- Horner, B. (2018). Translinguality and disciplinary reinvention. *Across the Disciplines: A Journal of Language, Learning and Academic Writing*, 15(3), 76–88.
- Martins, D. S. (Ed.). (2015). *Transnational writing program administration*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.

- Mehio, M. (2023). Negotiating civic concepts of peace in Lebanon: Postcolonial peace education and English Composition classes. In T. Kloubert, P. E. Mabrey III & C. Hoggan (Eds.), *Civic education and transformation: Possibilities for individual, community, and societal change* (pp. 165–186). MSU Press.
- Thaiss, C., Bräuer, G., Carlino, P., Ganobcsik-Williams, L., & Sinha, A. (Eds.). (2012). *Writing programs worldwide: Profiles of academic writing in many places*. Parlor Press LLC.
- Zenger, A. (2018). Writing program administration, mobility, and locality at the American University of Beirut, 1970 to present. In M. Rajakumar (Ed.), *Western higher education in global contexts*, (pp. 59–80). Lexington Books/Fortress Academic.