Writing Support for International Graduate Students
Enhancing Transition and Success

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Contents

Preface ix

1 Introduction 1

Study Design and Data Collection 5
Coding and Theming of Data 10
An Ecological Framework 14
International graduate students must explore a large, complex ecology of resources to learn how to write.
The Scholarly Context 18
Issues about international graduate students often call for the reset button.

2 Understanding Politics: Affecting Policy 37

The Politics of International Students 40
Empowering/Overpowering International Graduate Students 42
Students who feel powerless cannot learn and communicate new knowledge.
Why Pay Attention to Political Economy 45
Geopolitical forces shape international graduate students’ experiences and needs.
Lessons from Other Places, Times 50
Experiences from elsewhere, and the past, offer important lessons.
Turning Knowledge into Action 53
Understanding big-picture issues can help us counter their influences on academic support.
Policies, Ideologies, and Response 59
Ideologies Out There 62
There’s an abundance of problematic assumptions about international graduate students.
Contents

Beliefs and Assumptions Among Students 66
Writing support should involve educating international graduate students about writing.

Avoiding Ideological Traps 70
Established beliefs among writing professionals also often aggravate challenges.

Conclusion: “Reflective Encounters” 75
A reflexive approach can help the most.

3 Shifting Focus: An Ecological Approach 82

Academic Transition and Learning to “Write” 85
Learning to write is a complex, multidimensional process for international graduate students.

“Who? Me?” Diversity of International Students 97
International graduate students are not just ESL students.

Programs versus Ecology 104
Formal writing support programs are only a node in the network for international graduate students.

Conclusion: Rethinking Universal Design 113
Differentiated support is often necessary, as well as useful.

4 Fostering Agency through Effective Support Practices 125

Exploring New Communities 128
Writing support should facilitate socialization for international graduate students.

Finding a Voice 132
Graduate-level writing requires finding a voice that make sense in a new country and culture.

Writing Support and Professional Development 138
Professional communication support is particularly useful for international graduate students.

Hacking Support and Resources 143
International graduate students (must) use creative strategies to learn how to write.

Conclusion: Pedagogical Applications and Implications 147
Writing pedagogy and support practices must be designed to foster agency.

5 Advancing Advocacy through Programs and Leadership 158

Writing Support and/as Advocacy 162
Advocacy-driven writing support best helps international graduate students.

Distributed Advocacy 168
Writing support should be designed as part of a broader network of support and advocacy.
Advocacy at the center 168
Advocacy at the gate 172
It takes a village 173

Students as Advocates 176
International graduate students’ own advocacy and engagement are important resources.

Conclusion: Programmatic Applications and Implications 181
Writing professionals can provide leadership to academic support networks and to their institutions.

6 Conclusion: Reflections on an Emerging Field 191
Writing support for international graduate students could be a catalyst for advancing the discipline.

References 209
Index 225
2 Understanding Politics

Affecting Policy

When I came to this country, I thought I was so powerless, that the system is so powerful. Now, I feel that you can make—maybe lower in the chain of power—you can negotiate what you want, negotiating with [your] power.

(“Ajit,” a doctoral student at Cornell University)

They are coming here to change the world fundamentally—and we look at [them as?] stakeholders. We know they are our students who are going to be connected everywhere, and … when they step into the classroom I don’t want them to apologize … for who they are or the way that they communicate.

(An academic program administrator at Cornell University)

The first quotation above is from an interview with a student from India, whom I call Ajit. This advanced doctoral student in Sociology at Cornell was describing how he learned to explore resources and opportunities for improving his writing skills, also discussing their importance for international graduate students. He said that international students in particular find it challenging to develop their own voice because they tend to take too much time before they realize the importance of “soft skills”; he connected their avoidance and often resistance against learning the skills with a feeling of powerlessness. While he appreciated programs and professionals supporting graduate students, as well as American academic culture in general, he also felt that the system can stifle international students’ agency, until they learn to negotiate with it and develop an intellectual voice of their own as scholars in their disciplines and in a new culture and country. The second quotation is from my interview with an administrator at the international teaching assistant (ITA) training program at Cornell; the administrator was discussing the importance of international students for the university. As the interview progressed, however, while the

view as the ITA support expert described how the program worked, I couldn’t help wondering how the ITAs felt “empowered” or went to class to “be themselves” if the support was as disempowering as it sounded to me. “If a student is an intermediate mid-level speaker—and there’s really
two kinds,” my interviewee paused, “they may need to tweak phonemic control. Their suprasegmentals may be a larger issue.” If the students’ “grammatical structure” didn’t “make sense,” she added, “then that’s going to be a challenge in their classroom.” The teaching assistants took multiple courses at the center, usually for two semesters. The training seemed rigorous, but I sensed a striking tension between the valorization of international students and the seemingly daunting nature of strategies for helping them improve communication and teaching skills. The notes I took the following day on this issue after listening to Ajit’s insightful reflections about how he learned academic and professional skills eventually helped me identify the theme of “tensions” between discourses about and support for international students. While the program was evidently designed to enhance ITAs’ effectiveness in the classroom, the overly standardized process, described with many technical jargons, reminded me of the extreme anxiety that I used to have during the first semester of working as an ITA myself.

The tension manifested in a variety of other ways in interviews with many other students, who felt “powerless” for a variety of reasons, which the rest of this chapter discusses. While all students share many of the challenges, from political to economic to psychological, certain groups face additional ones or at least exacerbated forms of shared challenges. Like their domestic counterparts, international graduate students have to deal with various kinds of power dynamics, such as in their relationship with mentors as they develop their intellectual voice and identity in their disciplines. But in addition, international graduate students also exist within a broader regime of power endemic to the nationalistic/capitalist political economy of international education. Macro-level politics shape and affect these students’ global mobility, educational experience, safety, well-being, self-perception, and confidence. Then there are power dynamics created by beliefs and ideologies about international students as foreign students who are usually non-native speakers of English, especially if they are from certain cultural backgrounds. Here are some of the challenges that are unique or more intense for international graduate students: (1) immigration laws and political climates which may inject ambivalences about them into institutional policies and academic programs; (2) ideological differences among disciplines and professionals that have more serious effects on these students than on their domestic counterparts; (3) the obscuring of diversity and complexity in their backgrounds, proficiencies, and needs; (4) the tendency to focus on the most visible challenges such as language proficiency while ignoring the broader context of these students’ academic and sociocultural adaptation; (5) the misalignment between how conventional writing programs support them and their complex and rapidly emerging needs (further aggravated by the decentralized nature of graduate education); (6) the tendency of academic support professionals
to overlook distinctive challenges faced by these students because they also face many challenges similar to those of their domestic counterparts (including a persisting argument that considers the two realities as mutually exclusive); and (7) a lack of advocates within academic programs and institutions at large who have the experience or expertise related to these students.

Knowledge about these dynamics can help program administrators and instructors alike to better understand who their students are and what they need most and when, as the students adapt to the new country and academic culture. Some sensitivity about the dynamics can help academic leaders to make good decisions about what language or logistical approaches to use for creating a welcoming environment, how to train tutors to engage as well as help the students, and how to respond to the affective dimension of education that may be different for international students. So, underlying the discussion of key issues in this chapter is the broader question of how internationalization and globalization of higher education reinforces or mitigates the effects of the current “political economy” (Scott, 2016)\(^2\) of international education and therefore the efforts of academic professionals and institutions to educate/support international students. I argue that international students are not just *individuals* with varied identities and ambitions who strive to find a place in often contested intellectual and professional domains in and beyond graduate education (like domestic graduate students); they are also *foreign bodies* accepted conditionally and largely in the “national interest” and ultimately for the economic and intellectual *benefit* of receiving nations and institutions; the institutions and programs and people within them further define these students by the foreignness of their language, culture, and identity. That foreignness, while frequently glorified and often working to the students’ advantage, shapes policies and sustains ideologies that many of the local professionals do not realize they may be perpetuating through their actions and relationship, even as their discourses and intentions suggest otherwise. It is these forms of power that this chapter explores with the aim of developing a theoretical framework that I argue could help writing support professionals more fully understand the status, needs, and strengths of international graduate students. I use the term “politics” and “ideology” as distinct realms as I explore how the larger political/economic regime of international education shapes the experience of international graduate students and how institutional and programmatic policies (which are usually not stated and are often contrary to stated claims) are shaped by discourses and ideologies about foreign students.

During my research, the writing and language professionals I met with were positive and generous toward their international students. But viewed in the broader context of international education, political and
ideological forces have a far greater role in shaping institutions and academic programs, the disciplines, and their discourses. The often adverse and usually unintended effects partly stem from specialization: certain issues are overlooked when others are attended to, and students’ experiences are often ignored while professionals focus on their distinct specialties. So, my argument here is that in order to make academic support effective, scholars and practitioners involved must pay a certain amount of attention to how broader political and economic forces and established assumptions/ideologies shape academic discourses and influence support practices.

The Politics of International Students

“I think we are increasingly globalized so it’s really hard to talk about [our state’s] citizens alone anymore,” said a dean at the University of Louisville, in a phone interview. “The only way we can meet the goals for us is by recruiting students from across the country and also across the world,” she emphasized. But a few months later during my visit to the university, when this advocate of international students joined a group discussion (organized at my request) with half a dozen other faculty and staff members from academic units across campus, the other academics brought up a theme that contrasted with her idea of “educating the world.” Participants of the group, all working with international students, suggested that public education as a state mandate was pushing investment in international students to the margin. From the state’s point of view, embraced by many in the university, the institution has greater responsibility to local citizens than to foreign students, said one professor. As the dean was emphasizing how important graduate writing support was, the discussion turned to the difficulty of creating and sustaining support for foreign graduate students. As I also heard at many other universities, the graduate writing course in Louisville had discontinued, moved, and morphed over the years. One faculty member said that it had to do with a “pushback from [our] state” against the university’s strategic plan for internationalization, “with the viewpoint that they don’t want [state] money wasted on international students”; another professor added that, in fact, only a few departments and their faculty members wanted to admit international students and fewer still were committed to supporting them. Some professors, he added, “are like ‘this is not my job’, not only because they were not trained to support the students with writing but also because “there is no desire for more international students ... there is not.” The politics about international students remained an undercurrent in many interviews with writing and other academic support professionals.

Writing professionals generally do not seem to directly address geopolitical forces and national politics in decisions or conversations about
writing programs or pedagogies, but quite a few of my interviewees explored the issues. On the one hand, knowledge about political and policy challenges seemed to erode their passion and confidence, often making them “cynical,” to borrow a term used by a writing scholar. “Some of them see new programs as doomed from the start,” a Cornell University scholar said, because they feel that “anything can happen anytime.” Another writing scholar who had tried and failed to create graduate-level writing support especially so that international students would benefit shared her frustrating experiences: “I would put money on the fact that what’s the huge, big, vibrant thing right now may well change in five years because the person in charge will change or something will happen.” She was glad that a new graduate writing center had been started at her institution, “but you know how many years I asked for one, begged for one? Twenty-five.” Experience had taught her that change was difficult to make and achievements difficult to sustain because of a lack of long-term institutional commitment or political interest. On the other hand, knowledge about political and economic dynamics affecting students and support programs seemed to greatly enhance the impact of their professional expertise. In fact, as both these scholars went on to discuss, those who had experienced political, economic, and institutional power dynamics disrupting their work shared best strategies for supporting each other, making the case for students, and tackling challenges when they arise. Institutions, the first scholar added, have their own reasons and interests or obligations to create support for international students, ranging from attracting more domestic students to the “global experience” of studying with foreign students, to economic incentives of recruiting more of the latter, to genuine interest in updating/improving higher education in an increasingly globalized world. And because prevalent arguments about internationalizing education are fraught with political and economic dynamics, political awareness becomes necessary alongside educational vision and specialized expertise.

Scott (2016) explores the “dynamic relationships between political processes, institutions, work, affordances, and everyday assumptions, relations, and behaviors” (12) that are part of what he calls the macro-and micro-political and economic forces shaping higher education nationally and internationally today. “Toggling between the granular and the aggregate,” he suggests, can help us try to “mak[e] sense of how particulars relate to whole ecologies constituted by mobilized resources, capital, ideas, struggles, and emotions” (12). Citing Trimbur, who noted that while writing professionals benefited from the “Johnny can’t write” national crisis (report of 1975), Scott reminds us that that development was also part of a self-legitimizing hegemony of a certain political class dynamic. Likewise, writing that academic professionals risk the same kind of myopia if they only try to capitalize on internationalization if they are not, at the same time, conscious about the politics and ideologies driving it (21).
Instead, a politically informed approach, as Scott implies, could better enable us to shape internationalization of higher education in educationally meaningful ways. Doing so would allow us to help address critical challenges of graduate education, given the important roles writing skills play in graduate students’ academic success and professional growth.

Two writing program administrators at the University of Houston shared a powerful illustration of the effects of political dynamics on their effort to increase support for international graduate students. While international graduate students dominated the use of their support (about 85% among graduate students), they had to create that support without publicizing it: they had to use the space and resources meant for undergraduate tutoring, finding creative ways to train their tutors to address graduate-level issues and the needs of international students, and looking for short- and long-term funding to meet the demand. I came across such surreptitious programming in multiple other institutions, especially where international students’ demand was high but institutional support and interest not (yet) sufficient. It was not just that universities’ discourses about the “value” of international students didn’t always translate into resource allocation for them; other stakeholders who wielded considerable power or influence over academic support programs viewed international students as a burden and consciously or unconsciously ignored or undermined the academic support for these students. This ambivalence seems to be related to the question of who is responsible for supporting graduate students in general (Simpson, 2016a) as well as supporting international students at any level (Shapiro, Farrelly & Tomaš, 2014). As a former writing program administrator at SUNY Albany told me, the explosion of international students since the turn of the century has clearly led to many institutional leaders to assume—if not argue, as the provost of her institution once did—that “if they are expensive, there’s no point in having them.” In short, tendencies to celebrate or benefit from but not invest resources and efforts for the success of international students is a manifestation of the macro-level politics at the national and state levels, as it also reflects in micro-level dynamics where, for instance, some faculty members may refuse to invest their time or attention in foreign students. This dynamic seems abstract and also applicable for all students, but it can be much more significant with international students—though we can only see it if we pay attention to it. As I discuss in the first half of this chapter, in order to create and grow support for international graduate students, to truly empower them as students and scholars, political and policy issues must be studied and addressed.

Empowering/Overpowering International Graduate Students

As I coded transcripts of interviews with students after gathering each new batch of interviews from new institutions, the theme of power that
Ajit had discussed emerged as an important lens with which international students’ experiences and issues about learning to write and to communicate effectively at the graduate level could be productively explored. So, before I recoded interviews overall for issue of power—looking for patterns within and between interviews, the students, and the academic professionals— I requested a follow-up interview with Ajit, along with a few other students and academic professionals.

When I called Ajit for the follow-up conversation, he spared another 90 minutes for me, unpacking issues about language and communication in the context of teaching, with the same gusto as before. He had gone through the required assessment at the ITA office, which, like in most American universities, ensured that foreign-educated teaching assistants are linguistically (and, in this case, pedagogically) equipped to enter the classroom. He had tested out of the training that would have followed, then attended a variety of other useful teaching-related events across campus over the years; but he knew about the program from having to prepare and deliver a teaching demonstration and from helping his junior colleagues who went through it later on. He had observed the program to be “very overpowering”; he didn’t like that the support was designed to “micromanage everything.” He argued that it “felt like a formality,” adding, “like they are doing it for the numbers, and their own job.” I asked him to unpack the critique. He paused to acknowledge that all the academic support programs he had come across were useful: “however bad they are, they expose international students to the system here.” He also valued their “ideas and ideals about diversity,” even when he thought some were largely a part of the “romanticization” of international students. When the support was “programmed,” however, and when it was based on “testing” and “levels” and “standardization,” he believed that students’ challenges and needs were overlooked and students were “silenced.” The standardized approach Ajit critiqued seemed to be common across institutions because I heard the same kind of language at several other places.

A particular example that Ajit shared during this second interview helps to illustrate how academic support “without understanding students’ perspectives” can confuse and disempower international students, especially when they are new:

Many people here want you to say “gas” for “petrol.” You say, “petrol.” They ask, “What?” and you say, “petrol” again. They will say, “Oh, gas,” even after they’ve understood it and they’ve learned that “petrol” is standard English also—or maybe they didn’t learn it. They just want you to conform to “gas.”

The challenge Ajit faced was not simply that of language; he said he was fine with his English, even though he believed he had a strong Indian
English accent. It was more significantly a challenge emanating from ideology and attitude. When many of my student interviewees kept focusing on British versus American, or Indian or Chinese Englishes as a source of concern, I had been coding the subject under “talking point response” (TPR) in the context of “academic transition”; this is the type of response that I’ve found interviewees in many of my research projects using at first, when they are asked questions about complex subjects. Instead of digging deeper into their own knowledge and experience, they seem to grab the most common reaction/discourse from their discourse community and deliver it, often even using such a point to frame the whole conversation. However, even when I asked my student interviewees more critical, probing questions about their experiences, my interviewees used language differences to discuss issues about power, ideology, confidence, and so on. Perhaps for this reason, a closer look at in-vivo codes about “language difference” and its patterns and connections continued to show how students evidently experienced the demand for “correct” or “American” English as a means of power and control, marking them as foreign—even when the interlocutor had the best of intentions to help the student. For instance, a graduate student at Penn State University described how she had to “flip” the situation by telling a classmate who had been correcting her speech for several years that she was “more interested in contextual way of using language” than about correct forms. As this teaching assistant was discussing the corrosive effects of linguistic marginalization, she added that “that was a moment for him to learn.”

Clearly, power dynamics around seemingly insignificant language variations are not just interpersonal: it has to do with larger cultural and geopolitical dynamics affecting foreign students’ experience of studying abroad and of learning and using writing skills. It is how power and resistance play out when phonemic control and suprasegmentals become the curriculum of required, gatekeeping courses that are designed to help international graduate students as teaching assistants. The educational objective for training ITAs—including assumptions about what they need in order to sound acceptable to local students—are not only educational but also political, and it is only educationally meaningful and fair to acknowledge both the dimensions. The broader political dynamic is illustrated by the fact that as more than 40 years of research on ITAs shows, these training programs were usually put in place in response to concerns about foreign accents (see Bailey, 1984; Finder, 2005; Hoekje & Williams, 1992; Yook & Albert, 1999). The issue of language ideology and language politics has been extensively discussed in the scholarship of Writing Studies (Horner & Lu, 2007; Horner & Trimbur, 2002); however, the rich theoretical perspectives from that body of knowledge are yet to be considerably brought to bear on the context of graduate-level writing support. Monolingualist ideologies, for
instance, still persist in the name of practical needs to “fix” international students’ language problems as a curricular goal or to ensure that someone “out there” doesn’t judge them (or the teachers who taught them) when they graduate. But the “practical,” as Ajit put it, “intersects with the political. When people are trying to first of all fix your accent, they are expressing a certain kind of value.” That value is also a reflection of national/social, institutional, disciplinary, and programmatic politics regarding language and culture, identity and relationship.

Of course, students are not necessarily reliable judges (and the more experienced ones shared how they had “completely changed” their views since they first came to the U.S.) and, of course, their views were “all over the map,” as one graduate writing specialist put it; however, students’ critiques and dissatisfaction about certain issues were consistent, as was the tension between discourse and practice among writing professionals. This tension prompted me to interview a third, gradually very diverse, group of interviewees: institutional leaders (provosts, deans, etc.), administrators of academic services across campus (international center, student life, graduate school, etc.), and others whose support fostered students’ learning of writing and/or other communication skills. Analyzing my interviews with these professionals for a number of issues related to the learning of writing skills—such as culture shock, academic/disciplinary socialization, academic success, professional growth, psychological and health issues, and personal/legal and financial challenges—explained many of the criticisms shared about the university and its academic units and support programs by the students.

In fact, studying the perspectives and experiences of many of those other professionals who paid closer attention to international graduate students started revealing that in most institutions, there was a hidden ecology of support and resources that was created by the lack of understanding or by negligence of international graduate students’ needs. As I will illustrate in the next chapter, these students gravitated towards people and places where they felt better understood and respected. Based on the triangulation of different perspectives and examining one set of themes or contradictions with themes drawn from another subset of data, I discuss in the next four subsections some of the major issues about politics and power that seem to deserve more attention in scholarship on graduate-level writing support. I start by shedding some light on the connection of micro-level issues of power to the macro-level context of international education.

**Why Pay Attention to Political Economy**

The macro-politics of international education shapes the micro-politics of power and privilege, bias and prejudice, ambivalence and disinterest on the ground—as much as the micro-politics of resistance and empowerment
can counter the effects of larger forces. So, it is important to understand the bigger picture of global geopolitical and economic forces behind the “market” of globally mobile students. Let me begin with an example.

When I asked Guo, a master’s degree student from China at the University of Maryland, which has both an excellent general writing center and also a graduate writing center (GWC), why she never used either of them, she said, “It is because we don’t have the fear of not passing, because most of us will pass,” adding, “the professors have pressure to give us higher grades.” What Guo told me seemed reflective of how the economics of international education can shape their view of education. Seemingly reflecting the department’s (and perhaps university’s) apparent interest to maximize revenue by recruiting a disproportionate number of students from China, the professors focused on content-based tests and did not require long written assignments; another interviewee said that the professors didn’t want to deal with paper drafts. That made Guo and her peers less likely to use writing support. “I think they only fix the grammar or simple things,” she said about the center, sharing an assumption she didn’t need to test. She also considered speaking far more important than writing. She was “extremely busy … participating in two campaigns … on environmental issues” because she thought that community engagement was “a good way to improve my spoken English, which is really helpful for an interview for a job, where they may not ask you to write a paper.” She added, “It’s about communication,” clearly excluding writing from the term’s definition.

While lack of knowledge and perhaps some exaggeration was involved in Guo’s response, the issue of how shifting geopolitical powers and dramatic increase of international students from countries making rapid economic development came up many times in interviews with various academic professionals as well. In this case, the fact that more than 90 out of about 100 students in the program were from China had probably shifted the focus of the curriculum in it. Guo also added that she “will still be okay” even though she had “very basic writing” because she thought that jobs in her field only required “basic language”—another claim that seemed questionable but was significant in relation to the for-profit nature of degree programs like this that I came across in several prestigious public universities. In a similar master’s program in California, an instructor had tried and failed to assist underprepared international students with their writing needs described a similar situation. Her department had come to rely on Chinese students to maintain enrollment numbers, while knowing that few of them would complete the degree:

We have six out of 36 students who are international.... We have never graduated the Chinese students.... We admit students that
are too low in their level. We really do. We take international students for the money, as you know; they’re paying three times the regular amount, and that offsets a lot of the cost. The program that I teach at is a for-profit program [within a public university], so we have to hit a certain amount of enrollments each year and graduate a certain amount each year, and because of that, the entry scores of students coming in was very low for the past few years.

An instructor of marketing whom I also quoted at the beginning of the first chapter, she said that she had given up trying to help international graduate students because the bar kept coming down in terms of enrollment standards and concern about student success from her institution and department. Similar concerns were shared by instructors elsewhere.

Writing programs cannot make their support effective and cannot get the buy-in of faculty and administrators if tutors, teachers, and administrators do not understand and address any adverse effects of the shifting political economy (Scott, 2016)\textsuperscript{17} of international education. For instance, the trend of admitting underprepared graduate students, as well as the perception that there is such a trend, may be connected with overall international student mobility data nationally and internationally, including academic backgrounds and distributions by degrees and disciplines or regions and institutions. Fortunately, more fine-grained numbers about graduate students are starting to be available, which writing program administrators (WPAs) would benefit to study in order to better anticipate and address new challenges and opportunities. In their 2015 report for the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), Okahana and Allum (2015)\textsuperscript{18} state that the first time that the Council broke down international graduate students by numbers, it noted a stunning trend: there were many more international students in master’s degree and certificate programs than previously assumed. Among first-time enrolled international graduate students, 77\% were masters and certificate students; this is significant for writing programs and pedagogy. Even though doctoral students may need more writing support and more kinds of it, the numbers of master’s students could mean that they are relatively more overlooked—not to mention that their needs are not yet as well recognized.

On the positive side, these shifts also offer tremendous professional opportunities for writing programs. Understanding distribution and change among different groups of international students can be quite useful toward making better policy decisions as well as developing new programs and support practices. For instance, international doctoral students in the U.S. were 16\% of total international students in 2015, but 70\% of South Korean applicants were doctoral, whereas only 36\%
among Chinese applicants were doctoral (Okahana & Allum, 2015). Given these numbers, a university with high concentration of Korean students would do well to not only have a Korean-specific recruitment strategy but also shape academic support accordingly. Similar benefits could be drawn from knowing the fact that most international master’s students are going into just a few fields: the CGS report showed that 26% of international graduate students were in Engineering, 21% in Business, and 18% in Math and Computer science—with as few as 1% in Physical and Earth Sciences and seemingly even fewer in the Humanities. Support programs in institutions in different regions of the U.S. could also draw inferences from trends by region of destination or by looking at the composition of graduate versus undergraduate students in their home institution. For example, the vast majority of international students went to just a few states in 2016 (ICE). Similarly, graduate international students comprised 43% of all international students in Tennessee but 85% in North Carolina.

The regular June 2017 update of student visa numbers by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE, 2017) showed even more striking trends, especially in distribution by institutions: among the 8,774 institutions that the agency certifies to enroll regular and exchange foreign students, fewer than 1% (or 80 or so) of the institutions enrolled more than 5,000 students, whereas 76% (or nearly 7,000 institutions) admitted 50 or fewer international students. The top 10 universities among the nearly 9,000 that were certified only enrolled 10% of the total students. The following summary of a few numbers about the top three countries of origin of international students in U.S. universities compiled from the “SEVIS by Numbers” report by the (ICE, 2017) reflects yet other surprising realities about international graduate students, including their differences from undergraduate students, their gender distribution, and their enrollment outside of tertiary education (Table 2.1):

### Table 2.1: A few striking numbers about international student enrollments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>South Korea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Students</td>
<td>206,708</td>
<td>362,370</td>
<td>71,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>140,720</td>
<td>188,368</td>
<td>37,605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>65,954</td>
<td>173,910</td>
<td>33,587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>17,970</td>
<td>48,441</td>
<td>10,684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>162,651</td>
<td>106,715</td>
<td>9,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>19,253</td>
<td>130,702</td>
<td>28,306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>2,648</td>
<td>15,472</td>
<td>6,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Education</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>36,798</td>
<td>6,398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Training</td>
<td>1,349</td>
<td>12,300</td>
<td>6,433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2,596</td>
<td>11,938</td>
<td>3,935</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Just the three countries represented here offer useful insight about international graduate students, with the total from the Asian continent being a stunning 77% of national numbers. More detailed data from the same source showed that while 83% of all Indian students were in the STEM fields, less than 42% of Chinese students were in those fields (ICE, 2017). The distribution was similarly skewed among graduate students in particular.

Similar but even more striking details can be found in the CGS report cited above, which was based on information from nearly 400 U.S. universities, including 80 of the top-ranking 100 that together granted about 70% of the graduate degrees that international students earned in the U.S. This report showed surprising changes across time, as well as surprising distributions. For instance, masters-level students have come to constitute 31% of total international students whereas doctoral students were only 12% in 2017 (a possibly significant decrease from 2015, per an earlier CGS survey). Furthermore, numbers like these become more significant when seen in the context of domestic enrollments and distributions. International students are increasing at a faster rate than their domestic counterparts; and while 17% of domestic graduate students are in doctoral programs, 37% of international graduate students are at this level (Okahana & Allum, 2015). Citing the CGS President Suzanne T. Ortega, the authors of this report stated that the data on degree objectives is illuminating for U.S. graduate schools:

[The data] leads to more questions about the goals and motivations of international graduate students.... Are students preparing for careers in the U.S. or at home after earning their degree? Are they drawn here by academic reputations, employment prospects, or professional advancement? How do economic conditions in the U.S. and abroad influence international graduate enrollments?

(Ortega, cited in Okahana & Allum, 2015)

In a phone interview, a scholar of graduate education who writes in national academic media discussed this issue in the context of a crisis in graduate education at large, the crisis of its overproduction of graduate students in relation to their demand in society and professions. “How do you help students professionalize when the students know more than you do about at least one aspect of the market that he or she is planning to enter?” he asked, referring to the challenge of adapting graduate curricula and professionalization of students in response to the increasing number of international students.

In short, understanding the changing global/local political economy, as reflected by numbers like the above could help writing professionals make better policy and program decisions, as well as make more impact on institutional conversations about internationalization on the one
hand and graduate education on the other. Writing scholars could also use the numbers and changes to guide them to study education systems and the nature of writing education in major countries of origin of international students. And writing instructors could adapt their teaching materials or strategies if they learn that their classes reflect the larger trend where, for example, four of ten graduate students, according to the 2015 CGS report, were from China and nearly three more from India.

Lessons from Other Places, Times

Paying attention to global pictures is important because overlooking economic and political forces behind them has occasionally precipitated the implosion of the international student “market” in other countries. For example, after many years of creating and exploiting a boom in international education as one of the country’s major “export,” Australian universities suddenly faced a crisis around 2009. As Mohamedbhai (2015) described for the American audience in Inside HigherEd, Australian media started exposing—or, rather, creating a significant hype out of particular incidents of—fraud and abuse in the enrollment, education, and graduation of international students. The alleged abuses involved “fraudulent recruitment agents, universities graduating poorly qualified or unqualified nurses, widespread plagiarism, cheating and exploitation.” In 2014, a national TV news channel aired an extensive “investigation” titled “Degrees of Deception,” using an ideological framing to show how “foreign students and other poor English speakers” were essentially considered a threat to society. The report included the notorious case of an Indian nursing student whose negligence caused the death of an elderly Australian. The nursing student, news media charged, “could not read the label” on the medication. A retired writing instructor who was interviewed for the documentary strongly endorsed the story line. Interestingly, the nurse’s personal weaknesses (such as incompetence or irresponsibility) or the possibility of a one-time human error (due to oversight or exhaustion) were never taken seriously. In recent years, scholarship focusing on international education has begun to explore the politicization and other challenges in Australia. The Australian “market” seemed to be back in full swing, but it seems as vulnerable to political forces as it was before.

Many news alerts generated by Google Search over the course of the last two years, in response to a keyword setting for “international student,” “graduate,” and “writing,” included increasing numbers of news items coming out of Canada. Most alerts started with headings that glorify international students—especially in contrast to the U.S.—and celebrate the “global” experience for local Canadian students, but a closer look usually revealed serious problems. For instance, after expressing the typical excitement about “internationalization” and “diversification” of
the universities, the news items mentioned, typically in passing, that international students (largely Chinese) pay roughly four times what their domestic counterparts do. The articles often ended with university officials glossing over the exploitative cost by citing an extra orientation program or English language support. But it was hard to ignore the escalation of market logic alongside the “celebration” of international students. “They enrich the fabric and diversity of the university,” said a Canadian university official in one news story\textsuperscript{22} (Brown, 2014),\textsuperscript{23} while international students told reporters that the very expensive private insurance that they had to buy upon arrival wasn’t accepted at the emergency room in the local hospital. “A lot of my international friends here have had to pay emergency room expenses out of pocket because the health coverage we get isn’t recognized,” said one Chinese student. “Some had to wait for their parents to send money before they could go to hospital.” Note that this is in a society that has a reputation for universal healthcare. So, the Canadian case exemplified how narratives that romanticize one country or another can obscure serious problems, such as financial exploitation that is justified by market logic or everyday prejudice that may be overlooked because it doesn’t fit the dominant national narrative. Scholars need to pay attention to the fuller, more complex, and nuanced pictures.

The market of international students in the United Kingdom has been further complicated by politics even before the problems were felt in the United States. Blogging for \textit{The Spectator}, Slater (2016) discusses a \textit{Times Higher Ed} article, which reported a new Home Office policy that required “university staff … to report their whereabouts … [including] when staff are visiting different parts of the university campus, such as the library or a colleague’s office.” Noting that “UK academia is an international business,” Slater described a critical situation where “foreign-born academics … [who are as much as a quarter of UK academics] face an increasingly precarious existence.” While the Ministry of Universities tries to “increase education exports to £30 billion by 2020,” the environment for international scholars, and the students who contributed a quarter of universities’ income, was “becoming more and more hostile” to both groups. A crackdown on admissions scams related to allegedly fraudulent language tests in 2015 rounded up and deported as many as 19,000 foreign students; but it was soon revealed that the Prime Minister, who got behind the action, “had almost no evidence, other than the fact these students all took the same test” as some students that were found fraudulent. Slater concluded that international students have “become a political football … in the ensuing kickabout between [political forces represented by] Osborne, Johnson and May.” At the same time as they are “rinsed for all their worth … their rights being curtailed again and again.” It is not just that politicization of international scholars and students inhibits the free flow of ideas and the strength of the nation’s institutions of higher learning. The author...
“more profoundly, anyone coming to work and live in a free society should not expect to be submitted to surveillance, extortion and deportation even when they do exactly as [they’re] told.”

In order to be effective academic leaders and sensitive educators, scholars must engage their institutions in conversations about the dangers of overreliance on market logic that relegates academic support for students into passing comments. We must study the effects of politically expedient but prejudiced arguments about students from certain regions and nations. The groundwork for effective academic support programs requires an awareness and interest in the composition and mobility of international students and how they are shaped and shifted by political forces of the nationalistic regime (Marginson, 2013) within which international education takes place today.

The political landscape in the United States has radically changed for international students and education after the 2016 presidential election. As Choudaha, an expert on international education and student mobility, pointed out, the policy perspectives of the current presidential administration seem to be “insular and not in line with the values of international education. It is likely that the future policies will start looking inward and slow down international education exchanges and student mobility” (cited in Redden, 2016). The policies might benefit other nations temporarily, but the larger questions about what values higher education is espousing on a global scale remain ignored. Hare (2016) has argued in an article written for The Australian that when one country becomes “isolated and divided” in competition with others about such fundamental global issues as the free flow of ideas and people, it hurts the advancement of knowledge and well-being of people everywhere. Competition does no good for “global higher education, even if Australia makes some profit from America’s misfortune” or vice versa. The subject of the “Trump effect on higher education,” which was the title of Hare’s article, published the day after Donald J. Trump won the 2016 American presidential election, seems too messy and uncertain to discuss insightfully at this time; but the impacts on universities and international students has clearly been adverse and could be long-lasting. Just while I was drafting this chapter, the new White House administration changed, eliminated, or instituted several programs that made education for international students more difficult. One of them was a bill that the administration got behind, trying to encourage only the “best and brightest” from around the world, turning university administrators’ idea of competitive, quality education on its head while also trying to put it into an ethno-nationalist framing. The recent waves of anti-immigrant rhetoric and political developments in Europe and the U.S. have similarly led to restrictions and difficulties against international students. Writing for Times Higher Education the day after the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, Choudaha (2016) stated that
“after Brexit, the U.S. election reaffirmed that nationalist viewpoints [were] gaining momentum.... It is also likely to have a chilling effect on the experiences of international students on campuses that have more conservative, anti-immigrant communities.” As the author predicted, American and British universities and colleges certainly have been “up for a tough time,” with their international students and faculty facing more visa denials, travel restrictions, and crippling uncertainty about safety and well-being necessary for academic success. It is clear that “the sociopolitical environment in the countries that are the leading destinations for international students has dramatically changed.”

International education (and students) are by nature highly susceptible to political forces and changes, including what message national leadership creates with each election or sociopolitical development. Some national leaders in the U.S. have been personally invested in the advancement of international education, for reasons appropriate to their times; John F. Kennedy has been perhaps the best example. In a 1961 letter to his Secretary of State, he asked to create a national plan rather than leaving the welfare of international students to the universities (with no public policy and guidance), writing, “I feel very strongly that we must not allow these students—especially the Africans and Asians—to leave this country disappointed any longer” (Bevis & Lucas, 2008; 157). But other presidents have done the opposite, taking cynical political approaches and capitalizing on fear and resentment toward foreigners, which directly affects international students and institutions and professionals that seek to promote international education. Vigilance to macro- and micro-politics of international students, therefore, means asking questions, difficult as they may be, about what battles we must pick, which positive forces we want to capitalize on, and what our value systems are about students from other countries.

In sum, learning lessons from different nations, as well as from the past in a given country, can help educators develop and implement intellectually meaningful and socially/globally just visions of international education, without being either paralyzed by cynical politics or blinded by romanticized economics about globally mobile students and scholars. Doing so can not only help us avoid repeating the same mistakes and anticipate challenges but also look beyond the growth and sustainability of our programs, designing pedagogies that can contribute to a more just and fair world that future generations deserve. It will help us help the next generation exchange ideas and advance knowledge, across national and political borders, more freely and fully than our generation could.

**Turning Knowledge into Action**

I remember a unique interview with a professor of nuclear physics at the University of Florida when I think about macro-politics that scholars...
(including myself) usually believe we can do little or nothing about. This professor told me that he hadn’t had international graduate students in his lab since the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York City because they were no longer enrolled in his discipline or perhaps department. But he offered to be interviewed while I was on campus because he was interested in international students. He said the lack of international students in the discipline would soon be detrimental to future American scientists, who would miss “multicultural experience in education”; he said he also missed the “work ethic” that international students used to bring to his lab and department. In addition to security concerns, partly because money had become scarcer and partly because of the concern about disproportionate number of foreign-born scientists in the U.S. (see Graham, 2002: Collision course; Stossel, 1999: “Uncontrolled experiment”), he sensed that STEM programs were increasingly ranked by the number of domestic scientists. Yet, he connected himself to the institutional network of advocates for international students, including professionals from the international student office, international student organizations, the housing department, admissions units, relevant deans, the graduate school, and professors from various departments. Since the prepared interview questions were largely irrelevant, I let the professor share his experiences of international students and education. So, among other things, he discussed how a student from Korea remembered an invitation to a Thanksgiving dinner nearly 40 years ago, how another invitation for him and his family for international travel had changed his perspectives on education, and so on. This early and unique interview made me aware of the important phenomenon among those who worked closely with international students: the additional commitment combined with experience made them more responsive to macro-and micro-politics affecting the students. Data analysis consistently showed that such commitment can greatly enhance academic support programs.

In another striking interview, an assistant dean at Cornell University discussed the vulnerability of international students. “So, form an international student perspective,” I said—as she handed me a signed research consent form—“to focus on the international students, what are some issues that you have observed in your position here?” She started by noting that “there’s always a cultural element that is sort of unknown that needs to be worked through,” pausing to mention that more than half of the graduate students she supported were international. In less than two minutes, she was delving into issues of power quite insightfully:

I find international students understand power, but I think they magnify it and forget that As students, that they are powerful…. But there’s, sort of, something hanging over them as far as to have them be connected here, and wanting to rock the boat. I think they tolerate [and they’re in]—the crisis mode as far as—in their mentors—I
think they tolerate ... a lot more.... [With] international students I’m wondering, “Ok, are they finally just tolerating it, or do they think this is normal or they just don’t have any power to ask?”

Apparently making sure that she wasn’t blaming faculty advisors, she highlighted the need to pay attention to vulnerability of international students. She said she created support programs with the dynamic in mind. The same kind of deep interest that the nuclear physics professor had shared was reflected in her responses. From a research perspective, while directly answering my prepared questions, this early interview further foregrounded the theme of power and politics that I kept coming across in many later interviews and while theming the data during the analysis of the final data set. I later found that the issue has been dealt with by some European and Australian scholars and by scholars in other disciplines in the United States as well. For instance, as Marginson (2013) reports from his research, even though the challenges of power dynamics related to nationality/citizenship, culture, and race affecting foreign students gradually diminish over time, they never fully disappear. Also, even where there are similarities between international and domestic students—such as power relations with faculty advisors and other members of the university, potential for exploitation of labor, and sexual harassment—international students don’t typically have similar courage or recourse for redress.

I began my research with the assumption that writing support has little to do with issues of safety and well-being, political climate, and its effects—at least not very directly. However, analysis of interviews, especially with more advanced students, kept countering that belief. Students in different universities shared experiences ranging from being worried about hostile political climates to the sinking feeling when health insurance was denied for a dependent child because of not being a citizen. And because I followed up with questions about whether and how those experiences influenced their academic transition and learning to write, students went on to give examples of experiences that I cannot imagine from my position today and hadn’t had when I was in their position. One was a graduate student who had been paying more than nine-tenths of his stipend as a graduate teaching assistant to rent a university apartment before his status as a doctoral student was downgraded to the master’s level because of his communication difficulties. But it was evident to me that he needed medical and psychiatric support more than he needed the basic writing class that he was sent to, which he greatly resented.

I found that writing professionals who were informed about and interested in issues of politics and power could translate their knowledge and interest into policies, programs, and practices of support. Here is an example from Cornell University again. Late in the afternoon on a day with subzero temperatures, an academic program director took me to a coffee
place called the “Big Red Barn,” where a group of international students played language games about American English idioms. To begin with, the students were learning and using language with greater motivation than they normally might in a typical language class. That “programming” of academic support also went beyond what formal programs can normally do, shifting the focus of language learning to socialization and comfort-building. An hour before, most of those students had shared their anxiety and frustration in a group interview with me. While this encounter was one of the more memorable ones, other encounters with students at a variety of universities similarly highlighted the importance of informal and low-stakes learning, empowerment, and sympathetic support. In fact, perhaps opening up to me as a former international graduate student, many of my student interviewees frankly described the **something** that is “sort of hanging over them” as the assistant dean above discussed; they overcame that anxiety when they could relate to people, when they sensed understanding and empathy. So, the **action** I indicated in the title that knowledge can lead to didn’t always require space and resources, institutional support, and specialized/separate expertise. It needed the affective dimension, informed by knowledge about the big picture, behind professional support.

Researchers who have studied the broader social conditions in which international students fail or give up have shown how often these students “face violations of human security in all domains of public, institutional and private life and cannot access the full range of human rights ... they are granted less than full rights, entitlements and protections of local citizens” (Marginson, 2013; 9). As Marginson acknowledges, “[i]t is hard for national systems of regulations to encompass cross-border persons. It is harder for the students, at the sharp end of national-global ambiguities and tensions” (10). But “political and legal ‘Othering’ of mobile students by national governments functions as the master Othering process” and affects international students’ academic performance as well: “The duality of citizen/non-citizen shelters, legitimates, and amplifies the other subordinations ... including racist Othering, the exclusions, and the abuse and violence.” Even as they are celebrated for their role in “diversifying the campus,” they evoke ambivalence; are they “included equals or subordinated Others?” Marginson goes on to add: “The first, liberal impulse is to answer ‘included equals, of course.’ Yet some who so answer are unreflexively national in outlook” (10). The assistant dean at Cornell who discussed the issue of vulnerability was speaking in the context of a prestigious university known around the world for its history of welcoming treatment of international students but also a history that has been recently tumultuous when it comes to providing essential support with language and writing skills necessary for academic transition and social/disciplinary adjustment. As I learned from other interviewees at the institution, support for international and ESL students had been
terminated, outsourced, marginalized, and so on, before it had recently been reinstated to a level that was starting to match with the university’s global ranking and prestige, if not driven by an institutional desire for effective education for all and just treatment of foreign students. For these reasons, academics who support these students must often work against the current nation-based and excessively capitalistic regime of higher education. They must often counter direct and indirect impacts of a world made of nations, borders, laws, and regulations that happen to undermine education as a global social cause. They must find ways to help their institutions to be driven by the basic transnational agenda to advance knowledge for universal human good.

There are also very pragmatic reasons why the politics of international education cannot be overlooked. Here is one illustration based on the experience of a language program director at the University of Maryland. Hers was a self-supported unit: it was not state-funded and instead based on additional tuition fee paid by international students who were tested into the program. Even though the tuition was fairly low, the fact that students had to take the courses when they failed a test changed the whole dynamic. Some students were offended about having to take a “remedial” class after being accepted as “outstanding” scholars: “What do you mean I need help and I think my English is good enough?” they challenged her, “I don’t need this.” Others said: “Yes I know I could improve my English, but I’m going into the sciences.” Many students thought that the program existed just to make money, making it extremely difficult to help them. The courses caught them off-guard, undermining their motivation to learn and sometimes their willingness to continue graduate education. How helpful the program was didn’t make a difference to many of the students. Knowing the fact that revenue happens to be a strong driver behind internationalization at many institutions, the director didn’t read student resistance at face value but instead designed and delivered her support with an understanding of the issue. The director of a similar language support program at Michigan State University had a punching bag in her office, on which she said she let the students “take out their anger” if they started spending too much of their time to vent their anger with the university. Situations like these cannot be explained without confronting the capitalistic, neoliberal argument about “internationalization” that often lacks a vision or focus on education itself. Writing support programs should respond to international graduate students’ challenges by using curricular and pedagogical approaches that treat “the teaching and learning of English as a complex social phenomenon instantiated in particular contexts for specific purposes” while attending to “complex interplays between policies, pedagogic practices, institutional constraints, and migrations” (Mallett, Haan & Habib, 2016; 126, 119). And more discussion of macro- and micro-politics of international students is necessary in the scholarship of graduate writing support.
Being broadly informed can help us capitalize on the opportunities where there is greater demand or recognition of our work, as well as to respond to marginalization of existing programs. In an era of “big data,” the effect of support programs can be further amplified by using numbers about larger political and historical pictures at state, national, and global levels. Doing so can also help academic administrators and staff members participate in institutional conversations on policy, program-building, and negotiation for continuing or changing existing support systems; to formulate new policies and tackle new challenges in realistic manners; and to collaborate with rather than confront university administration when institutional challenges affect existing academic programs. Even scholars involved primarily in classroom instruction can tremendously benefit from an awareness of sociopolitical, economic, and cultural conditions that affect their international students directly and indirectly. What groups of international students are increasing and what are their most significant needs and strengths? Which groups of students are most vulnerable in a given political climate and what, if anything, can academic support services do to alleviate the effects through academic support? What are the different educational, sociocultural, and class backgrounds of students from a given country? While the use of generalization is limited and can be counterproductive, at least an awareness of issues and possible questions to ask can lead to better understanding and support, whether the support is academic writing or psychological counseling.

For program administrators and instructors who wish to study issues like these as intellectual and practical input toward creating more inclusive, safe, and engaging environments where international students can learn language, writing, and other communication skills, there is rich research and scholarship in other disciplines on a range of issues ranging from social policy (Trilokekar, 2015) to institutional engagement (Glass, Wongtrirat & Buus, 2015). In fact, some journalists have countered the more superficial mainstream reporting with both broad and fine-grained views about international education. One such report was conducted by The Economist (2016), showing how political and economic forces in the four major destinations for international students (US, UK, Australia, and Canada) have shifted the global mobility of international students. The article, titled “Brains without borders,” shows how the changes in national (especially immigration) policy, political discourse, and economic and social environments affect international education. Analyzing push and pull factors in the global market, the article suggests that only a genuine focus on education can sustain the national branding campaigns. These dynamics, alongside developments in information technology, could also change the current culture toward more transnational education where students mix and match curriculum at home and abroad. Academics need to find a handle on them.
The increase in the number and diversity (in terms of nationality, ethnicity, gender, class, and other factors) of international students after every new wave can easily give the impression to academic leaders and experts that changes always happen in positive directions; enlightenment ideals and assumptions about American exceptionalism somehow seem dominant among scholars when it comes to international education. Experts and educators tend to develop policies, programs, and practices on the basis of the positive trends. In reality, the numbers and mobility of international students in the U.S. has been one of the ficklest aspects of the history of U.S. higher education. Each large-scale increase or shift in the distribution of international students coming to the United States has happened in response to a major sociopolitical event or climate, such as rapid social or technological development (e.g., in the mid 1800s, when Yung Wing and large numbers of Chinese students arrived, or since the turn of the current century), national crisis (e.g., the Sputnik moment, Iran hostage crisis, 2001 terrorist attacks), or political upheavals (e.g., anti-immigrant laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, after World War II, anti-immigrant election rhetoric such as that during and after the 2016 presidential election). Economic conditions have also had direct effects; for instance, the oil boom of the 1970s exploded the number of Iranian students from 5,100 in 1970 to 51,000 in 1980 with the Iran hostage crisis taking the number down to 1,800 by 1990 (Trines, 2017). In fact, there are also less visible but significant cultural forces behind the history of international education—and not just those related to the politics and policy of immigration. Christian missionaries, for instance, facilitated some of the earlier waves of international students; they sponsored support and gave them shelter when political crisis turned them into refuges overnight; even today, they continue to work alongside international student offices in many universities, often serving as the only support system for social/cultural adaptation. Understanding the history and politics, culture and economics behind the macrocosm of international education is necessary for scholars and academic leaders, and it is also useful for instructors working with international students.

Policies, Ideologies, and Response

In the same way as “elections have consequences” in democratic politics, political and economic stances adopted by nation-states and institutions shape or influence education for all students and often distinctly for different groups of them. Some of these policies arising from political actions and economic changes may never be officially stated. In fact, stated policies may contradict or even counter what is done in practice, a situation that marginalized groups in any social/political setting face quite often. In the case of the United States, while there is no official national policy regarding international education and students
organizations such as the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA\textsuperscript{38}) have described the policies they find beneficial for the nation. For example, in a call to the U.S. President to formulate a national education policy regarding foreign students and study abroad toward maintaining “US leadership, competitiveness, and security,” NAFSA (2007)\textsuperscript{39} recommended the following, among other actions, regarding international graduate and professional students: “Through graduate and professional training and research, enhance the nation’s capacity to produce the international, regional, international business, and foreign-language expertise necessary for U.S. global leadership and security” (2). As this organization for international education has consistently done, it went on to urge the President to advocate a more internationalized education for American students as well to adopt a strategic approach to maintaining global competition and leadership in international education. As the document reminds us, in lieu of formal national policies, the U.S. instead uses visa and immigration regulations, work and mobility restrictions, and occasional provisions to ease one kind of difficulty or another for international students—typically driven by the political will and economic interests of the time. Like NAFSA, most academic institutions try to mitigate the effects of political forces when they are detrimental by providing a welcoming stay and productive educational experience for their international students. Such responses, as well as mission statements regarding international students and education, collectively contribute to higher policy in the U.S. For example, in response to the contentious “travel ban” ordered by President Donald Trump in early 2017, universities quietly wielded tremendous resistance. Many universities released their official policy or position statements; the professional organization of writing scholars and teachers, Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), released one of such statements supporting the free movement of scholars. Among a number of statements released within four areas (digital, ethical, linguistic, and professional), CCCC statements address issues of ethnicity/race (which are also related to its historical stance on “students’ right to their own language”), language and power, national language policy, and teaching second-language writing and its writers.

Political/economic regimes and forces constitute or shape macro-level policies that influence foreign students’ education. So do institutional policies (including policy statements), whether they are meant to counter adverse political forces or if they are philosophical statements from professional organizations, guidelines for employees by academic institutions, or mission statements. However, policies go beyond explicit statements because policies also function, subsume, and manifest themselves in beliefs and ideologies, attitudes and behaviors vis-à-vis certain groups of people. Jones (2013)\textsuperscript{40} reviews four approaches to policy in the context of education: “policy as text, policy as value-laden actions,
policy as process and policy as discursive” (3). The first approach (policy as textual statements) too often produces simplistic thinking about complex issues and overlooks “power dynamics regulating dominant trends and uses of education”; it also makes it difficult for researchers to represent students’ “experiences of practices and their own navigations of the field” (4). The second approach (policy as “value-laden action”), which I have borrowed and adapted for analyzing and discussing the findings of my study, “locates education policy within the realm of values and politics” (Kogan, cited by Jones, 2013; 5); this approach “places policy in a context of wider fundamental questions about what and whom education is for, and who decides” (5). While this approach has its own weaknesses, it allows me to discuss national and institutional policies about foreign students as they are reflected in value-laden beliefs and ideologies about the students and about three particular subjects pertaining to them—language, writing, and international students. I also build on one of the ideas from the fourth approach to policy in education, in which groups’ and individuals’ language use is seen as reflecting how certain individuals and groups are situated within “contentious social spheres regulated by powerful institutions” (Leitch et al., cited by Jones, 2013; 10).

In the process of my research, when I regularly came across varied but significant effects of unstated policies about language and writing, in the form of ideas and beliefs shaping support programs and practices, and how they affected international graduate students’ process and experience of learning to write, I started coding the data for “ideology” in relation to the three subjects (language, writing, and international students). I used this stronger term (than, say, “discourse” or “argument”) due to the consequential nature of what interviewees said about the subjects. The emergent theme of “ideology” was not necessarily meant to capture negative ideas; for instance, “international” and “internationalization” were almost always used with tonal emphases suggesting a positive view by interviewees. However, as I started writing the current chapter and the next, I found it necessary to foreground the element of “bias” in order to theorize the challenges (in this chapter) and critical perspectives (in the next) facing writing/communication programs in the context of supporting international graduate students. Also, even though only a minority of the interviewees who were faculty members and academic leaders expressed some of the “biased” beliefs and ideas about international students vis-à-vis language/communication and writing, I wanted to foreground those beliefs/ideas because I found them to be (1) consequential, even when they seemed innocuous in themselves, (2) built into normal and normalized discourses and practices, (3) relational in that different individuals seemed to perceive bias differently, and (4) an expression of power and power relations (including resistance by students who may at first feel “powerless” and unable to negotiate).
It was not very surprising that faculty members in different disciplines expressed or implied views about “language” and “writing” that differed from mine or from those that I recognize as widely held by language and writing professionals. There is a significant amount of scholarship about ideologies and discourses about language and writing (e.g., Horner & Trimbur, 2002; Russell, 2007) especially in disciplines beyond those that focus directly on these subjects. Given that my student interviewees had come from many different backgrounds and were immersing in different disciplines, it was also not surprising that they too viewed and approached the learning of language and writing in varied ways (see Leki & Carson, 1997). Although the usefulness of generalized “contrasts” of students’ writing styles have been sharply debated (Hum & Lyon, 2009), writing professionals do not question the usefulness of understanding academic backgrounds of students coming from particular educational contexts, provided that generalizing by countries or cultures is not too simplistically relied on. What I had not expected, though, was how strongly prior experiences and current beliefs about language and writing seemed to shape international graduate students’ decisions to use (or not use) available writing support, a subject current scholarship hasn’t explored as much but was significant in my data. In fact, the conversation on graduate-level writing support hasn’t yet focused on specific effects of academic faculty and staff members’ ideologies about language and writing in relation to foreign students, or of the students themselves. So, in lieu of stated policy about what kind of language and writing support international graduate students need, I also drew inferences from the interviews about beliefs and biases, which I coded under “ideology,” whose influence on support programs and practices I further explored. Briefly put, whether and how those programs and practices were created by the providers, endorsed by faculty advisors, and used by the students depended on their “ideologies” about language and writing. This is not to say that students’ ideas about writing somehow constitute “policy” about language and writing support for them. But since they are not passive receivers of support, it made sense to consider that their ideologies, or value-laden actions and discourses, also shaped and influenced their use of writing support.

**Ideologies Out There**

Ideologies about language and writing affect all students, and they have been written about extensively. Scholars of Writing in the Disciplines (WID) such as Russell (2007) have explained ideologies about writing in disciplines that do not directly focus on writing; other scholars who have explored the “politics of language” (e.g., Horner & Trimbur, 2002) have shown how this politics further shapes stated and unstated language policies in academe and affect non-native English-speaking
students, including within Writing Studies. Interviews with international graduate students and those who provided them writing support consistently showed that language ideologies disproportionately affect international students, magnifying the effects of power dynamics that I discussed before. A language specialist with expertise in graduate level communication support best explained the difference with the example of a common statement graduate students made when they came to her for help. If a domestic graduate student says, “I’m a terrible writer,” the expert told me, he or she means “something different” than if the same statement were made by an international non-native English speaker, adding that the statement could point to yet another set of challenges if a domestic non-native English speaker had said it. If the students are not referring to the same challenges, the challenges cannot be addressed with the same support and resources either. Here is how two University of Houston writing program administrators I cited earlier described the effect of the ideologies:

We’ve had graduate students who… have tears in their eyes. They say: “…[my advisor] said that I should have never been added to their program… I have two days to fix [my paper] or I can’t graduate.” So, we…

Interviewee 1: We’ve had graduate students who come in and they have tears in their eyes…. And so, the pressure—Interviewee 2: We also have to train our consultants in dealing with those types of situations. How do you help someone in that situation realistically who doesn’t have the time to go back to the basics and have a grammar lesson in a day and a half?

As writing tutors, they did not know what to do when the students’ advisors simply told them, “This is terrible writing” without specifying “what they are to produce, what format, what they’re looking for….[and] students are trying to go at their writing in the dark.”

Another insidious assumption about graduate writing support is that it is only for the deficient, or those on the lowest rung of the proficiency ladder. Even when resources are available for international students, they are only provided to address the “needy” student rather than as support that all of them need for a smoother transition and greater academic success. The undergirding discourse of the “linguistically deficient” international students can push support programs in the wrong direction, undermining their quality and sustainability. A university, for instance, may only fund language support or “remedial” writing help, or it may simply raise language proficiency test scores for admission (so that “deficient” students are not admitted, to begin with) while eliminating the support program altogether. “Language support” programs actually teach a wide variety of writing and communication skills, but the assumption that the support (should) focus on fixing language deficiency is also used as a justification for cutting such programs. Thus, academic program leaders must inform/educate the community that even to the most linguistically proficient international students, writing
support provides what an instructor at the University of Michigan said she described as “advanced academic literacy” with the administration. As the instructor also suggested, advocating support “at the end, as with dissertation boot camps,” can also help to drive home this message.

The assumption that writing support for international students is limited to language support is further reinforced by a second assumption that international students are, or should be, brought in because they are the “cream of the crop” globally. As one STEM student who was working as a writing fellow at the New Mexico Tech put it, evidently sincerely, “in my experience, international students, very commonly, had an excellent work ethic, were very dedicated, spent time, were very organized.” There were dozens of instances in the data where this positive sentiment is expressed, in a variety of ways. Unfortunately, as the director of a graduate medical program at the University of Louisville admitted, universities and departments tend to use this logic to “only hire students who are already able to do the work” (meaning, they are “already able to write at the graduate level”). In reality, not even domestic students are already able to do advanced academic communication—not to mention students coming in to a new country and culture without at least some transition support. In fact, universities use that logic to try to temper public resentment about the disproportionate number of international students in public institutions, if not worse. For instance, even when universities do look for the brightest, they may practically target the richest instead, all the while using the narrative to deny or degrade support for international students, to outsource whatever support is provided, or to only use contingent faculty. Ideologies about foreign students are usually tangled in a variety of ways.

When beliefs about language, writing, and the person using either of those means of communication interact with each other, the interaction can lead to complicated challenges. Amir, a writing center assistant director in Penn State University (an international graduate student himself), discussed this complexity from the perspective of “affect” in graduate-level writing. He said that international students’ writing challenges are oversimplified and misunderstood for a while, including by themselves. So, the students overcome their “writing” challenges not so much when they start mastering the language and style of their writing as when they become able to negotiate their research topic and agenda with their mentors through language and writing. Amir illustrated this using the example of a female doctoral student from Taiwan who had been reportedly “unable to work above the sentence level.” He found that the student lacked both confidence and interest in local subject matter she thought she had to write about—until she “figured it out.” She gradually understood “the system well enough here” to realize that if she started with a theoretical framing about violence and education as they were familiar to her advisors, she could then write about education in Taiwan, and the
moment she did so, she was able to “wake up the next day, write eight pages per day, and keep going.” The advisors who were worried about her language errors, and her writing skills, were pleasantly surprised.

Among the many other examples of the ideology about language (further entangled with assumptions about cultural differences) was the enforcement of an “honor code” at Penn State University law school which prevented students from using the writing center, a seemingly discontinued practice also mentioned at Ohio State University. In both cases, the interviewees discussed how the policy could be applied differently on international students because of beliefs/ideologies about them. Thus, to put it generally, on the one hand, faculty and students in many academic disciplines tend to espouse—at least when discussion or practice is not framed critically—what Rose (1985) and Russell (2007) called the “myth of transparency,” or the idea that writing is transcription of ideas/reality with language as a transparent medium, and the myth of “transience,” or the idea that writing is a general skill that can be acquired once and for all. Following the lead of Rose and Russell, many writing scholars have also studied faculty perceptions in the disciplines and how they shape and affect teaching and learning of writing in the disciplines (Jordan & Kedrowicz, 2011; Leydens, 2008; Winsor, 2003; Zawacki & Habib, 2014). On the other hand, in the context of international graduate students, beliefs like the above make any problems with their writing seem to be deficiencies in language (or cultural background).

Some faculty members said that if the students focus on the logic and content of their discipline, they shouldn’t normally need writing support; others asked their students to make the effort and find the support to eliminate nonstandard English and non-native styles of writing. Unfortunately, all these assumptions ignore the reality that graduate students in particular must learn to use writing as means of “negotiating competence, identities, and power relations” (Morita, 2004; 573). They obscure the multidimensionality and complexity of the challenges of graduate-level writing especially for international students.

The intersection of ideologies about language, writing, and foreign students among different stakeholders constitutes unstated institutional policy. But it also shapes the educational environment and support programs and pedagogies. So, writing professionals should make their programs more welcoming and their practice more inclusive. They should also inform institutional leaders and administrators who shape institutional policy and decisions, allocate resources, and promote the programs. An experienced scholar at an English language support program best illustrated that need:

You get a change in the dean, and the new dean has no background or experience, and if you’re unlucky, these things just wither away. I mean every time there’s change in the senior administration, there
One has to be educated, this scholar suggested, in order to inform university administrators and to counter their beliefs and ideologies about language. It is important to note here that contrary to the confrontational approaches described by some of the writing scholars, the more effective program administrators sought to understand the ideologies in their broader political/economic context and in light of what different disciplines value; doing so enabled them to better address differences, to find support, to create alliances, and to best engage stakeholders. As one of the graduate writing specialist I interviewed noted, graduate students and their faculty advisors are “all over the place about their view of language and writing—[and] we’re not going to convince everyone.” The issue of language ideology is indeed complex and potentially divisive. So, instead of trying to counter ideologies, program leaders should engage faculty advisors and other stakeholders on the latter’s terms, at least as a starting point. Certainly, avoidance may not always be a more effective strategy than countering. But some efforts must be made at informing and educating the community about writing support as a multidimensional and complex phenomenon.

**Beliefs and Assumptions among Students**

I also coded student interviews for their beliefs and ideologies about language and writing. While their views about these subjects were as diverse as the student body, there were a few patterns, which evidently had significant connections with whether and how they used writing support. First, many of the international students I interviewed bought into the dominant assumption that if they fixed their language, they would just write better. Many of them believed that high TOEFL scores were a reliable measure of their language and writing proficiency, so if they had a good “writing” score, they tried to get out of any required learning, as well as ignoring recommendations to further improve their writing. Their view about writing support also had to do with their sense of purpose and priority about coming to the United States for graduate education. Ajit, whose interview I have cited before, best explained this issue while discussing how his peers viewed “additional skills” like writing: “[m]ost of us who come from other countries come here just for learning, the academic scholarship part.” Commenting especially on the views of students from India, he added: “[Writing skills are] like one of those brochures we’ll pick up on the way.” Such beliefs and ideologies among students seemed to be a significant obstacle against writing support programs that sought to help them with the different dimensions
of graduate-level writing, especially beyond support for fixing language problems. Many of the more advanced students did look back to realize that they needed more than linguistic proficiency to be effective writers—and, indeed, some students’ views seemed to change quite rapidly. But their improved understanding didn’t always lead to more frequent or better use of writing support: other challenges complicated their use of the support, ranging from needing to focus on exclusively language as demanded by their mentors to lacking information or understanding about available support programs to finding little time to use the support. New students seemed to actively look for available support, but they were too overwhelmed at the time to use what they found; by the time they could manage the time to visit support programs, many of them didn’t find the support necessary.

Second, many of the students I interviewed said that they did not find available writing courses useful for them. Reflecting a pattern at many universities, a master’s degree student in Michigan, where the writing center director described a range of support adapted to international graduate students, had stopped visiting the center because she said the tutors “don’t really understand what I’m trying to write [as a graduate student and in the department of criminal justice] so they ask me to find out the errors [in my writing] by reading it aloud. That’s it.” That “not understanding,” which students described differently at different places, usually coincided with an evident lack of rapport and trust between international students and writing centers. Data analysis indicated that the cause of this challenge seemed varied and complex; this is an issue for further study. Among other things, students found support practices (such as writers reading their drafts aloud and tutors asking questions instead of giving direct suggestions) new and strange, and they suggested that the support providers weren’t interested where they were coming from. Because such beliefs shaped their view and use or non-use of the support, they are worth scholarly and programmatic attention. In short, international graduate students not only need writing support but also education about it, including education about the approaches and expectations of how writing is done and taught in a new country and in varied contexts.

Third, students also ignored available writing support because of stigma attached to being “ESL” or similar terms. As one student in a group discussion at the University of Louisiana, Monroe said, “ESL support is not very helpful, because it’s for undergraduates,” referring to the Writing Center! One of nine students had asked me to join a group over tea at a nearby student apartment, where I requested written consent and then largely listened to a conversation that often involved strong emotions. “Because the writings there are not for graduate, they start from abc, and we have learned that in grade one.” Other students also found the support infantilizing. “Writing is very difficult, you know,”
said one of the more advanced graduate students, moving on to struggles he had with publishing a journal article. He suggested that tutors could not help him with rhetorical skills, genre knowledge, and communicative proficiencies required for his graduate-level writing. Other students shared their own challenges, before Vijay, a student who was soon graduating, shared a story of breathtaking struggle and eventual success, which I elaborate later. Generally, writing center staff members do not yet have as much scholarship on supporting international graduate students (Phillips, 2016). Instead, even though students incorrectly associated stigma about “ESL” writing centers, the more language-focused centers often adopted more sophisticated approaches to supporting diverse students. A simple explanation of this could be that language specialists paid attention to language issues and international students and they practically addressed the students’ challenges with more nuance. Because international students are among the primary group of students that these programs are designated to support, they have more knowledge and more professional incentive to advocate and sustain the support for them. This difference was best articulated by a language program administrator at MIT who was discussing the need to train writing tutors to better support international students, who were 40% of all graduate students at the university:

Few writing centers are adequate in supporting international graduate students with writing,... I mean they’re lovely, hard-working wonderful people, and they certainly do things nobody else is doing... but I get emails like, [Mary], I’ve been working with these nonnative English speaking students. Can you give me some tips on working with them?’ And I’m just thinking, “Like, what? I mean is there a list? First of all, who are they? What’s their first language and where did they get their prior education? What is their exact problem?” I mean it’s just impossible to answer like that.

As this candid comment on the admittedly hardworking tutors reflects, simplistic understanding of international students as just “second language” or “non-native” English speakers/writers were more common in interviews I gathered at writing-focused programs. Other than graduate-specific writing centers, only a few others (generic centers) seemed to have trained their tutors to tackle the many facets of “language problems” among international students. In spite of decreasing institutional support that I learned about across the country, language support programs also seemed generally more flexible than writing support programs, as I see in program descriptions in recent publications such as Simpson et al., (2016). It seemed to me that writing support programs tend to embrace more fuzzy views about international students because many of them are yet to pay attention to the side effects
of using language-based identification. In any case, writing support programs must address assumptions and resentments regarding language among international students, as well as language ideologies among other stakeholders and themselves.

Fourth, various beliefs that students bring from their national/cultural and educational backgrounds shape and influence their attitudes about and learning of writing skills. As a doctoral student at Penn State University who had conducted research on writing in Eastern European countries noted, international students often bring very strong views about writing from their home countries, views that support professionals here seemed to pay little if any attention to. For example, the researcher said that Serbian teachers and students described how they wrote in stark contrast with how they thought Americans did: “writing in Serbia is not organized, we don’t have topic sentences. Serbian writing is very free formed.” Many international students I interviewed created similarly stark contrasts, especially describing their backgrounds in writing as “no good,” an evidently counterproductive view. Unfortunately, the deficit view of their own prior writing experiences did not make students look for or appreciate the support available. It often led to avoidance or anxiety and eventual delay in the learning process.

Fifth, students reacted strongly to stereotypes and perceived biases from those who provided them support, often giving up on the support itself because of negative interactions. Indeed, some students in the humanities and social sciences shared experiences of being stereotyped by faculty mentors, from whom we would expect relatively nuanced views about language and writing vis-à-vis international students. One Japanese student who had studied in different countries before she did her master’s degree at a Michigan university and moved to the University of Maryland said that she had “mixed feelings” about how her advisors viewed her writing:

I have mixed feelings and mixed reactions to those comments ... because I came in feeling like a global citizen, like this is American institution, and I knew that there are certain frameworks. But I still tried to figure out how to go about it and where to draw the line, like, hey, this is the way I talk and write and this is how I am going to be working. I don’t think I can have an editor every time I write.

The persisting tendency to help the student with her language caused a bigger problem than the help itself. She was, in fact, bothered by the “cushion” with which the professors started their comments, and she did not understand what the big deal was with a few “awkward phrases,” if the department wanted to include students from around the world. “So, yeah, I still try to figure out what to make out of those feedbacks,” she
added, going on to discuss issues of power and identity. At the previous university, she had visited the English language program, where she found genre-based tutoring “degrading” because “the level of service they provided was very elementary. Maybe that was just the person I met … [but] he was kind of top-down approach, using a rigid approach, like a formula—like introduction, body 1, 2, 3, conclusion, done.” She didn't understand why the tutor tried to teach her the metalanguage of writing, such as topic sentence, which she said she already knew and which was not why she sought help. She was “a little frustrated that he treated me in such a way.” International students have a degree of difference.” When asked to unpack her frustration, she returned to the theme of stereotyping international students as linguistically deficient. She did qualify her criticism by adding that international students must try to explore the system if only to find out what is there, a theme common among most of the more advanced students. But her resistance and criticism were as common, which were as common among advanced students, were strong.

Finally, international students often struggled to work and engage with their domestic counterparts and with others in the campus community especially when they were new. “Nobody wanted to work with me,” said a student in a group discussion at Cornell, before his friend chimed in: “The thing that really shocked me when I first came was that nobody seemed to want to talk to me,” pausing to add, “or to talk to anybody [else].” A third student agreed: “Everybody is just using email here.” As the conversation developed, it seemed that the students’ frustrations were less related to writing support and more to culture shock. These were new students, and like most new students I interviewed, they indicated that they were frustrated and confused by many things. Most of the more advanced students had learned to make better use of available support, as well as to work with their domestic peers, having overcome language barriers and cultural differences; some continued to be often offended by how they were treated. As some of the program directors discussed, new students in particular were much more engaged, and the support became effective, when the support addressed cultural difference and culture shock, power dynamics, and perceived or real biases.

Avoiding Ideological Traps

Writing professionals certainly know best about how to support students with writing. But graduate students in general and international students in particular are not always able to adopt writing professionals’ advice, due to their own and their faculty advisors’ beliefs and demands, the specialization of their writing, and so on. In this sense, writing professionals’ knowledge/expertise and beliefs can themselves become an ideological barrier of a sort; our expertise can inadvertently aggravate differences
of understanding and ideology about language, writing, or the students we serve. In particular, this happens when we happen to impose our discipline’s sophisticated understanding and educational approaches on students of other disciplines in relation to their and their mentors’ beliefs and expectations. For instance, a writing program administrator at Michigan State University pointed out a common dimension of this challenge, with problematic views about writing among students’ faculty mentors:

Some [international students] are sent to us by chairs in their committees … for surface level issues, but you know that’s not what we do…. There might even be a note … that says, “I’m not reading this until you get to the writing center.”

The professor’s demands as described reflect that they view students’ challenges with writing in superficial ways, as something to be fixed at the writing center; they also seem to indicate irresponsibility as mentors who ought to help their students with discipline-specific writing support. However, when inexperienced international students, like a number of my interviewees, faced conflicting views about how to improve their writing, it didn’t matter to them who was right. For them, not being able to address their mentors’ demands had immediate adverse effects on their confidence and performance, also aggravating the dynamics of power and perceptions with the professors.

A number of writing scholars have written self-critically, so to speak, about beliefs and ideologies in our own field (e.g., Prendergast, 2013), and a few scholars have also put that disciplinary self-reflection in the context of supporting NNES students (e.g., Benesch, 1993; Leki, 1995, 2001). But practitioners generally continue to retreat into the comfort zone of their own ideologies about language and writing. As some of the experts I interviewed noted, and viewing from the perspectives of students and other interviewees, writing professionals must be strategic in order to bridge interdisciplinary ideological gaps, especially while supporting international students. In fact, writing professionals often embrace and aggravate problematic views about international students. For example, one of the most experienced scholars of Writing Studies I talked to during the study, albeit someone who said he hadn’t paid attention to international students in his scholarship, described a dissertation completion grant project that excluded international students because no one in the program had “ESL or EFL backgrounds.” The program leaders “were afraid that … [because] so many of our science and engineering students (and faculty) are NNES” the faculty would overwhelm the project with demands for “grammar and style.” They were afraid that because dissertation advisors “don’t know what else is going on … [they] were concerned [they] would be flooded by
students who are sent by advisors simply to, basically to, rewrite their dissertations.” The challenges described by my interviewee are real, but addressing them with avoidance means agreeing with the problematic beliefs—or at least doing nothing to counter the beliefs.

In an article titled “Power and agency in language policy appropriation,” Johnson and Johnson (2015) found that while peripheral stakeholders such as parents (in the case of secondary education) may have some influence on language policy decisions, policy arbiters such as teachers have greater impact on what is actually implemented: “language ideologies and beliefs about language education lead arbiters to utilize research in tactical ways—i.e. to support their pre-existing positions on the value of linguistic diversity” (241). Thus, tactical selection and application of scholarly knowledge (such as the idea that only ESL specialists can help international student dissertators) can stem from very good intentions; but their effects can nonetheless be problematic. In the case of the grant project for dissertators, the program decision based on a certain belief showed concerned and sympathetic views of international students, but it also prevented a writing support program (as it often does scholarship) from addressing many other challenges for which support evidently existed. Ultimately, the assumption that any differentiated support needs experts in the area led to inaction and reinforcement of a problematic belief—not to mention the missed opportunity to help students in many other possible ways. Situations like this were quite common.

While emphasizing higher-order concerns as traditionally understood (such as clarity, transition, and focus), some writing professionals seemed to fail to address challenges that were higher order for the students, such as when they were new and needed a broader orientation to the academic culture while also working on specific tasks. That is, what is “higher order” should depend on the need of the student, not a predetermined assumption or ideology. There should be no “higher” order outside of context, purpose, or other rhetorical factors of writing. In the case of many international students, the demand for support with language (grammatical, syntactic, or vocabulary issues) is legitimate especially when they mean what they say, for even at the graduate level, many of them do need to brush up on their language skills. Some of them—like the students in Louisiana who were “offended” by the focus on language—may or may not need it. So, assumptions about language can lead to unrealistic responses from writing support programs and professionals.

In fact, writing programs can also be unhelpful if they create orthodoxy out of the positive idea that international students are “multilingual” writers with rich linguistic resource at their disposal. The programs I observed tried to prioritize issues like clarity and focus, organization and transition, audience-awareness and tone, conciseness and precision,
especially at the graduate level—countering the overemphasis on grammar and syntax that disciplinary faculty often want international students to focus on. Indeed, even without fully understanding the content and context of their communication, trained and experienced tutors are able to ask students from any discipline many valid questions, helping them to become aware of the generally higher-order concerns and to better articulate their ideas to better achieve their communicative goals. However, I also found a rather widespread refusal to help students with grammar and syntax, which evidently affected many international students adversely. Some faculty members in other disciplines said that they had stopped sending their students to writing centers and writing classes because they could not trust the writing center with issues of content or genre and disciplinary conventions; unfortunately, by taking their own disciplinary expertise too seriously, the writing centers often made that mistrust worse. Thus, especially with a student body whose needs are more diverse, complex, and shifting, it is important to avoid reinforcing ideological gaps by updating our support policies and practices, as well as by understanding the beliefs and assumptions of other stakeholders.

Another cause of difference in expectations and demands about writing pedagogy and support is what writing scholars call the “monolingualist ideology” (see Horner & Trimbur, 2002) that is prevalent across the disciplines. The term refers to a narrow view about what counts as academic English (this ideology denigrates different local varieties in academic contexts, as erroneous or substandard) and what counts as standard English (which also rejects World Englishes and sociocultural and contextual variations in language use). Unfortunately, while writing scholars become increasingly critical of the university as a monolingualist regime, the rest of academe seems generally aware but not very interested about this issue. So, the increasing sensitivity about language among writing professionals, somewhat like the resistance against fixing grammar, also seemed confusing to international students whenever I brought up the issue during interviews. On the one hand, if they were interested or worried about their English language proficiency, they gave high priority to learning what they believed was standard American English; even though multilingualism and translingualism (concepts few of them might encounter) are a fact of their lives, they focused on what they are often told they lack. On the other hand, most of them are enrolled in the natural sciences, engineering, medicine, and business—disciplines where “monolingual” beliefs are predominant and justified with all the myths described earlier.

Therefore, rather than investing time and energy colliding head-on against deeply entrenched ideologies such as English monolingualism (which have to do with how scientists, for instance, define knowledge-making), writing professionals need to be diplomatic and pragmatic about the issue, countering monolingual beliefs and ideologies without
alienating students and faculty members in the first place. I found that more successful writing program administrators worked across disciplinary and ideological divides—by providing faculty with formal training through workshops and consultation, supporting them through classroom visits and collaborative teaching, and creating new initiatives such as writing fellowships and teaching fellows—thereby gradually influencing different stakeholders’ views about writing and writing services while also helping their staff become aware of their own ideologies. As a significant side benefit, when people knew one another, they didn’t try to impose their (presumably correct) views about the issues involved; instead they met each other half way and learned from one another. Especially in larger institutions and also where writing programs had limited resources or expertise, writing professionals who were proactive in their outreach, and strategic and diplomatic in their relationship-building, were most able to help international graduate students with their many and often unique challenges with writing.

It must be noted, however, that tactical and diplomatic strategies often come with their own drawbacks. They can set up ideological traps as much as create pathways. So, I found educational and leadership-driven approaches to be less prone to inadvertently reinforcing ideologies about language and writing, especially in relation to international students. Instead of only tapping into ideologies about these students’ writing needs, support professionals taking an educational approach tried to address larger issues of politics and policy—such as the stigma that students felt about being treated as “ESL”—by also engaging faculty mentors and institutional leaders in broader conversations about international students and writing support. In the words of an academic program director at Cornell University, one effective approach to overcoming the trap this section describes was to try to “sell the idea that writing is a complex process” by engaging faculty and students alike in that process. This program leader invested much time with faculty members because she believed that creating faculty buy-in also made programs more sustainable. This approach seemed more farsighted as well as more effective.

The visibility and profundity of language problems can work to the advantage of writing professionals insofar as they can use the problems to engage faculty members or administrators or gather support and resources. But histories of support programs that professionals shared with me clearly showed a pattern: short-term strategies backfired unless their adverse effects were offset by stronger positive forces. As Aitchison and Lee (2006) have argued, it is important for us to attempt substantively shifting the perception of academic support from a “site of deficit” designed for “clinical intervention” to fix wherever the deficit appears toward a perception that we are informed and sensitive about disciplines, cultures, and contexts beyond our own. In an article that
“identifies problems of policy, theory and pedagogy in relation to research writing,” Aitchison and Lee suggest that writing professionals try to reestablish the conceptual link between, on the one hand, the common understanding of the “centrality of text” (meaning that administrators do know, for instance, that graduate students must produce the thesis or dissertation and other types of texts) and, on the other hand, the idea of advanced degrees as a means of “knowledge production” (266). If students must produce text, and text embodies knowledge, the authors imply, then the “pragmatic problems of policy imperatives in the name of efficiency and capacity-building” cannot relegate the teaching of research-based writing to clinical interventions designed to produce correct text without regard to the larger challenges students face. Writing professionals should prevent their own specializations and established wisdom from aggravating those challenges.

Conclusion: “Reflective Encounters”

Coding and analyzing interviews with faculty members from other disciplines (as well as with other groups) at first seemed to show clear contrasts in ideologies about language, writing, and international students in relation to ideologies in the interviews with writing and language professionals. However, closer attention and analysis indicated that writing professionals were also largely complacent or nonchalant about the nationalistic regime and capitalist market logic about international education and international students. Beyond a minority of scholars who worked closely with international graduate students, the students were described only in linguistic terms. In fact, I often heard echoes of the same ideologies expressed by the teacher of the failing Chinese students mentioned earlier in many conversations with writing support professionals. International students were often described in romanticized terms, but the same underlying ideologies seemed to ultimately shape many programs and inform their policies and practices. Some experts clearly heeded scholarship showing that international students perform better when they learned to overcome cultural barriers and if they are socially engaged (e.g., Suspitsyna, 2013), or because support programs were designed to that effect. A few writing centers also involved and engaged the students by working with professionals across campus who could help address issues around writing. But mainstream writing programs practically ignored consequential effects and critical issues about power and ideology and just focused on language and writing per se. So, there is clearly a need for writing professionals to both focus on political and ideological issues and to reflect on our own beliefs and practices as they affect these students. One of the ways for doing so could be Mao’s (2003) “reflective encounter,” which involves pausing to examine one’s own understanding of the subject matter when one encounters a different
Understanding Politics

view of the subject or different beliefs and ideologies about it in other communities or cultures. It is not enough to criticize other stakeholders for not being sensitive to politics and ideologies, but the nature of our work makes it possible and productive for us to pay attention.

Many interviews with students, their faculty advisors, and other participants surprised me, forcing me to rethink my prior beliefs and perspectives. One interview that best foregrounded the issue of ideology was with the marketing instructor in California whom I cited at the beginning of the first chapter. To elaborate on the underlying issue here, having apparently pinned down the reason of the students’ failure on a “cultural divide,” my interviewee had made straightforward decisions about helping the Chinese students with their writing: “We’re not going to teach writing…. Chinese students are a problem!” Instead of seeking ways to mitigate the challenge of learning to write that even the academically brightest foreign students face—because at least a few dimensions of that process are unique, at least during these students’ academic transition—the instructor just demanded that the university only recruit students who could just write:

This is college. You need x amount of GPA in graduate school…. Every year I have students from China and I think their idea of motivation is different. I want to take a test, I want to perform, I want to get a degree…. I think it’s just cultural, I really do.

Whatever extent to which they are based in facts, the assumptions—that a certain group of Chinese students have only had a test-based education, that all of them have a certain kind of motivation about education, and that everything boils down to cultural difference—put the onus of learning to speak and write entirely on the students. Such association of students’ failure to their language, motivation, and cultural difference is also increasingly shaped by the view that Chinese students who don’t catch up and perform are fuer-dais with a bad attitude and no interest in education. The instructor’s arguments could be seen as a candid expression of frustration about the market of international education that she believed has increased the proportion of unmotivated students from a certain country. However, the interview gave me pause because it made me ask how often her kinds of views shape or influence writing support and how we counter them. How are the politics and economics of international education accounted for in Writing Studies? What beliefs and ideologies do our research and scholarship, as well as our support programs and pedagogies, promote and resist?

Broader issues about politics and policy of international education have been addressed in recent scholarship, but most writing professionals continue to embrace what Suspitsyna (2013) called a “demographic” view about international students, one which values them for numbers and
variety but, I argue, neglects complex sociopolitical and economic issues such as economic forces, dominant ideologies, and intolerant political climate and culture-based prejudices. "The paradoxical coexistence of intolerance and diversity... operates as a strategically deployable shifter, with a spectrum of meanings ranging from demographic representation to welcoming climate to skills necessary for participation in a global economy" (9). Because "international students’ status as legal aliens places them in a marked category in comparison with the unmarked category of the American citizens" (10), academic programs and support practices cannot be effective while overlooking the basic fact that our universities are in many ways “collective enactments of organizational traditions, histories and mythologies.” Suspitsyna goes on to argue that universities “operate as colonial metropolises, fashioning themselves as multicultural centers of learning and global providers of knowledge and, at the same time, remaining negligent of their multicultural and international subjects” (11). Seen from such critical perspectives, which often greatly sharpen our understanding of pertinent issues, academic support programs can help reshape current worldviews only if its professionals envision universities as a “new imaginary of organizational citizenship, which displaces [nationalistic regime] at the core of academic and campus cultures, and accepts internationalization and diversity as organizing systemic principles” (12). Spaces like the writing center and the writing classrooms and communities like writing groups and writing fellows programs are the right places to directly address such issues, at least at the level of being aware and for creating socially engaging and educationally effective support programs. Denying or ignoring how their “otherness” affects them can only lead us to abstract similarities while concrete issues that ought to be addressed first are ignored.

To understand the big picture of international education first, writing program administrators and instructors could look beyond their own field to scholarship in disciplines like psychology, student affairs, comparative and international education, and higher education administration. For instance, in a study of consensual and individual stereotypes about international students among domestic students, a psychology scholar, Spencer-Rodgers (2001), shows that stereotypes, bias, and prejudice—which are undeniable parts of international students’ experience in any country—can have serious effects on “psychological well-being and cultural adjustment of international sojourners” (655). Studying the differential perceptions about international students’ gender, academic level, ethnicity, and language proficiency, Kwon (2009) highlighted the need to understand these factors to better facilitate the students’ academic transition to U.S. higher education. There is now a plethora of articles that could help us understand the academic socialization of Chinese graduate students (e.g., Huang, 2012), as well as international graduate students in general (e.g., Ravichandran et al., 2017). Scholars in student affairs
have explored the dynamics of privilege based on different national and racial identities (e.g., Huang, 2012), cultural influence on “academic voice” (e.g., Ballard & Clanchy 1984; Ramanathan & Atkinson 1999), and so on. Even a small selection of readings on the social, psychological, cultural, and other issues that form the periphery of writing support can help go a long way toward creating effective and sustainable writing programs.

In fact, being reflexive about foreign students also must also involve asking tough questions about them in relation to their domestic counterparts. I believe that there are ethical questions at this nexus that every educator must ask, which journalists have best raised so far. For example, in a thought-provoking article in *The Atlantic* magazine, McKenna (2015) discusses ethical questions raised by the concentration of international students in many large public universities whose leaders seem to skirt the question of their institutions’ responsibility toward domestic students while justifying increasing numbers of international students in various ways. On the one hand, even though the number of international students crossed a full million in the United States in 2016, their proportion remains just above 5% of total U.S. enrollments (as opposed to, for instance, over 24% in Australia the same year); the sheer capacity of U.S. higher education, which is more than double the number of institutions than any other country, may make that proportion seem insignificant. On the other hand, the concentration of international students in certain states, institutions, and disciplines is more concerning, as McKenna argues. Using the example of the largest recruiter, New York University, she points out that while 19% of all freshmen at NYU in 2015 were international, only 5% were African American, and the combination of many native demographics was just 1%. While university officials claimed that they have “embarked on an ambitious plan to become America’s first truly global university, creating an infrastructure that enables students to experience a global network of campuses and academic centers around the world, without ever leaving NYU,” the fact that an American university has more students from China than from the entire Midwest raises serious questions (McKenna, 2015). Furthermore, international students are also increasingly treated as what many describe as “cash cows” rather than learners with full privilege, with little regard to whether they are able to pay the “full fee” and exorbitant surcharges. McKenna explains this with the same example: “given that one year at NYU for tuition, room and board, and fees costs $66,022, it would take the average Chinese family—with a yearly income of $2,100—decades to save enough money to afford attendance there.” Academic scholars should not hesitate to ask what proportion of international students is too big. Shouldn’t our institutions instead invest more resources on domestic, especially minority, students? I would add that the focus on revenue could also be closing doors to lower-income students from other countries, further slimming the possibility of what Zakaria (2015)
calls a “natural aristocracy” of talented people who acquire education and wealth by sheer commitment, rather than an “unnatural aristocracy” that is inherited by a certain class. I would add that academic scholars can and must show the American university how to cultivate a vision of global social mobility as well as a national one, which it can do by providing a certain amount of opportunity for hard-working students from around the world while it recruits international students for revenue generation and tries to provide internationalized academic experience for domestic students. These three dimensions are not mutually exclusive; they can be parts of the same whole. As scholars, we cannot advocate for international students, cannot simply demand more resources for them, and cannot just ride the wave of the next appealing discourse about them, without simultaneously asking tough questions about them and about their domestic counterparts.

Notes

1 I used to have dreams where my students in a first-year writing course would ask questions involving local or technical words (such as “curving grades,” which one student used early on) that I did not understand.


3 See Tardy (2009) for insights on language education in the context of internationalization.

4 See Simpson, next note (2016; esp. 5–7).

5 Introduction. In Simpson et al., *Supporting graduate student writers*.

6 *Fostering international student success in higher education*.

7 I had been systematically tracking interviews where students talked about writing and communication support that they had used, triangulating analysis of interviews with those who provided the same support along with my own field notes taken during research visits.

8 Very likely meant as a computer metaphor.

9 The “foreign TA problem.” In Bailey et al., *Foreign teaching assistants in U.S. universities*.


11 Communicative competence and the dilemma of international teaching assistant education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26, 2.

12 Perceptions of international teaching assistants.... *Communication Education*, 48.

13 A review of literature on ITA training shows the focus in its scholarship shifted from accent and speech in general to “classroom culture” in the 1990s (e.g., Rubin & Smith, 1990, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 14), but as resources on program websites indicate that practice hasn’t caught up to the balance urged by scholars.

14 Resisting monolingualism in English.... In Ellis et al., *Rethinking English in the classroom*.


16 Methodologically, this was a statement I marked as “language ideology” under “students,” a theme I discuss toward the end of this chapter.


18 *International graduate applications and enrollment: Fall 2015. CGC Report*. 

Understanding Politics

19 SEVIS by the numbers, June 2017.
21 See Indelicato (2018) for a critical analysis of tropes that treat international students as “subjects of the border” in public debates in Australia, where they’ve been seen as “objects of national compassion or resentment,” as it fits political and economic climates.
22 This one addresses the unregulated price for international students.
23 International students or ‘cash cows’? The Star.
24 Equals or others? … In Sovic & Blythman, International students negotiating higher education.
26 The Trump effect on higher education. The Australian.
27 The politics of the UK and the U.S. will not be welcomed by international students. Times Higher Education.
28 International students in American colleges and universities.
29 Collision course: The strange convergence of affirmative action and immigration policy in America.
31 This network was called UFIIT (University of Florida Initiative for International Initiatives Team), which was later updated as UGIFT (Gator International Focus Team).
32 Equals or others? … In Sovic & Blythman, International students negotiating higher education.
33 Graduate pathway programs as sites for strategic language-supported internationalization…. In Simpson et al., Supporting graduate student writers.
34 From soft power to economic diplomacy? Research & Occasional Paper Series.
35 International student engagement.
37 Déjà vu? The rise and fall of Iranian student enrollments in the U.S. World Education: News and Reviews. (Feb. 6).
38 Now called the Association of International Educators, while retaining the original acronym.
40 Understanding education policy: The “four education orientations” framework.
41 English only and U.S. college composition. CCC, 53, 4.
42 Writing in the academic disciplines: A curricular history.
43 “Completely different worlds…. TESOL Quarterly, 31, 1.
44 Recent advances in comparative rhetoric. In Eberly et al., The SAGE handbook of rhetorical studies.
45 The language of exclusion: Writing instruction at the university. College English, 47, 4.
46 Writing in the academic disciplines: A curricular history.
47 Attitudes about graduate L2 writing in engineering…. Across the Disciplines, 8, 4.
48 Novice and insider perspectives…. IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, 51, 3.
49 “Will our stories help teachers understand?” Cox et al., Reinventing identities in second language writing.
50 Negotiating participation and identity in second language academic communities. TESOL Quarterly, 38, 4.
Understanding Politics  81

51 Writing center support for graduate students. In Simpson et al., Supporting graduate student writers.
52 See, esp., chapters by Fairbanks & Dias; Fields et al.; Mallett, Haan & Habib, 2016; Phillips.
53 Writing and learning in view of the lab. Literacy in Composition Studies, 1, 2.
54 ESL, ideology, and the politics of pragmatism. TESOL Quarterly, 27, 4.
55 Coping strategies of ESL students in writing tasks across the curriculum. TESOL Quarterly, 29, 2.
56 A narrow thinking system. TESOL Quarterly, 35, 1.
57 Power and agency in language policy appropriation. Language Policy, 14, 3.
58 Issues about such “division of labor” are substantively explored by Matsuda (1999) in CCC, 50, 4 and (2012) in Writing Program Administration, 36, 1.
59 English only and U.S. college composition. CCC, 53, 4.
62 Reflective encounters. Style, 37, 4.
63 Colloquial/slang term meaning “children of the nouveau riche” or “second-generation rich kids” in China.
64 Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside HigherEd, and other national venues have published a number of news stories in 2016 and 2017, reporting incidents of racism, prejudice, or violence. For example, see Belkin and Jordan (2016: “Heavy recruitment of Chinese students”) and Fischer (2017: “International students dodge Trump’s partly reinstated travel ban”).
65 Consensual and individual stereotypic beliefs about international students among American host nationals. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 25, 6.
66 Factors affecting international students’ transition to higher education institutions in the United States. College Student Journal, 43, 4.
67 Transitioning challenges faced by Chinese graduate students. Adult Learning, 23, 3.
68 Study abroad: A manual for Asian students.
69 Individualism, academic writing, and ESL writers. Journal of Second Language Writing, 8, 1.
71 In defense of a liberal education. The two terms are borrowed from Thomas Jefferson’s letter to John Adams.
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218 References


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220 References


222 References


