

## CHAPTER 9

# LET'S SEE WHERE YOUR CHINESE STUDENTS COME FROM: A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES IN CHINA

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*Written by a scholar in China who received her PhD in writing in the US, this chapter reports on a study examining faculty perceptions of the role of writing in learning and students' competence as writers and speakers in the disciplines at their Chinese institutions. Wu introduces the role of writing in China's higher education system with implications for those who work with Chinese students, and she argues that WAC should be introduced into China to promote better faculty teaching and student learning. Wu first provides a review of Chinese higher education system with indigenous and imported historical heritages from Confucianism, a Soviet higher education structure, and the US higher education system. She then reports on the status of writing in the disciplines in China based on interviews with ten faculty members from six disciplines in four Chinese universities. Interview results indicate that faculty believe that students' writing in the disciplines in both Chinese and English is not satisfactory and that they are interested in the potential for WAC to improve teaching and student learning and writing. Suggestions to faculty in both Chinese and US universities are provided to help them understand and assist their Chinese student writers.*

According to *Open Doors Report 2012* (Institute of International Education, 2012), China is the leading sender of students to US higher education, with a

majority of them being graduate students who completed their undergraduate study in China. Various studies have been conducted to examine Chinese students as second language (L2) writers in the US, and these studies have provided suggestions to US professors and higher educational institutions to enhance Chinese students' learning on different levels and in different disciplines. The challenges for their academic study in the US have been reported to come from students' lack of English proficiency (Berman & Cheng, 2001; Huang, 2005), their academic learning anxiety (Upton, 1989), and their perceptions of learning cultures (Feng, 1991; Huang & Brown, 2009), among other issues.

However, limited research has been done to study what current English writing is like and especially how it is taught, or learned, in the disciplines in Chinese higher education system, which has been feeding US higher education institutions at all levels from first-time students to post-doctorate researchers. And no previous research has been done on linking the needs of writers in Chinese higher education to Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). Once these Chinese students begin writing in their courses at US institutions, they may get comments like "awkward English" on their papers but still do not know why they get these "awkward" comments nor how to improve. The help they can receive from their professors or even writing center tutors is most of the time limited as there is a lack of understanding of how English writing has been used, taught, and practiced in China. Trying to help Chinese students in the US without an understanding of where they come from in terms of English writing costs more than wasted time or energy, but also precious learning opportunities for these students.

This study provides a snapshot of writing in the disciplines in China based on interviews with ten faculty members from four Chinese universities and six disciplines. The purpose of the study was to examine faculty perceptions of the functions of writing and other communication competencies at their institutions. One goal of the study was to introduce the role of writing in China's higher education system, and the implications of that role, to those who work with Chinese students. Although some of the interview questions asked about other communication competencies, the focus of this chapter is on how these faculty members perceive the functions of writing in the curriculum and their expectations for students' writing. Students in Chinese higher education still need more guidance and engagement in writing as faculty regard writing as products rather than processes and perceive student writing quality in both Chinese and English as unsatisfactory. This unsatisfactory status will remain until Chinese higher education system accepts and adopts educational reforms like WAC to help improve students' writing and learning.

However, the Chinese higher education system, as higher education systems in other countries, is complicated and comes with indigenous and imported historical heritages from Confucianism, a Soviet higher education structure, and the US higher education system. Therefore, it is necessary to provide an introduction to this system before analyzing how faculty perceive and utilize writing in their disciplines.

## CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Currently, the higher education system in China is the largest higher education system in the world, surpassing the US in 2003 (Knight, 2006) as a result of its six-fold increase in enrollment between 1997 and 2007. This system consists of two thousand years of Chinese traditional education and more than a hundred years of Western higher education influences (Min, 2004).

Traditional Chinese higher education institutions were officially established in the Han Dynasty (135 BCE). These institutions were set up to prepare the elite class to work as government officials. Later, in order to recruit students from the lower classes to address the lack of a qualified workforce for the government (Lee, 2000), an imperial exam system was established and continued to be used for about two thousand years. These exams were based on the Four Books and Five Classics in the School of Confucius, and they were the only avenue available for lower-class Chinese to gain access to the upper class (Kirby, 2008). As the only evaluation tool was the students' writing on these classic books, it was not surprise that Chinese people developed and retained not only their worship for Confucianism, but also an appreciation for good writing, which influenced China and many neighboring countries and cultures (Altbach, 1998). This possibility of social mobility also created the emphasis on education in Chinese families, which formed the underpinning needs among Chinese people for better access to higher education in hope for better jobs and higher social status. These needs helped in the decision-making process of the very recent large scale enrollment expansion from 1998 to 2008 that not only increased access to higher education but also posed issues for an education system that was designed for "elite education" but now faces "mass education." Therefore, this indigenous tradition, even though it was interrupted several times, has functioned as one of the forces for enrollment expansion, and the appreciation for good writing still has its influences among Chinese people, which sets up a solid but less obvious foundation for introducing WAC pedagogies into China.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, universities modeled after Western ones were established by the government and missionaries and through other efforts. These new Western-style universities, together with the indigenous Confucian traditions, laid the foundation for modern Chinese higher education, forming an indispensable part of its tradition. Although the Western-style universities were replaced by the Soviet model in the 1950s, these “traditions and memories of excellence remained, and they have helped to fuel more recent efforts” (Kirby, 2008, p. 140).

In the Soviet model, higher education faculty and students were assigned to specialized institutions, each focusing on one area, creating a planned workforce to serve the planned economy (Mok, 2005). As the universities in this period served the needs of their respective ministries, the Ministry of Education was not the only one administering higher education. Other ministries, such as the Ministry of the Coal Industry or the Ministry of the Machine Building Industry, had their affiliated universities, setting their own enrollment plans and assigning jobs to their graduates. Not only the enrollment but also the curriculum, including course syllabi and textbooks, were determined by the respective government units or agencies in charge throughout the country (Mok, 2005). This structure made it difficult for different disciplines to exchange pedagogical insights or share concerns. The Soviet model represented not only a separation of the disciplines but also a centralization of knowledge and a uniformity of thought (Hayhoe, 1989). Its far-reaching impact included departmentalization, segmentation, overspecialization, and the separation of teaching and research between the teaching institutions and research units (Min, 2004). As a result, there was no exchange between domestic and international researchers (other than the Soviet scholars) or between teachers and researchers; this lack of research and communication made it impossible for WAC concepts or practices to be brought up in China during that time.

The reform era begun in 1979 marked the beginning of improved, although still limited, freedom (Zarrow, 2008). The Chinese higher education system attempted to recover from the Cultural Revolution; however, resources and attention were primarily focused on economic reform in the industrial sector (Shirk, 1993) until after the 1997 Asian Economic Crisis. This crisis spurred the government to increase domestic consumption, and family educational expenses were added to the agenda (Xi, 1999). At the same time, the government had to address market pressures for a highly educated workforce as the economy was being transformed from labor-intensive to knowledge-based (State Department, 1999). This change resulted in the expansion reform, a strategy employed by the government to address the needs of the labor market and the need to stimulate domestic consumption for the “soft landing” of the economy needed

to maintain the double digit growth in the GDP (Bai, 2006). Therefore, higher education, especially enrollment, attracted much attention.

As a result of this attention, the total number of students increased from 3.2 million to 18.8 million from 1997 to 2007 (not including the institutions of higher education for adults), while the number of faculty increased only from 0.4 million to 1.17 million. This difference resulted in a change in the student-faculty ratio from 8:1 to 16:1. Although this 16:1 student-faculty ratio may not seem problematic, this number does not reflect the reality. First, because of the separation of research and teaching units (Hayhoe, 1989), researchers also take faculty positions in the institutions but do not teach, so the faculty data do not reflect the actual number of teaching faculty. In addition, as more Chinese higher educational institutions strive to become research institutions, more faculty members prefer not to teach undergraduate courses. Secondly, many full-time faculty members in regular higher education institutions teach courses in institutions for adults as the two are frequently affiliated (Yi & Li, 2004), meaning these faculty member have an extra teaching load on top of what the official statistics show. Third, the lack of qualified faculty remains a problem. For example, a 2005 survey of 23 Shanghai higher education institutions conducted by the Shanghai Institute of Educational Evaluation (Postiglione, 2005) found that only 39% of all professors teaching undergraduate courses held master's degrees, and only 17% held doctoral degrees. Therefore, this 16:1 student-faculty ratio poses more challenges than the number indicates on the surface.

Although Chinese young people are now given more opportunities to receive a higher education, the speed and the scale of this expansion have posed problems for the Chinese higher education system, and university professors in various disciplines have begun to look into the effects of this enrollment increase, finding, for example, that the increased enrollment and the slow reform of higher education concepts have made the mathematics education in colleges less effective than before (Tang, 2007). In addition, English professors have begun changing the training models, revising the national curriculum, and updating textbooks to address the consequences of the "increased numbers of students, a shortage of language teachers, the lack of teaching resources and inadequate language training in larger classes" (Chang, 2006, p. 519). Various researchers have also focused on the quality of teacher training (Jiang, 2005).

The Chinese higher educational system has also been greatly influenced by its political culture, especially in terms of English education. English is the dominant language in international organizations, trade, and business. As a result of the recent reforms in the Chinese educational system in the late 1980s, English is required for almost all Chinese students from their third year in

primary school or first year in middle school, equivalent to the seventh grade in the US, through college. Students going on to graduate schools in China have to take English exams for both master's and PhD programs. If they want to study abroad, most need to take the TOEFL, IELTS, and/or GRE in order to study in English-speaking countries. The emphasis now put on English in the Chinese education system is further supported by the fact that students have to pass a test of their English skills to move to the next educational level. The combination of the indigenous Confucius emphasis on writing and the recent prevalent emphasis on English education has contributed to the current teaching and learning of English writing in the disciplines, which hasn't been revealed much to the world.

As this historical overview suggests, the Chinese higher education system incorporates traditions from both indigenous Confucianism and Western modern education. However, given its turbulent history, Chinese higher education first had to recover in the 1980s after the Cultural Revolution. Then in the 1990s, the system was put in the position of having to meet the economic needs of producing a well-educated workforce. Thus, the focus of attention in Chinese higher education has been on survival until the tension between access and quality was drastically intensified by the recent fast, large-scale growth (Hayhoe, 2000; Jiang, 2005; Li, Morgan & Ding, 2008; Lin, 2006; Min, 2004; Mok, 2005; Postiglione, 2005). This focus on survival and recovery has meant that the Chinese higher education system has centered on rebuilding the institutions and restoring the social status of teaching and learning that were destroyed during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, institutions have not paid much attention to research on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Therefore, although students are writing in English in various disciplines, China did not develop its own version of WAC or "import" a WAC model from other countries to guide the development of writing instruction in English. However, recent reforms and their resulting impact on Chinese higher education have redirected attention to the quality of teaching and learning, and this change in focus shows promise for introducing WAC into China.

Still, there has been limited research attention to students' writing in both English and Chinese in the disciplines, as the teaching and learning of writing have remained as a training process in the foreign language courses they take in college. This study was designed with the goal of probing the feasibility of introducing WAC theory and practice into China, although the broader purpose was to gather faculty members' perspectives on the goals for higher education, the learning outcomes for college students, the students' written and oral communication abilities, and their expectations on these aspects of

communication modalities. During the interviews, WAC was introduced to the interviewees, and the faculty participants were asked whether similar programs were feasible in Chinese higher education, what they saw as the possible obstacles, and what were their own concerns.

## METHODOLOGY

Ten face-to-face faculty interviews were conducted in China in 2009. All interviewees were contacted as a result of a personal relationship network. Two of the interviewees were suggested by earlier interviewees, reflecting snowball sampling. These interviews varied in length from 22 to 48 minutes, with the average being 35 minutes. After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed by a college student in China. To ensure their accuracy, a second Chinese college student reviewed the transcriptions. These students highlighted any unfamiliar words and phrases, most of which were English terms used by the Chinese interviewees, marking the recording time to allow me, the principal investigator, to verify the words and spelling. The transcription of the ten interviews in the faculty group contains 64,705 Chinese characters (47 single-spaced pages, 11 point font size). The standard conversion ratio for Chinese characters to English words is 2:1, meaning the transcriptions of the Chinese interviews result in approximately 130,000 English words.

The ten faculty interviewees ranged in age from 26 to 58, with the average age being 37. They are from four universities and six disciplines, including business administration, computer science, English, journalism, law, and medicine. Five of these faculty members are female and five male, four having doctorates and six master's degrees. Similar to the US, there is a faculty track in Chinese higher education, but the difference is that the Chinese faculty track includes lecturers, and there is no such rank as assistant professor. Therefore, this track has the ranks of lecturer, associate professor, and full professor. All of those interviewed were on the faculty track, with seven of them being lecturers, two associate professors, and one full professor. Their average teaching experience in higher education ranged from one to 18 years, with the average being seven. Six had overseas higher education experiences: one completed his MBA at a British university in Malaysia, one had a master's degree from Australia, and the other four had conducted research at overseas universities.

The interview questions were divided into two sections. The first section focused on demographic information, and asked about interviewee's affiliation, age, gender, highest degree, rank of professorship and administrative role (if available), teaching experiences and major courses, and overseas study

or research experience. The second section focused on writing instruction and included questions about faculty members' opinions on the quality of students' writing in both Chinese and English, their motivations in assigning writing tasks, their perceptions of the importance of writing in learning, their willingness to participate in programs like WAC or programs that have WAC components, and reasons for possible difficulties and challenges in doing so. All interviews were done in Chinese, and the questions were translated from English to Chinese as the study was designed in English and implemented in Chinese. The findings in the analysis of this study were coded according to the interviewees' answers to the questions. If more than 50% of the interviewees agreed on one answer, then that answer became a finding. Then the eleven findings were grouped into the following four themes, with findings on similar topics being put together under one theme.

*Theme One:* While faculty are integrating writing into their courses, they believe that the quality of Chinese students' writing in both Chinese and English is not satisfactory.

*Theme Two:* While the faculty found the writing unsatisfactory, they believe the students' Chinese and English speaking and presentation competencies are satisfactory for the university, if not the workplace.

*Theme Three:* Communication is important and has been integrated into the curriculum for assessment and preparation for future jobs.

*Theme Four:* Faculty are willing to participate in WAC programs, but workload is the biggest disincentive.

Implications of these findings are discussed at the end of each thematic section. At the end of this chapter, implications for introducing WAC into Chinese universities are also discussed. The findings may help readers understand that Chinese international students who are going to study in the US have a very different orientation to writing in the disciplines. However, as WAC takes hold in China, the students who come to the US to study should be more confident in, and adapt more easily to, their academic writing.

## **THEMES AND RESULTS**

The data analysis of the ten interviews resulted in the following four central themes. These four central themes can be used to understand Chinese college students' writing quality and faculty's expectations. Each theme is followed by findings from questions that are related to that theme and then by a discussion of the implications of that theme for WAC in China.



**THEME ONE: WHILE FACULTY ARE INTEGRATING WRITING INTO THEIR COURSES, THEY BELIEVE THAT THE QUALITY OF CHINESE STUDENTS' WRITING IN BOTH CHINESE AND ENGLISH IS NOT SATISFACTORY.**

**Finding 1: Communication practices and skills are important for student learning.**

The first finding under Theme One emerged from the responses to two closely related questions on the relationship between student communication competencies and their learning and job performance after graduation. The two questions were: *Do you have a desire to integrate communication components into your course?* and *To what degree do you think integrating communication into your courses will enhance your students' learning of the subject?* All of these interviewees answered that they had already integrated communication components into their courses and agreed that this integration enhanced the learning of their students. These responses indicate that these faculty members agree on the importance of teaching communication skills in universities. However, one of them mentioned that although many faculty members are integrating communication components, some of these were just end-of-semester papers or oral presentations with very limited guidance because, with huge numbers of students and heavy teaching loads, professors cannot spend too much time with specific training regarding writing, speaking and other communication modalities in class. Although some interviewees said that they integrated writing and speaking into their course because they hope this could make students more active learners, they also said that these kinds of assignments are not as effective because students do not get comments back for their end-of-semester papers or oral presentations. However, they believed it is important to have these components in the courses, and some writing is always better than nothing.

**Finding 2: The quality of Chinese writing is thought to be unsatisfactory.**

Among the 10 faculty, 80% said they read students' Chinese writing, and only one, a journalism professor, said she was satisfied with its quality. Forty percent said the writing they read was not good, and 30% indicated that it varied according to students' attitudes, their disciplines, or their experiences as student leaders. According to a computer science professor, the quality of an individual student's work may vary from writing task to writing task depending on his/her attitude. If the writing task tends to be an interesting topic to the

student, s/he might spend more time and work on it, which can be clearly shown in the final draft submitted to the professor. According to a journalism professor, students in the humanities write better than those in science and engineering. She also said that student organization leaders also write better than the rest. This professor believed the reason was that student organization leaders got more chances to use and practice writing. She also explained that, most of the time, those students who apply to work as leaders and those who choose to major in humanities tend to be stronger writers in high school and would not worry about being challenged too much in the related tasks in the organizations or the majors.

**Finding 3: The quality of the English writing is thought to be unsatisfactory.**

Seventy percent of the faculty members said that they read English writing from students. Among them, 71% did not think the quality was satisfactory. The one professor who said that students' English writing was adequate was an English professor teaching English majors, the faculty member adding that her students were able to produce grammatically correct essays but had problems such as using Chinese styles in English writing or choosing inappropriate words to express the meaning. This comment supports Li's (2003) research on the influence of Chinese writing styles on students' English writing. When asked what were the problems in students' English writing, faculty interviewees did not really focus on the grammatical mistakes the students made, but talked more about expressing the ideas by using proper words and expressions so that their sentences can "make sense." This echoes the "awkward English" comment mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that Chinese students see written on their papers in the US (as well as those reported by Zawacki & Habib and Ives et al. [this volume] from faculty teaching at the US institutions that were the sites of their investigations into attitudes about and expectations for their L2 student writers). However, most of the professors said that they did not have enough time or proper methods to help students' English writing. Some of them even said that their own English writing needs to be helped for publishing internationally.

**Finding 4: Strengthening communication skills should be a critical focus in Chinese higher education.**

All of the interviewees agreed that strengthening writing and other communication skills should be a critical focus area in higher education. The responses generating this finding also relate to Finding 1 reflecting the impact

of communication on student learning and job performance. When asked why they thought communication skills should be a critical focus, many said that these are basic competencies in all disciplines and will determine students' chances at key intersections in their lives. An English professor pointed out that these competencies "will benefit students for their whole life and would never expire." Knowledge and skills are represented through communication competencies in all disciplines. A mass media professor said that the lack of these skills are like "a short board" or even a "bottleneck" for students, affecting both the "input" and "output" of knowledge and training. Communication skills determine students' chances at key intersections in their life. A medical professor said that every key intersection students experience in their lives after college, including job hunting, promotions, and personal relationships, requires them to present themselves to others. Therefore, when we prepare student for their future, we should help strengthen their writing and other communication skills. Apparently, though, working on communication skills has not been a critical focus in Chinese higher education, as curricular goals are not set by faculty but rather from the top down, so it was interesting that all faculty interviewed in this study agreed on this point.

As shown by the four findings described above, we could say that Chinese professors do have high expectations for their students' writing in both Chinese and English and are disappointed by the writing they get from their students. They also realize that writing is important, but they could not provide much guidance due to the time constraints and the lack of proper preparations provided to faculty themselves on writing and teaching writing. Although all college students should have passed their English test and Chinese test in the college entrance examination, that test result cannot tell us much about their writing. Therefore, faculty's answers have pointed out the urgent need to help students write and help faculty teach how to write. This urgent need might appear to be familiar to those who know the history of development of WAC in the United States. It was faculty's realization of these needs that helped start grassroots WAC programs and initiatives in American higher education institutions in the 1970s. Now we have this realization in China, and this could serve as the starting point for introducing WAC into China.

For now, however, the perceived poor quality of students' Chinese and English writing does pose problems when they go abroad to study. This does not mean that their grammar or vocabulary are not good enough, but this touches the communication functions of English, which makes it difficult for them to follow others' ideas and express their own. When taking tests like the GRE or TOEFL, these Chinese students can achieve high scores, but they are able to score high because they spend a lot time and energy in test preparations. They

are able to pass the writing components in these tests, but their writing skills are only trained to cope with the tests but not “real world” needs in academia. Therefore, once they get into US universities, their professors might find the gap between the language test scores and the writing and speaking quality of the students.

**THEME TWO: WHILE THE FACULTY FOUND THE WRITING UNSATISFACTORY, THEY BELIEVE THE STUDENTS’ CHINESE AND ENGLISH SPEAKING AND PRESENTATION COMPETENCIES ARE SATISFACTORY FOR THE UNIVERSITY IF NOT THE WORKPLACE.**

**Finding 5: The overall speaking competency was thought to be satisfactory.**

The faculty group was the most positive when asked to comment on students’ speaking competency, with 100% of them indicating that it was satisfactory, although some provided additional comments. One faculty member said that the students’ speaking abilities were generally better than their writing. Two faculty members said that students had the potential to do a better job if they received proper training in both speaking skills and critical thinking so that they could “make a breakthrough on both personal and social limitations.” The two professors who said that their students speaking competency was excellent taught communication studies. Fifty percent of the interviewees pointed out that they wanted their students to be articulate when speaking, and 40% said that students should be proactive, taking advantage of every opportunity in class to practice so that they could get immediate feedback from the professor and their peers.

**Finding 6: Presentation competencies were thought to be satisfactory in universities but not in the workplace.**

When asked their expectations for presentations, 50% of the interviewees commented that they should be clear, to the point and within the time allowed, and that the tools used for presentations should “serve the purpose of the presentation well.” Sixty percent of the interviewees were satisfied with students’ presentation competencies, especially when they used software like PowerPoint to do presentations. Two professors even commented that students were sometimes better than the faculty themselves and could offer technical help. The two communication studies professors from one of the top two universities in China said that their students’ performances when giving presentations sometimes exceeded their expectations and predictions. This

was not mentioned by faculty from other universities or disciplines. However those who said that their students' speaking was excellent said this is because their students are mostly journalism majors who have received better and more training in speaking than students in other disciplines. Furthermore, because they teach in one of the top two universities in China, the students are selected with higher standards.

Although speaking and oral presentations are two communication competencies that are not the focus of this chapter, this second central finding explains that students' speaking and presentations are better rated than their writing by faculty. When professors in the US try to understand how well their Chinese students can speak and present, they probably need to speak to the students themselves to find out if the quality fits their demands, as test scores, once again, cannot tell much about the students' competencies.

It was also interesting that many faculty members, when asked about presentations, referred to PowerPoint presentations immediately. They did not mention any other forms of presentations, such as prepared or unprepared speeches, or poster presentations. They almost equate presentations to PowerPoint presentations. However, the styles used and preferred in Chinese classroom PowerPoint presentations are quite different from those in the US. The presentations slides tend to be more flashy, more colorful, and use more animations and art words in order to show the technical knowledge of the students in using the software. Although this is just a personal observation that has not been supported by data yet, the fact that only 30% of the faculty mentioned that the tools used for presentations should "serve the purpose of the presentation well" might have echoed this observation. Therefore, this satisfactory status for students' presentation skills in China might not translate into the same evaluation in the US.

**THEME THREE: COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT AND HAS BEEN INTEGRATED INTO THE CURRICULUM FOR ASSESSMENT AND PREPARATION FOR FUTURE JOBS.**

**Finding 7: International and intercultural communication is considered important for college students.**

When asked whether it's important for college students to have some knowledge and skills in international/intercultural communication in today's global economy, only one faculty member said that it depended on the discipline the students were in or the kinds of jobs they wanted in the future; however, 80% of the faculty also said they had already integrated international and

intercultural communication into their courses. The primary major approaches used included bilingual courses, exchange study programs, invited speakers, and specialized courses for English and communication majors. Bilingual courses are courses taught in both Chinese and English, which demand faculty to be prepared for teaching certain courses in their disciplines in English, as all courses were previously only taught in Chinese. Therefore, students taking these bilingual courses also need to complete assignments in English, including writing.

However, the respondents indicated that these approaches were not effective. Bilingual courses, the most frequently mentioned method, had not been as effective as expected because 1) they involved no actual communication situations and tasks, and 2) many faculty members were not prepared to teach in English. One faculty member said that the academic exchanges students could be exposed to were far more “tolerant” than workplace communication tasks. In the academic exchanges, there was no punishment for making mistakes, and sometimes errors were not even pointed out to the students by faculty or foreign experts. This situation is quite different from workplace intercultural and international communication expectations, especially in the discipline of business management. Errors in workplace might result in a huge loss to the company and cannot really be tolerated so easily. Therefore, these simulated tasks and visiting international scholars cannot give students a real “sense” of what is required. Actually, the students cannot know the proper ways to handle communication tasks, if they are not corrected in simulated tasks in class or by kind-hearted foreign experts.

**Finding 8: Communication modalities have been integrated into university courses.**

All of the faculty members interviewed assigned writing in the courses they taught, with 20% of them assigning only English writing assignments and 30% only Chinese; 50% of the faculty members in management, computer science, law, and medicine indicated they had integrated multiple communication modalities into their courses, asking students to complete tasks by writing, speaking, presenting, and using digital educational technologies in both Chinese and English. These responses indicate a faculty buy-in and a realization of the importance of integrating these components, supporting the introduction of WAC into China. However, as indicated in Finding 7, the integration of communication tasks into courses did not always lead to satisfactory results, suggesting it is time to review the how and why of this integration process. The quantity of integrated courses does not guarantee the quality of this integration.

Professional research and support should be provided so that this faculty buy-in does not lose momentum and become an obstacle for introducing WAC programs.

**Finding 9: The two major motivations for engaging students in writing are assessment and preparation for study in the disciplines or work in related fields.**

Seventy percent of the interviewees clearly stated that one of the motivations for engaging students in writing was assessment of students' learning of the course contents. The assessment mentioned by these faculty members refers to using writing tasks for grades assigned in their courses, with most of the tasks being term papers. Students' writing in these tasks directly influences their final grade for the courses, making these high-stakes writing tasks. Fifty percent of the interviewees also mentioned the importance of the writing tasks they assign to their students' future study in their disciplines or the workplace. The computer science professor said that all the documents she required students to write in the course, such as PRD (Product Requirements Documents), DD (Design Documents), and TD (Test Documents), were similar to the types of documents her students would be required to write in the workplace as computer science engineers. Two business professors gave similar reasons for assigning writing, saying that in their field of study there often were no right or wrong answers, so the writing the students did could reveal their entire thinking process on a topic, something that could never be seen in standardized tests that have only multiple choice questions. As the higher education system in China has been more discipline-specific and there are limited number of requirements for general education courses, students do get trained to write in the disciplines if they are given writing assignments or writing tasks. However, there is no top-down requirement on how much and how often students should write, so this kind of training really depends on how much faculty members would like to try to explore by themselves. With the big class sizes and teaching loads since enrollment expansion, it does take some courage to assign writing tasks to the students. The importance of writing and other communication competencies has been stated by the faculty members interviewed in this study. However, none of the faculty interviewees mentioned "writing to learn," a key concept in WAC in the US. They only focus on grading students' writing or the documents their students are to encounter in future. Therefore, if WAC is to be introduced into China, it is important to let faculty understand "writing-to-learn" pedagogy so they do not think that writing tasks are only for "learning to write." By doing so, students may also learn to understand writing as process, not only product.

**THEME FOUR: FACULTY ARE WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN WAC PROGRAMS, BUT WORKLOAD IS THE BIGGEST DISINCENTIVE.**

**Finding 10: Faculty members are willing to participate in WAC programs.**

“What is your level of desire to participate in such an initiative to integrate writing, communication, and digital technologies for learning into your courses?” was the last question asked of all interviewees, and all of them expressed great interest in participating in WAC. When WAC was introduced to them in the interviews, the name “WAC” was not emphasized at all as the concept does not mean much to Chinese professors. The concept of WAC was explained to them as helping faculty and students learn to write and write to learn so that students not only practice writing but also learn more and better in courses with well-designed writing components. After stating their interest, almost everyone added a “but” and explained the conditions they would want to be met before committing themselves into programs like WAC.

Rewards from both a sense of accomplishment and compensation are important to these faculty. One faculty member was very straightforward, saying that the reward system had to recognize the faculty effort involved in participating in the workshops and incorporating WAC pedagogies; in addition, it was also a prerequisite that the pedagogies had to be worth the effort and time commitment, and, as a result, student learning had to be enhanced. If attending workshops becomes an added obligation, they probably would not choose to participate. Regular meetings appear to be a burden. As a result, some suggested online webinars or podcasts so that faculty can participate whenever and wherever they want to. Further, the quality of the workshops has to be guaranteed. One professor pointed out that the workshop facilitators had to have a good understanding of the disciplines and be able to provide concrete suggestions for courses, or it becomes a waste of time. Although faculty development is provided through the university, most of it is related to teaching technologies rather than methodology. There is also a tendency that older professors do not appear to be interested in workshops designed for faculty development as they think these are for younger professors or novice teachers.

**Finding 11: Workload is the biggest disincentive for faculty assigning students writing tasks.**

While 30% of the faculty denied there was any disincentive for assigning writing tasks, 57% of the remaining faculty stated that workload was one. They said that they already have a heavy workload due to the enrollment expansion



which caused student-faculty ratio to increase from 8:1 to 16:1, and they have found through experience that it takes much more time to grade writing assignments than standardized tests. Why would they want to increase their own burden? Therefore, this workload issue should be considered as a challenge for initiating WAC in China. However, some professors did not think this was a good enough reason for not assigning writing. A law professor, whose average teaching load per week is 12-14 hours, said, "It is much easier for me if I do not assign writing assignments to my students, but our goal should not be to make things easy for ourselves but to make sure students can learn things in our courses." Other interviewees said their students might complain about more work caused by writing assignments, which might cause some bad students evaluations at the end of the semester. Some worried they might experience failures in trying to realize learning outcomes through writing. Some pointed out that they would be considered to be "showing off their teaching" by their peers, so there is peer pressure from other professors who do not use much writing in their courses.

From this last central point, we can know that faculty do have an interest in helping students learn by learning themselves how to design and use writing components in their courses, but they would not want to devote extra energy or time if they will not be rewarded or if their already heavy workloads are made even worse.

## IMPLICATIONS

From the four central themes and eleven findings described above, we know that Chinese college students or graduates need to improve their writing in both Chinese and English. Most Chinese college graduates have experience dealing with written assignments in both Chinese and English, although the guidance they receive is not sufficient or to the point. Therefore, there are certain implications for higher education professionals who work with Chinese students on writing, speaking or other communication modalities in China or the US or in any other country.

The quality of students' Chinese writing is not considered very satisfactory by the faculty interviewed, even by Chinese standards. As pointed out by Chinese professors, this is the general status with exceptions of limited types of students and majors. Therefore, high expectations cannot be met. As research has shown that first language literacy facilitates second language literacy (Durgunoglu, 1998; Lanauze and Snow, 1989), students' unsatisfactory Chinese writing can be said to lead somewhat to their unsatisfactory English

writing. It is then easier to understand why some Chinese students' papers were marked "awkward English" by their professors after they enter graduate schools in English-speaking countries.

The poor quality of writing does not mean that there is a corresponding poor quality in other Chinese or English language skills since, when it comes to their student writing, faculty members interviewed admitted that they cannot spare too much time reading or commenting on students' writing due to the workload and also lack of recognition in the reward system. Some of them did not even have the confidence to help students with their English writing. If provided time and faculty patience, Chinese students can improve their writing as they learn to use their grammar and vocabulary by following the norms in their disciplines.

Students are also more used to writing tasks as assessment rather than as learning processes. They have been evaluated in the Chinese higher education system by using writing, so they have actually been treating their writing assignments as products rather than processes. Therefore, they might find it quite difficult to understand or to handle comments they may get in courses at institutions in other countries, as they have previously only known numbers as grades.

This dissatisfactory status of writing instruction in China has been and will remain with Chinese students for a while because the effects of college expansion are still pervasive. Although faculty rated the importance of different modalities of communication, they do not have the time, energy or support needed to make these improvements as they have been busy dealing with student numbers. It is hoped this can gradually improve as expansion has slowed down since 2008.

In order to help with the current quality problems in Chinese higher education, it is feasible that WAC could be effectively introduced. Faculty interest in WAC concepts and programs is quite obvious from the results of this study. We could even say that WID is already practiced in the disciplines, but we would need more research to describe the practice. However, this faculty interest in WAC could easily be turned into faculty resistance if no theoretical and pedagogical support is provided to the faculty members who have been integrating or want to integrate communication components into their courses. The workload is also a big challenge for WAC or similar programs as the problematic student-faculty ratio will probably stay longer than we want. While WAC could be feasible in Chinese universities, the results of this study further point out the opportunities and potential challenges. Chinese higher education system has one of two indispensable components for starting WAC programs—faculty interest. And with proper connection, it is reasonable to believe that the

second indispensable component—support of the high-level administrators—can also be obtained.

Hopefully, understanding the history and the current issues in Chinese higher education can also help understanding Chinese college students so that proper assistance can be provided to support their academic success, in both Chinese universities and universities abroad (for another study on the educational backgrounds on international students in the US, see Fernandes [this volume], who examines the curriculum at for-profit English language programs, which many international students attend before entering US colleges and universities). What the 10 faculty members from different disciplines have shared in the interviews cannot provide a whole picture of the status of writing or communication practice in Chinese higher education, but at least this study peeks into this area and attempts to initiate the conversation. Future research might focus on the links between WAC and the existing writing centers or writing programs in Chinese higher education institutions. Longitudinal qualitative studies can be conducted on those students who were helped in writing centers or took courses with WAC components to see how well these might help them if they go to the US to study.

WAC can be introduced into Chinese universities, but it will take quite some time and efforts before we can translate this US-originated idea into a Chinese one. This introduction of WAC into China has the potential to contribute to the overall development of students' writing, which will help both domestic students and those students who go to study in the US face fewer challenges and obstacles in coping with the writing tasks in their courses. Hopefully, they will also become more confident and adapt with less difficulty to writing to learn and learning to write pedagogies, whether in a US or Chinese higher education institution.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview Questions

#### Demographic Section:

1. Institution 学校名称
2. Age 年龄
3. Gender 性别
4. Highest Degree Earned 最高学历
5. Rank of Professorship 职称
6. Administrative Role 行政职务

7. Years of Teaching in Higher Education 高校执教时间\_\_\_\_年
8. Major Teaching Areas and Courses 主要教学专业及课程
9. Overseas Study or Working Experiences (time, type of study/work, purpose, countries) 海外学习或工作经验 (时间, 学习工作类型, 目的, 哪些国家)

### Information Section

10. What are your primary course goals for teaching the subject (science, engineering, economics, business management...)? 请谈谈您在本专业教授课程的目标
11. Have you recently read any students' writings in Chinese? If yes, how would you assess the quality of your students' Chinese writing? 您近来是否读过学生写的中文的东西? 如果读过, 您认为学生中文写作质量如何?
12. Have you recently read any students' writings in English? If yes, how would you assess the quality of your students' English writing? 您近来是否读过学生写的英文的东西? 如果读过, 您认为学生英文写作质量如何?
13. What are your major motivations for having your students engage in writing assignments? 您给学生布置写作作业的主要动机是什么?
14. What are your major disincentives for having your students engage in writing assignments? 有哪些因素会妨碍您给学生布置写作形式的作业?
15. Comment on your students' communication competencies in speaking. Do you have expectations for these? If yes, what are they? 请评价学生的口头沟通交流能力。您对此能力有一定的期望吗? 如果是, 那么有哪些期望?
16. Comment on your students' communication competencies on presenting. Do you have expectations for these? If yes, what are they? 请评价学生做演示的沟通交流能力。您对此能力有一定的期望吗? 如果是, 那么有哪些期望?
17. Comment on your students' competencies on using digital technologies. Do you have expectations for these? If yes, what are they? 请评价学生使用数码技术的能力。您对此能力有一定的期望吗? 如果是, 那么有哪些期望?
18. What do you see as the major overall objectives for higher education? 在您看来, 高等教育的主要目标是什么?
19. Do you think that strengthening writing, other communication skills such as speaking and presenting, and the use of technologies should be a critical focus area for educators in higher education? Why or why not? 您认为加

强学生的写作及其它沟通能力，例如口头表达，做演示及使用数码技术，是否应当引起高等教育工作者的重视和相当的关注？为什么？为什么不？

20. Do you have a desire to integrate communication components into your course? 您觉得您想在所教授的课程中加入加强学生沟通能力的內容么？
21. To what degree do you think integrating communication into your courses will enhance your students' learning of the subject? 您认为在课程中加入沟通能力的培养是否能够提高学生对该科目的学习？能够起到多大的作用？
22. Is it important for college students to have some knowledge and skill in international/intercultural communication in today's global economy? If yes, how could it be integrated into your course? 在当今全球经济条件下，国际交流和跨文化交流的知识和能力对于高校学生来讲重要吗？如果重要的话，您认为在您所教授的课程中能够如何融入这些知识和能力？
23. Please talk about the effects of the Five-Year-Circle Evaluation on your teaching. To what degree do you think integrating communication into your courses may help you on preparations for the evaluation? 请谈谈高校评估对您教学工作的作用和影响。您认为在您的课程中加入沟通能力的成分对您准备评估检查会有帮助么？有什么样的帮助？
24. To what extent would a campus-wide writing and communication initiative contribute to the overall objectives for higher education? 如果在全校范围内开展写作和沟通交流的项目帮助老师在课程中融入写作和其他沟通能力的培养，这是否有助于实现高等教育的主要目标？会有何种程度的贡献？
25. Is a campus-wide, holistic, writing and/or communication initiative the best way to enhance student communication skills? 您觉得一个全校范围的写作和沟通交流的倡议项目是不是提高学生沟通交流能力的最好的办法？
26. What other ways would you suggest? 您有其他的建议吗？
27. What is your level of desire to participate in such an initiative to integrate writing, communication, and digital technologies for learning into your courses? 如果有机会的话，在您所在的学校开展一个项目帮助老师把写作，沟通交流能力的培养和数码技术的应用融入各个课程，您有多大的兴趣参加？