

2

WAC On Spec: A Critical Narrative of My Year at the Extended Campus

Given my close connection to and direct involvement in my university's extended international campus, I provide in this chapter a critical narrative of my mutually embedded professional and personal experience there.

The multi-university⁵ Incheon Global Campus, the location where the University of Utah Asia Campus operates in Korea, is in turn part of the Incheon Free Economic Zone, established in 2003 in an attempt to attract tourists as well as foreign investment to the Yellow Sea ports closest to Korea's capital city, Seoul (Incheon Free Economic Zone, 2018). The campus is located in New Songdo City, a planned community with a target population of at least 250,000 that is built atop land reclaimed from tidal estuaries. The city includes a highly promoted business and entertainment district that is itself a \$35 billion public-private real estate-based partnership between Korean and U.S. companies. As one of the city project's main architects describes it, the district is "a model for future, sustainable city-scale developments, not only in Asia but across the globe" (Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates, 2020). Where no artificial structures existed prior to 2005, an island containing at least 150,000 residents, offices for 1,600 companies, at least 1,000 retail or hotel businesses, the tallest building in Korea, and a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course now provides evidence of astoundingly fast economic development and breathtaking financial opportunity, and my university is part of the vision.

Of course, living, working, and walking on the ground as a semi-permanent city dweller allowed me to develop different views. I had been primed to expect what an article in *The Atlantic* described as "a history-less and especially unnatural city . . . 'an ideal test bed,' as one Cisco employee put it, a massive blank slate" (Arbes & Bethea, 2014, n.p.). However, I came to know the city described elsewhere in the same article—one that was as subject to mid-decade economic downturns as much of the rest of the world had been, one in which the futurism of "smart" waste management systems "coexist[ed] with the familiar and mundane" (Arbes & Bethea, 2014, n.p.; See Figure 2.1).

5 During the time of my study, Incheon Global Campus was populated by academic programs, faculty, staff, and students representing the University of Utah, the Fashion Institute of Technology, George Mason University, Ghent University, and the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

I came to know a city in which the many and proliferating steel-and-glass towers, often empty but always well lit, reflected images of families and of subsistence farmers growing vegetables in as-yet undeveloped plots (see Figure 2.2). I also came to know a campus and a university marked by the same striking contrasts between huge and very human scales.



Figure 2.1. Waste management machines in New Songdo City next to bags of household/business waste. Credit: 'Future past still in the making' by Kairus Art+Research, 2017. Kairus.org.



Figure 2.2. Large garden plot surrounded by new retail/residential buildings in New Songdo City. Credit: 'Future past still in the making' by Kairus Art+Research, 2017. Kairus.org.

Indeed, while I was close enough to Seoul's photogenic density that I went regularly with my camera/smartphone, some of the most compelling pictures I took were in the still-sparse urban experiment where I lived and worked. To colleagues, friends, and family members, I described this place, the campus, and my university's role here as a "startup within a startup within a startup": it is a new institutional partner in a young educational experiment in a planned city that won't be finished until at least 2022. Most of the construction across the city was and still is "on spec," and I saw daily what that looks like: a lot of gapingly empty steel, glass, and concrete (see Figures 2.3 and 2.4). But it is slowly beginning to fill as both the campus and the city inch toward their target populations under the curious gaze of administrators, government officials, investors, and other stakeholders spread between cities 16 time zones apart.

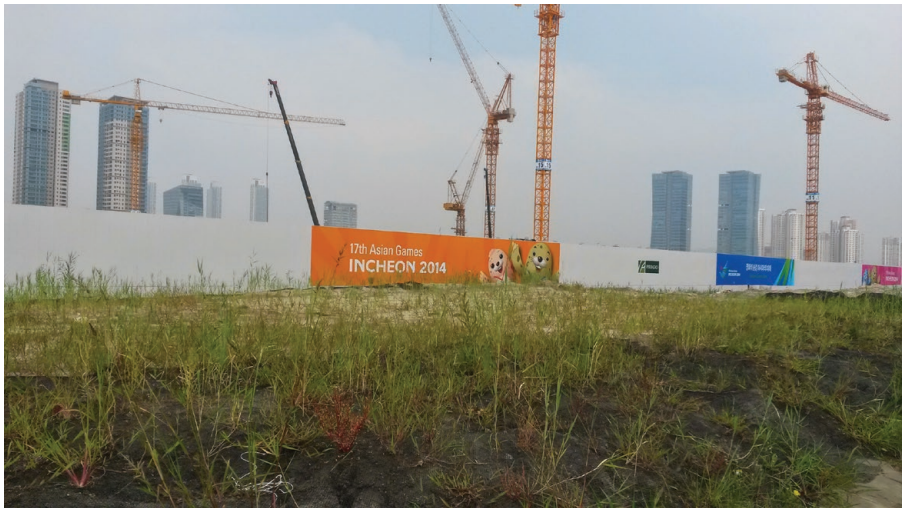


Figure 2.3. Construction near Incheon Global Campus, August 2014. Credit: Author.

It is hard for me to think about my experience researching and supporting WAC/WID in Korea apart from the place itself. When I was asked to go to Korea, I knew I would be part of a very small initial group—small enough, in fact, that I was not only the entire WAC/WID program but also the entire writing center for an initial student body of fewer than 15. Both WAC/WID support and writing tutoring initially functioned out of my office, though I also started meeting students at the on-campus convenience store/cafe, because that felt a little less antiseptic. The extremely small human scale contrasted sharply, though, with the massive scale of

the built environment, erected to accommodate thousands of students, instructors, and staff. The building into which we all moved to try to carve out our own identity away from another university's ubiquitous signs is a swooping, hypermodern semicircle—apparently the architect's idea of what a 21st-century global university ought to look like. We suddenly had cavernous new space to attempt to make our own. When I met cross-disciplinary colleagues for workshops on teaching writing, we gathered in a meeting room with a huge conference table and rolling/reclining executive chairs. (I felt as if we had broken into the boardroom, but no executives ever arrived to kick us out.) Our new building's design and scale made it seem like a broad canvas. But daily realities revealed the challenges inherent in an experiment of this kind—challenges that informed my own work. In turn, that complexity reflects the broader contexts of internationalization, globalization, and higher education I noted in Chapter 1.



Figure 2.4. Land clearing and construction on and near Incheon Global Campus, May 2016. Credit: Author.

In preparing to leave for Korea and in reading about the place while there, I encountered again and again visions of a campus and a city self-consciously inventing itself and projecting itself into the future—directly in line with Korea's clear desire to assert itself as a global economic power. My daily experiences, though, grounded those visions in inescapable multilayered complexities that permeated the educational experiment—including the teaching and learning of writing. Precisely due to such complexities, I offer this story of arrival, orientation, and encounter.



Figure 2.5. Classroom/office building at Incheon Global Campus, August 2014. Credit: Author.

Early Days

Roughly a year and a half before my departure for Korea, the previous dean of my college, who was part of a university-level leadership team coordinating the international effort, had approached me to ask if I would be interested in becoming one of the first faculty members to teach at the new Asia Campus. Plans for majors and for the general education curriculum were still being settled, and negotiations with the Incheon Global Campus Foundation and the Korean Ministry of Education were ongoing, but the dean expressed his desire that I commit to contributing expertise in second language writing. In preparation for this opportunity, I agreed to team teach a learning community course on global citizenship for first-year undergraduate students at the U.S.-based campus. Shortly after I began teaching the first semester of that course, the Asia Campus leadership team asked me to revise it for Korea on the premises that all first-year students should take the same courses in cohorts and that the theme of global citizenship was the best fit for the new campus, its location, and its international population. Thus, when I was finally scheduled to travel to New Songdo City, I was contracted to teach not writing but a still-experimental two-semester learning community course on global citizenship, and also asked to create a writing center.

By this point, it had become clear to everyone that our inaugural class at the new campus would be extremely small, which meant I would be teach-

ing one section of the learning community course instead of two. I used the preparation time freed by the cancelled section to design and give a presentation on disciplinary principles of assigning, responding to, and evaluating writing to a small group of faculty members who were scheduled to arrive in Korea at roughly the same time as me. My presentation was a basic overview that borrowed information from other presentations and from a general second language writing support site I had built several years earlier. In addition to presenting heuristic questions about what constitutes “good writing” in the undergraduate majors that would be offered at the Asia Campus (primarily communication and psychology, fields on which I will focus in Chapter 4), I described what we might expect in the writing of our second language (L2) English students based on research as well as on my own experiences teaching international students. I foregrounded Joy Reid’s (1998) distinction between so-called “eye learners” and “ear learners,” in which international students (“eye learners”) typically learn English through grammar-translation exercises, and domestic second language learners in the US (“ear learners”) often learn through daily interactions with native-English-speaking peers and from English-dominant media. According to Reid (1998), the differences in language learning backgrounds can mean that international students have high metacognitive knowledge of English-language grammar but not as much comfort speaking English spontaneously, while domestic L2 students may have speech that represents an idiomatic level of comfort but may find grammatical composition challenging.

Based on the knowledge that most of our first-time enrollees were from Korean secondary schools, I thus predicted that they would initially follow “eye learner” patterns. I also predicted that students would be highly attuned to writing as a form of testing given the highly cohesive standardized assessment environment in Korea, and so would require time to adapt to new and different academic expectations. I observed that their adaptation to/of the campus would necessarily occur alongside ongoing language acquisition, and that despite the traditional view of writing as the last of the “four skills” (in addition to listening, reading, and speaking) to be taught and learned, writing can and does occur while other language practices are developing. I concluded with advice on the utility of regular, low-stakes writing practice in and out of class times and a strong suggestion that faculty members provide models for the kinds of writing they were targeting. I cautioned that students may initially be reticent to ask questions in class because of perceptions of social distance and/or embarrassment about spoken proficiency. And I warned that the first-year writing courses we were planning to provide could not teach students everything they would need to know about how to write across the

curriculum, especially since their enrollment in those courses would likely overlap with enrollment in somewhat more advanced/major courses given the small number of courses we could initially offer. As I'll explain shortly, our students turned out to be far more educationally diverse than I was predicting.

I arrived at the Asia Campus two weeks before the scheduled start of Fall semester. Five of the seven other inaugural faculty members had arrived; however, two were still trying to obtain Korean visas for their positions.⁶ Meanwhile, the concerns that administrators and other stakeholders in the US and Korea had held about low initial enrollments were about to be confirmed: we would open at the beginning of September with a class of only 14, including two U.S.-based students who were officially studying abroad. Our small faculty, administrative, and staff cohort reflected the size of the student body. In the weeks before classes started, we all worked in an open office with cubicles, with the provost and I sharing one of them. Months later, long after we had settled into our own offices, I would joke with him that, in the first days, I worried that I was helping set university policy by turning sideways in my chair and expressing opinions to him. At the time, though, we were certainly involved in daily conversations that were clear expressions of our startup status, ranging from the best ways to coordinate textbook purchases to communicating with campus staff about challenges with classroom technology to discussing faculty cell phone contracts. When the other new faculty members arrived from the US, I was able to catch up with them about ideas for integrating assignment types and timing as well as content across courses. The writing instructors—a combination of experienced teachers with advanced degrees in either communication or linguistics—and I revised schedules between their first-semester composition course and mine so that students were writing summaries of a chapter about global citizenship just as they were practicing summary, paraphrase, and quotation. The sociology instructor—a faculty member from the university's College of Social Work—and I agreed to time our introductory readings about cultural diversity to complement each other. I discussed with

6 Visas proved to be a substantial logistical challenge. As a professor, I was granted a Korean E1 visa, which required employment verification but little additional documentation. Several instructors who did not carry the title "professor" were granted E2 visas, a classification that exists solely for employing language teachers (usually in secondary schools) from countries Korea recognizes as dominant sources of native speakers of the language to be taught. For instance, E2 visa holders seeking English teaching jobs must be citizens of Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, or the US. Visa applicants must also submit to criminal background screening and sexually transmitted disease testing (<https://www.korvia.com/e2-visa-korvia-guide/>). There is no readily apparent relevant visa classification for university instructors who are not "professors."

writing instructors and with other faculty colleagues the advantages of coordinating reading and writing across courses in this way, starting with the required first-year writing courses. Colleagues outside writing reassured me that they appreciated my pre-departure workshop and my offers of ongoing support for teaching writing, but they were primarily invested in starting their own courses and communicating with their home departments at the U.S. campus. And in a couple of instances, they related to me that their courses were not particularly writing intensive anyway.

Learning Underway

At the start of the semester, several realities quickly became apparent. First, even though all students who were not coming from the US to participate in the learning abroad program were Korean nationals⁷, they had more diverse educational backgrounds than my pre-departure introduction—or really any overview of “international students”—could have predicted. The majority had graduated from primarily Korean-language secondary schools in the country, but at least two students had lived and learned abroad in Canada, Thailand, and the UAE. Consistent with literature about Korean concerns over the deleterious effects of “too much” English learning, one of those students expressed to me on several occasions his anxieties about his Korean proficiency among peers and elders. Next, students were encountering problems with their online math course that became especially visible one morning as I walked into the classroom where I taught: several students had occupied the room the night before and had filled one large whiteboard with English-language math vocabulary. The challenge of tying ongoing language acquisition to conceptual knowledge of math was exacerbated by lingering problems with our university’s course management system: the time zone difference had not been consistently set across all courses, which was creating deadline problems that were not quickly solvable given the asynchronous (email) communication on which students and their distant teachers had to rely. And the “writing center” that I had established was more of an idea than a visible support mechanism. While I had announced to faculty members and students that I would set aside hours per week for writing center consultations, I was often alone in my office as I observed that students were meeting with writing instructors immediately next door about assignments across their courses at least as often as they were meeting with me.

7 The university initially planned on an eventual mix of 40 percent Korean national students, 40 percent students from other Asian nations, and 20 percent students from the US.

Outside of classrooms and offices, the startup nature of the overall campus project meant that lines among faculty, staff, and administrative activities remained blurry even after we moved into separate spaces. The extremely small initial enrollment placed a high premium on recruitment, and it also translated to the decision that our campus would enroll new students each semester for the foreseeable future rather than enrolling new students once per year. Pressure on the (small and new) recruitment staff was apparent as they traveled in and out of Korea, developed and refined marketing materials, and established relationships with well-known secondary schools—working through their own process of learning about how an IBC can and should position itself among other, much more established universities. On several occasions on and off campus (including a large national recruitment event at a shopping complex in Seoul), we faculty members participated in recruitment activities ranging from short speeches about our academic specialties to individual conversations with prospective students. On one hand, these were valuable opportunities to learn about students’ and parents’ expectations: almost invariably, revealing questions arose at each recruitment event about the value of “general education” and about the marketability of Bachelor of Arts versus Bachelor of Science degrees. To be sure, many faculty members may otherwise rarely encounter such questions once students are admitted and enrolled. On the other hand, recruitment felt uncomfortable. As Shun Wing Ng (2012) notes, intense competition for students in East Asia in particular means that faculty involvement in nonacademic activities is increasingly common—and that it can blur lines between academic work and globalization-as-business-enterprise as a result.

While I believed in the educational value of what we were presenting to students, I also knew that they and their parents might see a lag between what was promised and what had yet to be built. Indeed, the campus itself was a compelling symbol of that lag. As ground was broken on another new building into which my university colleagues would move, existing facilities remained incomplete, unoccupied, or unevenly serviced. Promotional videos about the campus that were displayed on a loop in our building’s elevators showed a recreational pool that was unfilled during my entire year-long stay. An entire floor of our current building was unused, though signs on each door suggested the rooms’ intended purposes. And the campus cafeteria regularly ran short of advertised items for lunch and dinner.

As the first semester progressed, we faculty began turning some attention to more specific planning for subsequent semesters. The next entering class of new students would likely exceed 60—significant growth that, we knew, would change current students’ sense of cohort. To prepare, in addition to

individual consultations/conversations with faculty, I led a brief workshop for all faculty that included sharing of student writing as heuristics for reactions and response. I also drafted a document based on the “Statement of WAC Principles and Practices” (<http://wac.colostate.edu/principles/statement.pdf>), in which I articulated both “learning to write” and “writing to learn” approaches, reiterated key second language writing concepts from my pre-departure presentation, and summarized the ongoing faculty development support I was interested in coordinating, albeit from the U.S. campus. That document included the first formal mention of the mixed-methods study that is the focus of this book.

Following a long break between fall and spring semesters, colleagues and I started classes in early March with a student body that was now greater than 70 and that interacted with student populations also of increasing size at the other universities operating on the shared campus. Oddly, I was not teaching any of the new students: the second semester of the learning community course I taught exclusively enrolled the now-second semester students. However, my writing center hours filled much more quickly than they had in the fall as students brought drafts of assignments ranging from weekly reading responses for their introductory communication course to mid-term APA-formatted essays for psychology. The diversity that colleagues and I had noticed among the initial cohort became even more apparent as the student population jumped: according to the survey I conducted that began the study that is the focus of this book, student respondents reported that they had at least briefly lived and been educated in at least nine countries outside of Korea.

In addition to the daily work of teaching and writing center support, I was looking ahead to returning permanently to the US and to attempting to maintain support for students and faculty from a distance. I tapped some funding for the small, shared campus library to purchase writing textbooks, style guides, and WAC/WID volumes as references for ongoing teaching. I met with and observed the writing instructor who would inherit the “writing center” from me and who would be responsible for setting up the dedicated tutoring space in the new academic building. In anticipation of conducting the research that led to this book, I read accounts of international WAC/WID programs and of longitudinal research on student writing, and I recruited a graduate student at the U.S.-based campus to return with me the following spring to observe and record faculty members teaching their courses and to interview participants. And I revised the pre-departure presentation on WAC/WID and second language writing for the new faculty members who would arrive in late summer after I departed.

While I worked, I began to reflect on how the campus and its writing support might continue to develop, given the still-small human scale and the semester-to-semester changes, and given the experimental and ultimately uncertain nature of the entire venture. Each new group of students will change the student body quantitatively and qualitatively. The rapport that the initial faculty group developed, which seemed to be both an effect of the close proximity of office and living spaces as well as of the shared experience of simply being first on the ground, is not likely to sustain itself as the faculty complement grows and diversifies. And the administrative infrastructure will likely distance itself from both faculty and staff as it grows, too. Faculty colleagues willingly participated in WAC/WID activities and engaged me in conversations as we passed one another in hallways, hosted one another for meals, and traveled together to and from Seoul: I knew that kind of rich, informal interaction would be less likely after I returned to the US, even though I left materials and training behind and promised to stay connected via email and annual trips. Even if faculty commitment to integrated content/pedagogies and principles of writing instruction were to sustain itself, I also worried, and still worry, along with my colleagues about what happens to literacy development during the long stretches between semesters. As I learned from literature on Korea's complex relationship with English and explored in Chapter 1, students who were Korean nationals were likely to listen to, read, speak, and write exclusively Korean during the months they were off campus, with little opportunity or incentive to continue the long work of acquiring the Asia Campus' dominant language of instruction. And looming over all was the agreement between the university and the Korean government, which codified the campus' status as a *startup* and reinforced the presence of its varied stakeholders.

A Promising, Uncertain Future

While it felt exciting and liberating to invent approaches to teaching and a range of other challenges based on our emerging experience, we knew that whatever we built faced the hard limits of funding as well as the vagaries of new administrators' decisions. It also faced and still faces the challenges of creating a sense of shared investment across two very different campuses separated by 6,000 miles. Before my departure and well after my return to the US, I spoke to faculty colleagues and community residents on and around the U.S.-based campus who had no idea that the Asia Campus existed—or who knew it did but who did not understand it. So in keeping with the uncertainties surrounding many other IBCs, the one where I lived and worked

and with which I remain closely involved may yet fold. In Korea, it remains unclear whether the government's vision of ten universities with 10,000 students on the new shared campus is reachable, and it also remains unclear how much more funding it is willing to invest to maintain and enhance facilities for an international university that represents educational philosophies for which many Koreans feel ambivalence.

The university, the campus, the city are all part of an expensive, extensively advertised effort to market Korea as a canvas for investment, innovation, and international connection. But the canvas is actually a palimpsest: the massive utopian scale of speculative construction is offset by the local complexities inherent in any meeting of multiple cultures. Faculty members bring expertise and expectations tied to disciplines. Students respond to the pitch that attending a U.S.-based university in Korea gives them an international education in a key global lingua franca, and parents appreciate that that education does not require sending their children abroad. As both a new and willing faculty member and an expert on writing, I was able to observe what international education "on spec" looks like in a very specific way, and I have been able to argue that while writing is certainly a thread that ties curricula together, it is also, unavoidably, a site for teaching, learning, and administering that reveals gaps between idealized internationalization on one hand and concrete realities on the other. Whatever the outcome of this educational experiment, I have hoped to maintain a balance between eager participation and critical awareness.