3 Researching a Transnational Startup: Site and Methods

In the previous chapter, I provided a narrative of my experience at the Asia Campus from preparing for departure to returning to my university's U.S.-based campus. As I have stated, the complexities of the Asia Campus, New Songdo City, and the nation of Korea during this period of its rapid internationalization argued for a detailed description of my personal experience as a teacher, scholar, quasi-administrator, and resident. In this chapter, I take a step back specifically to describe the transnational site of my study—really, two campuses of a single university separated by roughly 6,000 miles—in terms of its student population, academic programs, and international aspirations. I reintroduce the research questions that arose from my experience at the Asia Campus and from my familiarity with relevant scholarship. I then describe the mixed methodological approach that informed my analysis of the range of data I collected from student and faculty interviews, faculty writing prompts, students' writing assignments, and the formal and informal observations research assistants and I conducted in and out of classrooms.

The Two University Campuses

The University of Utah is the largest publicly supported university in the state. In August 2014, when the Asia Campus opened, the total enrollment was roughly 31,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Among undergraduates, communication and psychology—the only two choices of major available to Asia Campus students during the time of my study—were and remain among the top ten majors by enrollment. Over the last several years, and indeed since my own arrival as a faculty member at the U.S.-based campus in 2006, the university has been highly academically aspirational.

One clear expression of such aspiration is the university's investment in internationalization. In 2010, the university entered a public-private partnership with an international pathway program, a partnership that lasted until 2014. While that effort to recruit and retain a larger number of international students was not a perceived success (see Jordan & Jensen, 2017), the university engaged a new private partner in 2018 and began allocating new revenue from the partnership to dedicated courses, advising, and campus space. At the same time, the university's Office for Global Engagement consolidated sever-

al units, including International Student and Scholar Services and Learning Abroad, into shared offices and sought to unify international projects.

But probably the most visible international project has been the Asia Campus—the university's first campus outside the United States. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Utah is in fact one of five U.S.- or Europe-based universities currently participating in Incheon Global Campus (IGC), a project that represents a $1 billion investment from the Korean government to create a "global education hub" in Northeast Asia (Incheon Global Campus, n. d.) that would attract highly regarded international universities to grow intellectual capacity supporting public and private investments in biotechnology. Early discussions among U.S.-based university officials, Korean alumni, and Korean educational authorities, however, revealed interest in humanities and social sciences curricula as well (M. Hardman, personal communication, October 22, 2020). Negotiations eventually led to the creation of the Asia Campus as an "extended" campus of the university, initially housing three undergraduate degrees—communication, psychology, and social work[8]—and a master's degree program in public health. Undergraduates were intended to spend three years taking a combination of general education and major courses before transitioning to the U.S. campus for a final capstone year, though the timing of that transition has varied somewhat based on students' plans, academic performance, and ability to relocate. Those academic programs are part of a larger social and economic scene reflecting not only the university's but also Korea's aspirations, as I explained in Chapter 1. Korean student writers—as all rhetors—bring to any communicative task a collection of consciously manipulated and unconsciously inherited affordances and constraints shaped by competence, experience, affective orientation, and motivation. Capturing and analyzing that multidimensional collection would be difficult with the best possible methodological tools. It is impossible through textual analysis alone.

Methods

My familiarity with relevant scholarship and my awareness of the role writing would play in the extended transnational campus curriculum prompted an initial set of writing- and pedagogy-focused research questions:

- How is writing being explicitly and implicitly taught in courses across the curriculum at the new campus?
- What kinds of writing are instructors assigning across the curriculum?

8 The social work major stopped operating during my study due to low enrollment.

- How do students perceive/respond to the writing assignments and teaching?
- How do instructors respond to the students' writing?
- What effects do students' transitions from the international campus to the U.S. campus have on their own and their instructors' perceptions and responses?

While those questions consistently guided interviews and my analyses of other data about writing, I understood from the beginning of my study, as I have noted, that the complexity of that writing's "context" made it impossible for me to isolate writing from its surrounds. Thus, I added this question to my initial list:

- How does writing as a privileged literate activity reveal the relationship between internationalist claims about education and the daily lived complexity behind such claims?

Given my need to balance analysis of students' already complex negotiations with writing on one hand and sensitivity to the emerging "context" on the other, I employed a range of qualitative methods intended to uncover nuances of students' and instructors' motivations, perceptions, and experiences. Methods included the following:

- A ten-question survey of all Asia Campus students in Fall 2015 (roughly 110 students total at the time), which asked about backgrounds and experiences in speaking and writing in English as well as about the kinds of writing they were already doing or that they anticipated doing in their majors (See Appendix A.)
- A three-question survey of all eight Asia Campus faculty members in Fall 2015, which asked about writing assignments and preoccupations in responding to student writing (See Appendix B.)
- Eight 45-60-minute in-person, semi-structured follow-up interviews with select students at the Asia Campus, co-facilitated by research assistants[9], conducted in May 2016, 2017, and 2018; informal post-interview discussions of initial analyses with research assistants; and three additional in-person interviews with students after their transition to the U.S. campus (See Table 3.1.)
- Seven 30-45-minute in-person, semi-structured follow-up interviews with select faculty at the Asia Campus, also co-facilitated by research assistants, conducted in May 2016, 2017, and 2018; informal post-in-

9 Graduate students Justin Grant Whitney in 2016 and Charissa Che in 2017, and undergraduate student Joanne Castillo in 2018

terview discussions of initial analyses with research assistants; and three additional in-person interviews with Asia Campus-based faculty members visiting the U.S. campus (See Table 3.2.)
- Collection of 71 student participant-provided examples of course writing ranging from brief reading responses to final semester projects
- Collection of approximately ten examples of faculty-provided syllabi and writing assignment prompts/descriptions
- Classroom observations and audio-recorded post-observation debriefing sessions conducted with research assistants during the May 2016, 2017, and 2018 Asia Campus visits

I used initial student and faculty surveys to begin identifying themes to explore further in interviews. Of 110 student surveys distributed, I received 20 completed responses—a low response rate potentially reflecting my own departure from the Asia Campus to return to the US and/or some fatigue from other more official university surveys about academic programs and student life. Eight students who had completed surveys responded positively to my subsequent email message asking whether they would be interested in a follow-up interview as well as additional visits, interviews, and collections of their writing/ faculty responses to their writing over the next two to three years. Ultimately, five students committed, although, since one of the five withdrew from the university in 2016 for health-related reasons, I followed four students throughout my study.

Table 3.1. Student Participants

Student Participant	Dominant Language(s)	Major	Gender	Other
Alice*	Korean (self-identified first language)	Communication	F	Korean secondary school bkgrd, 3 months' study abroad in Canada
David	Korean-English bilingual in speech, more self-identified English proficiency in writing than Korean	Psychology	M	international school bkgrd (Korea), father from US, dual Korea-U.S. citizen
John	English with increasing Korean proficiency (both parents Korean)	Psychology + Social work	M	school in several countries, including Canada and UAE
Jane	Korean (self-identified first language), English learned only in Korea	Psychology	F	secondary school in Korea only

** All participant names are pseudonyms.*

Table 3.2. Faculty Participants

Faculty Participant	Department Affiliation	Campus Location	Gender	Other
Professor W	Communication	Asia Campus	M	U.S. educated, native English speaker, originally hired at U.S.-based campus
Professor M	Communication	Asia Campus	M	U.S. educated, native English speaker, originally hired at U.S.-based campus
Professor A	Psychology	Asia Campus	F	Korea and U.S. educated, native Korean speaker, hired at University of Utah Asia Campus (UAC)
Professor B	Psychology	Asia Campus	F	U.S. educated, native English speaker, hired at UAC
Professor O	Writing & Rhetoric Studies	Asia Campus	F	Turkey and U.S. educated, native Turkish speaker, hired at UAC
Professor K	Psychology	U.S. Campus	F	U.S. educated, native English speaker, hired at U.S.-based campus
Professor E	Psychology	U.S. Campus	M	U.S. educated, native English speaker, hired at U.S.-based campus

Of the eight initial faculty surveys, I received four complete responses: one faculty member replied to my emailed cover note that he and at least a couple of his colleagues were not teaching enough writing in their courses to warrant their potential inclusion in my study. Based on the faculty surveys that were returned, I invited respondents (Professors W, M, A, and B) who were then teaching courses enrolling my student participants to meet me for initial and follow-up interviews. As the study progressed, I identified Professor O, who was working with one of the student participants in an independent study I describe in Chapter 4, as well as Professors K and E—based at the U.S. campus—to whom other faculty participants directed me as U.S. campus instructors whose courses enrolled relatively large numbers of post-transition Asia Campus students.

Approach

My approach is guided by tenets of grounded theory (GT; see, e.g., Bowen, 2006; Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I have found GT

especially valuable for this study given its explicit aim—to develop descriptive theories that, as the name implies, are grounded as much as possible in daily experiences and the ways participants make sense of those experiences implicitly and explicitly. Contrary to quantitative researchers' claims that qualitative work was biased or even idiosyncratic, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss together and separately articulated an approach that *grounded* credible theory building in the simultaneous and recursive collection and analysis of data from live phenomena and processes. GT's openness to emergent codes and themes in naturalistic settings and its skepticism about established theoretical categories allow me to balance scholarly understandings of multilingual writing on one hand with the discursive and material complexities of writing's scenes and contexts on the other.

In my recursive readings of surveys; interview transcripts; student writing/instructor responses; notes from classroom observations; and other material describing coursework, writing assignments, and instructional/other campus spaces, I employed "open coding," in which I tagged data with preliminary candidate codes arising from my experiences as a teacher of second language writing at both the U.S.-based campus and Asia Campus, from my knowledge of the relevant scholarly literature, and from my desire to remain sensitive to students' and faculty members' emic perspectives on their academic and social interactions. As interviews, other data, and interactions with research assistants generated more candidate codes, I began to shift my analytical focus to what grounded theorists term "axial coding," in which I analyzed additional data with the goal of confirming, disconfirming, and/or consolidating emerging codes as I approached a point of diminishing returns. Chapters 4 through 6 report on my analyses and explication of several of the most durable emergent themes. (See Appendix C for the full list of codes.)

I have been inspired and informed by a number of prior studies of writing that are more explicitly and clearly longitudinal than my own (Beaufort, 2007; Carroll, 2002; Chiseri-Strater, 1991; Haas, 1994; Herrington & Curtis, 2000; Smoke, 1994; Spack, 1997, 2004; Sternglass, 1993, 1997; Wardle, 2007; Wolcott, 1994; Zamel, 1995). But I have come to realize that my study has diverged significantly from these as well, given that maintaining consistent contact with the scene of my research—the site and the faculty and student informants—presented significant challenges. Of course, my study is not unique in that respect. Marilyn Sternglass (1993, 1997) acknowledges, for instance, that keeping in touch with student participants in particular can be frustrating since students are generally relatively transient. Even now, two and a half decades after Sternglass' data collection, when students have more durable phone numbers and other contact information thanks to the proliferation

of digital communications, I was not always able to stay connected with all student participants. And my physical distance from the Asia Campus for most of the study period meant that my impressions of the scene came in fits and starts as the campus and surrounds were quickly evolving. Unavoidably uneven data collection can exacerbate some of the problems Richard Haswell (2000) observed—in a strident critique of longitudinal work—problems including not only small and relatively unstable participant groups but also a lack of comparable writing tasks and conditions. Haswell went on to criticize longitudinal researchers as well for relying on open-ended interviewing and "intuitive evaluation of course writings" (pp. 310-311).

If the goal of writing research is to produce readily generalizable results that may serve a comprehensive theory and one-size-fits-all pedagogy, Haswell's (2000) concerns are merited. However, qualitative writing researchers have long argued for the value of their work in providing unique insights grounded in site-specific conditions that are not transferable but nonetheless valuable to the field's accretive—story by story and layer by layer—understanding of composition as an inescapably social and material practice. Lee Ann Carroll (2002), for example, explicitly rejected "explanation, prediction, and control" in favor of a loose approach oriented to understanding the phenomena she was observing as closely as possible.

Moreover, some compelling scholarship on transnational education affirms the value of methodological complexity. As I noted in Chapter 1, transnational subjects cultivate identities and practices that are pushed and pulled among overlapping spaces: students in my transnational university may spend most of their undergraduate careers at a campus geographically located in Korea, but they are embedded in social, discursive, and material ecologies that remind them of the U.S.-based campus' symbolic proximity and its temporal inevitability given students' requirement to travel there for a year of study. That institutional push and pull, the physical campus' and city's constant hypermodern rate of change, and students' cultivation of what Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller (2004) term "multilayered and multi-sited identifications in and across local, regional, and national spaces" (pp. 8-9) call for especially sensitive empirical approaches. As Fraiberg et al. (2017) term it, situating writing as a literate activity in a global framework requires "fine-grained tracing of mobile literacies across space-time while connecting moments of everyday practice to wider distributed networks" (p. 19). Thus, again, this work requires balance—between capturing the development of writing teaching and learning across an institutionally determined transnational scene and timeframe on one hand and capturing the richly accreting detail of that scene on the other. While Brice Nordquist (2017) notes that educational initiatives are of-

ten predicated on "predictable repetitions of movements of people, objects, texts, ideas, and information" (p. 9), the projected outcomes of such routines run up against the embodied experiences of both researcher and participant.

That confrontation, for Nordquist (2017), between smoothly articulated claims about educational progress and the complexity of actual lives-in-education has immediate relevance for scholarly representations of literate activity in motion. I did not and could not have overlooked writing's embeddedness in the densely layered symbolic, material, and social context of my transnational site—not as a resident of the campus and city nor as a faculty member and informal administrator nor as a researcher who left and returned repeatedly to re-encounter the memory of my lived experience there. All were entangled. But my study's reflection of that entanglement, I hope, enlivens "context" as it interplays with other data and analyses of "writing," revealing the fecundity of a transnational educational experiment that, on its surface, can still seem smooth, future-focused, and predetermined.