**Accounting for Transfer During and After a Third-Party**

**International Student Pathway Program**

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International students have figured large in many US-based colleges’ and universities’ enrollment plans for several decades. While a former presidential administration tightened immigration requirements, and while a global pandemic has created further complexities (Buckner, Zhang, & Blanco, 2021), institutions remain motivated to grow and diversify their student bodies through international admissions. But even in more favorable conditions for international student movement, colleges and universities have competed against one another in a huge educational landscape including roughly 4,000 degree-granting institutions. For institutions that lack immediate name recognition, recruitment needs can easily outpace campus recruiting staff and other resources—a gap that has created a market for third-party recruitment entities.

According to recent estimates, at least fifty (50) US-based colleges and universities have entered contracts with private-sector international student recruitment companies, including INTO University Partnerships, Navitas, and Shorelight Education (Agosti & Bernat, 2018; Klahr, 2015). These companies typically work with on-campus admissions, student affairs, and academic staff to augment—or in some cases, replace—existing resources, including intensive English programs, orientation, and student immigration processing. The companies also tend to coordinate with academic units to create academic pathway programs combining preparatory English-language courses with extended orientation experiences and even some general education credit. In most cases, recruited students meet minimum admission guidelines except for their scores on standardized English assessments; thus, the academic pathway provides them an alternative opportunity to demonstrate English proficiency and to matriculate.

To the extent that data is readily available from such partnerships (often limited by contractual/proprietary arrangements), results can be mixed: at least some enrollment increases are offset by private partners’ expansion to other university partners, creating internal competition for students. And while grade- and retention-based data is generally positive, some institutions pose consistent questions about the practicality and the ethics of outsourcing (Redden, 2018: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/19/more-colleges-hire-corporate-partners-international-student-pathway-programs-mixed>). Even in apparently successful partnerships, in which growing enrollments, retention, and cumulative grades are usually cited as quantitative evidence of “student success,” little if any qualitative data is routinely collected. That lack of diverse data represents a gap in how international pathway students’ knowledge and practices—especially those relevant to the highly privileged academic activity of writing—might transfer.

This proposed longitudinal study aims to recruit and follow a nationally, linguistically, and academically diverse group of students (10 projected) as they progress from initial enrollment in a public-private international student pathway program through graduation. The research site is the pathway program at my home university[[1]](#footnote-1), with which I have been directly involved in a quasi-administrative capacity since 2018—a role that will end in summer 2022 before I collect any data. Program characteristics include

* A current, exclusively undergraduate enrollment of roughly 350, with a targeted steady-state enrollment of 500.
* A three-phase academic program beginning with non-credit bearing courses and progressing through a selection of cohort/sheltered general education courses, including mathematics, sociology, global citizenship, and introductory writing.
* “Wraparound” student services during students’ pathway enrollment, including dedicated academic advisers, social/cultural programming, one-credit “add-on” language support classes for select general education courses, and (limited) designated campus space.

The overwhelming majority of recruited students declare majors in computing or in digital game design/programming. A plurality are from the People’s Republic of China, though students also come from Brazil, France, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, and several other countries.

Given this pathway program’s and university’s emphasis on English-language academic/disciplinary writing, the diverse literacies that develop and circulate in pathway students’ intended fields, and the complexity of transfer—especially in a multi-stage undergraduate experience, I am working with these preliminary research questions:

* How do international students' knowledge about and facility with English-language writing develop during several stages of "foundational" coursework in a pathway program?
* How do the complexities of students' participation in the pathway program affect their writing development?
* How do students transfer writing knowledge and facility into and through major/disciplinary writing?

Methods will be recursive, following constant-comparative approaches influenced by Grounded Theory. Data will include regular student interviews, faculty interviews, student writing samples, faculty responses to writing, course observations, and investigator field notes/memos.

This project potentially adds to knowledge about writing transfer as well as knowledge about public-private international student pathway programs. While transfer research has focused to some extent on second language/multilingual writers (DePalma & Ringer, 2011, 2013; Grujicic-Alatriste, 2013; Leonard & Nowacek, 2016; Roozen, 2009), it has yet to expand its focus to the relatively novel institutional context of private-public pathway programs, which have become even more complex in the wake of pandemic-related travel restrictions (which, for instance, have forced many students into online coursework while still in their home countries). And while there is research on international student pathway programs, much of that scholarship is in international education policy, student development, and/or "grey" literature intended to help universities and professional organizations strategize international student markets. Thus this project aims to fill an existing gap in scholars' understanding of transfer and of international students' navigation of post-pandemic US-centric pathway programs.

*Institutional Description*: 1-2 brief paragraphs that describe the institutional factors that influence your research project (either the institution you are from or the institution in which your research is occurring). We will send you a set of questions a few weeks before the workshop to further prompt your thinking about how your context will need to be explained to fellow workshop participants.

**The international pathway program I am studying is part of a public-private partnership between my large, state-supported, research-extensive university and a private company that has contracted for similar partnerships with approximately 20 other universities across the US. My university is highly aspirational: it is a recently admitted member of the American Association of Universities--a consortium of "top" public and private universities in the US and Canada, and its new president has set a goal of becoming a "top ten" university within the next ten years**. **Part of those aspirations include international student recruitment--clear from this partnership and also from the university's establishment of a branch campus in South Korea, a public health-based extension in Ghana, and ongoing negotiations with potential partners in other countries. While the university's highly publicized and variously nationally ranked undergraduate academic programs in computing, game design, engineering, and finance attract some international students on their own, the university's enrollment management units have not historically been able to hire sufficient recruitment staff. The gap between the university's aspiration and its relative lack of recruitment resources created a market niche for the private partner.**

*Key Theorists*: A one-page digest of **key theorists and frames used in the choice of methods and research design**; this should highlight between 2 and 5 main perspectives that guide your work: the scholars you cite most often, or the “schools of thought” you draw from. Each entry should be just a few sentences long—enough to give readers an understanding of your methods and analytic frames. *This framing will be particularly important in this workshop setting: we will ask you to emphasize this material in your actual workshop introduction.*

* **Transfer: both the broad concepts that have circulated in education and also the specific application/uptake of those concepts in rhetoric and composition and in second-language writing (DePalma & Ringer; *Elon Statement on Writing Transfer;* Leonard & Nowacek; Roozen; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak**).
* **Ecological approaches to language acquisition: concepts of the relationship between language learning/acquisition/use and complex social, symbolic, and material surrounds (Activity Theory; Larsen-Freeman; Lei; Pennycook; van Lier).**
* **Longitudinal and ethnographic methodologies (Beaufort; Smoke; Sommers; Spack; Sternglass; Zamel).**

*Glossary*: A list of any potentially context/culture-specific terms, both practical and profound; the glossary collectively produced will be further discussed during the workshop itself.

**International student pathway program: an academic and potentially co-/extra-curricular program of support provided by a college/university either alone or in partnership with a third party. Features may include cohort/"sheltered" academic courses, special orientation, special housing, dedicated academic advising, etc. Often enrolls students whose standardized English proficiency test scores fall below university requirements for direct enrollment.**

1. I would certainly be interested in connecting and potentially collaborating with other researchers at institutions hosting similar partnerships/pathway programs—especially since our own private partner has been slow to facilitate such connections with other institutions with which it contracts. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)