



Writing Instructors' Perceptions of International Student Writers: What Teachers Want and Need to Know

University of California (UC) campuses have recently experienced a dramatic increase in the number of international degree-seeking undergraduate students. This article presents results of a UC-wide survey conducted to understand the perceptions of developmental and 1st-year composition instructors about these demographic changes and to help design professional development for these instructors as they aim to better support international student writers. Results suggest the need not only for in-service training but also for advocacy by UC writing programs within the UC system in general as well as local contexts, specifically regarding placement issues, course offerings, and teacher qualifications.

Introduction

Many University of California (UC) campuses have recently experienced a dramatic increase in the number of international degree-seeking undergraduate students, with some experiencing a fivefold increase over the past 10 years (UCOP, 2014). In the last decade, both UC Berkeley and UCLA have seen the number of international undergraduates climb from fewer than 700 students to more than 3,500 students (UC Berkeley Office of Planning and Analysis, 2014; UCLA Office of Analysis and Information Management, 2014). In 2012, the international student population at some UC campuses comprised more than 15% of the freshman class (UCOP, 2014) and almost 35% of the students enrolled in reading and composition courses designated for students who have not fulfilled the entry-level writing requirement (UCOPE EMS Advisory Group, 2013). Though dealing with smaller numbers, other campuses—such as UC Davis, Irvine, San Diego, and Santa Barbara—have recently seen their interna-

tional undergraduate numbers more than quadruple (UCOP, 2014). Even UC campuses that have traditionally had very few international student applications have recently begun to see the need for international student support because of increased international enrollment (S-H. Parmeter, personal communication, November 24, 2014).

It is important to note that first-year composition (FYC) courses on many UC campuses, required of most entering freshmen, are often taught by instructors who may not have specific training in working with international multilingual student writers, who may not be familiar with the academic cultures and expectations these students previously experienced in their home countries, and who may feel a degree of frustration in working with the changing population of students in the public UC system. In addition, the influx of international students has placed great hiring and scheduling pressure on programs providing pre-FYC, entry-level writing requirement (ELWR) courses for multilingual students. Finally, instructors in both ELWR and FYC programs have designed curricula through the years to support long-term immigrant student writers (Generation 1.5) who previously comprised a large percentage of the multilingual student population UC-wide but whose needs differ substantially from those of recently arrived international student writers. Thus, this recent influx of international students with unique writing-support needs has forced many instructors and administrators to consider curricular changes and additional support systems for both students and faculty.

The idea for coordinated teacher development across campuses first grew out of conversations among compositionists at the UC Writing Program Conference held in 2012 at UC Santa Barbara. In order to understand the perceptions of FYC and ELWR writing instructors regarding their need to best serve this growing population—as well as identifying the felt needs of the instructors for further professional development—multilingual student writing consultants from UC Berkeley, UC Davis, and UCLA conducted a UC-wide survey of writing instructors. The specific questions posed in the survey, based on Matsuda, Saenkhum, and Accardi's 2013 study of composition instructors, focused on teachers' perceptions of the presence and effects of international student writers in their classrooms, of the perceived needs of this varied group of students, and of necessary classroom adjustments based on the increased numbers of international students, as well as instructor perceptions of their own resource needs in working with international student writers. The overall aim of the survey was to inform the design of professional development for instructors to help them better support international student writers across the UCs.

The Study

The survey, conducted online, investigated instructors' perceptions and opinions via 22 questions. With the exception of a final "Any further comments?" question, all items were multiple choice, and most allowed space for respondents to (optionally) add their own comments.

The survey ([see survey here](#) or see Note for link) was divided into four sections.¹ The first section (Q1-5) asked instructors about their own backgrounds (training, experience, the types of writing classes they teach). The second section (Q6-12) asked instructors to share their own perceptions about students—whether the demographics have been changing in their respective classes/programs, and if so, what are the instructors' assessments of students' preparation levels and needs. The third section (Q13-16) asked specific questions about how instructors are currently responding to changing student demographics in their own teaching, and the final section (Q17-22) inquired about instructors' desire for/interest in further professional development for working effectively with international student writers.

After piloting a draft of the survey with volunteers from UCLA, we distributed the survey electronically to contact persons (writing program administrators from two e-lists) from each UC campus, asking them to distribute the link to colleagues in their own programs. We collected responses during August-September 2014, using the online survey collector SurveyMonkey. We received 140 total responses, representing all nine UC campuses. More than 70% of our respondents had been teaching college-level writing for six years or more; 56% had taught for more than 10 years. Thus, our responses came from a very experienced group of instructors. More than half of the responses (56%) were from instructors holding PhDs, mostly in English literature. A small proportion had MAs in Composition and Rhetoric (8%) or in TESOL (9%), and only about 25% said they had completed formal course work on working with L2 writers.

Findings

We present our findings in three sections:

1. Instructors' perceptions of a changing student population;
2. Instructors' pedagogical adaptations (if any) to new student demographics and needs; and
3. Instructors' expressed needs for further training to work with international student writers in their classes.

In each section, we present the trends from the survey items along

with some representative quotations from comments that were added to the multiple-choice responses.

Perceptions of Changing Student Demographics and Needs

Nearly all respondents (86%) said that their current writing classes consisted of a mix of monolingual English speakers, resident multilingual students, and international students. Only 3% reported having classes consisting of only monolingual English speakers, and 10% said their classes were a mix of monolingual and resident multilingual students. Some UC campuses have been more aggressive than others in recent years in recruiting and matriculating undergraduate international students, so these varying responses reflect the priorities of the respondents' respective campuses.

Although the vast majority of instructors reported having at least some international students in their writing classes, the proportions of such students varied, with only 13% of respondents saying that international students comprised 50% or more of their student population. A majority (52%) said that international students account for 25% or fewer of their students, and 36% said that their classes included 25-50% international students. Thus, it can be seen that in some contexts, international student writers would have a huge influence on class characteristics, while in others, they are greatly in the minority (e.g., 1-2 international students in a class of 25). Our respondents noted that within the past two years (2012-2014), the proportion of international students has grown substantially (43%) or slightly (34%), while 13% said the proportion has stayed about the same. In short, according to the respondents, the student population in UC writing classes is extremely diverse and has become even more so during the last couple of years.

Nearly all of the instructors (95%) said they used some formal or informal mechanism—questionnaire (48%) or observation (47%)—to learn about their students' backgrounds at the beginning of each term and class. Their first impressions of international students' readiness for US university-level work varied: Some said that most students seemed well prepared (14%); others said that international students are mostly underprepared (25%); and the majority (60%) said that while some international students seemed well prepared, others did not.

Forty-five respondents (32%) added comments to their responses to Q10: "When you first meet newly arrived international students, what is your impression of their readiness/ preparation for your class (and for U.S. university work in general)?" These comments fell into four observable patterns:

1. Comments about students' poor oral skills (listening comprehension and ability to participate in spoken activities);
2. Comments about students' inadequate reading skills;
3. Comments about students' poor language skills in writing (grammar, vocabulary, mechanics);
4. More general comments about students being poorly screened (for UC admission), misplaced (into the "wrong" writing classes), and generally unprepared for the rigors of the UC system.

Two representative comments follow.

Most have not read a book in English; many find the American classroom dynamic intimidating (speech and interaction); writing demands of UC are often much more of a challenge since the focus of their English writing instruction has often been on test taking.

I would say that over 50% of the international students I have taught are not adequately prepared for any aspect of their experience at [name of campus]. ... This is of course not the fault of the students. The blame lies with the disgusting and economically cynical motives of the administration ... they frequently are uninformed about how to navigate the campus ... what is required of them, how they can receive help, what services are available to them, etc. etc. etc.

It can be seen from these comments that at least some instructors believe the perceived struggles of international students are not the students' fault but rather the logical consequence of inadequate preparation in their prior education and/or the university's "cynical motives" in admitting students who are not ready for the challenges they will face.

In the final two questions in this section (Q11-12), instructors were asked how international students performed in their writing classes, relative to other students' outcomes. Again, responses were mixed, with 17% of respondents saying that international students had "among the weakest outcomes," 16% saying that international students' outcomes (grades/overall writing ability) were about the same as those of the other students, while 65% reported great variability—some international students do very well while others struggle. Asked in Q12 what students' perceived greatest areas of struggle in the writing class were, all four options were selected by the majority of respondents: writing skills (62%), oral skills (65%), reading skills (71%), and

language skills (77%)—that is, problems with grammar or vocabulary. As one instructor noted in an added comment:

... what gets in the way of student success is insufficient comprehension of English, which manifests itself in reading, orality, and language. By “insufficient comprehension,” I don’t mean that students are making grammatical mistakes when they speak and write. I’m referring to the (very) occasional student who cannot understand the most basic exchanges that we have in class.

To summarize this section: Our respondents expressed at least some concern about the preparedness and performance of the international students in their writing classes, relative to the abilities of the other students. Though they had a range of opinions about the source and nature of students’ observed struggles, as a group, our survey participants definitely felt that some of the international students were at risk, not only in their own classes, but also in their overall potential to succeed at the university. Since these writing instructors typically encounter students at or near the beginning of their studies at the UC and in smaller classes than UC students most often encounter, these perceptions, while limited to students’ performance in writing courses, should raise some concern about at least a subset of the international undergraduate population in the UC system.

Instructors’ Adjustments and Adaptations to a Changing Population

In Q13-16 of the survey, instructors were asked if they had made any adjustments to their own pedagogy in response to the changing demographics in their classes. This set of questions provoked some strong reactions and comments from instructors, including some attitudes we will discuss, here and below, that we characterize as “surprising/unexpected responses” to our survey.

In Q13, instructors were asked if they spent extra time outside of class helping their international students, relative to the hours spent with other students. While 54% said they spent the “appropriate amount of time,” 17% said they spent “too much time” with their international students. At the opposite extreme, 20% said they wished their international students would ask for *more* help. Numerous instructor comments reflected this varied perspective:

There seems to be no middle ground, actually. They are one of two types: they do not come in to see me at all or they come in every single office hour I hold.

Several respondents vociferously complained about the excessive demands international students add to their own workload:

I am concerned and would like to help more, but due to my schedule and the fact that I do not have tenure ... the time and effort does not directly benefit me. I know that sounds incredibly harsh.

... my job is not to teach the English language and/or grammar. They seem to ask for that kind of help, but I can't do that. I'm neither paid nor trained for that kind of 1-on-1 instruction.

In contrast, some respondents made positive comments about working individually with their international students:

I enjoy working with these students. I feel that they've inspired me to examine my methods and have made me a better teacher.

In Q14, teachers were asked what, if any, adaptations they have made in their classroom instruction to meet diverse student needs. They were given a range of options and could select all that applied. Table 1 summarizes the responses.

Table 1
Ways Respondents Adapt Writing Instruction
for International Students (Q14)

<i>Option</i>	<i>Responses</i>
I'm mindful of presenting key information (assignments, instructions, deadlines) in both written and oral form to adapt to listening comprehension difficulties.	68.5%
I keep an eye out for them and give them more individual help.	57%
I'm careful about who I put them with for pair/group work.	52%
I think about international students' frame of reference in selecting reading texts and/or developing writing assignments.	39%
No, I teach my classes the same as I always have.	16.5%
I've de-emphasized oral class participation as part of the lesson (or part of the grade).	14%
Not sure if I do.	3%

Twenty-six respondents (19%) added comments to their choices for this question, and these fell into several patterns:

- These “adaptations” are good for everyone.
- I have to be careful not to frustrate the native English speakers.
- No, I don’t want to “adapt” anything.
- We have a responsibility to figure out how best to serve these students.

Two opposite extremes among the comments are captured in these representative quotations:

No. Same with students with disabilities. Teach at the same level. That’s what they expect; that’s what all students expect and deserve. No compromise for special cases. If it’s that special, main-stream class might not be the best idea for anyone involved.

If the university is committed to increasing enrollment by international students, it has (we have) a responsibility to support their learning. Particularly important is developing respect for the strengths in language diversity and multi-cultural savvy that international students bring to our classes. For far too long, we have had a debilitating “deficit” mentality toward international students that belies our claims of being “global” institutions.

In sum, while the majority of instructors agreed they had made specific adaptations for their international students (most notably giving them extra help and being mindful of how key information is presented), some felt strongly that any such adjustments were not only unnecessary but also ethically wrong.

In the last two questions of this section, respondents were asked specifically about two important writing class issues: feedback strategies and assessment practices. With regard to feedback (Q15), 25% of the respondents said they give international students more grammar/language feedback than they do for other students; 30% said they provide/offer more one-on-one help (instead of or in addition to written feedback); and 24% said they urge students to receive extra help elsewhere, such as in a writing center. However, 16% of instructors said their feedback practices with international students were the same as for their other (monolingual and resident multilingual) students. This pattern of responses as to instructor feedback approaches is similar to that observed in a survey/interview study by Ferris, Brown, Liu, and

Stine (2011), though that study focused more broadly on all multilingual students in “mixed” writing classes, not only international students. As to their classroom assessment/grading practices (Q16), 67% of instructors said international students are graded according to the same standards as everyone else, but 29% said they disregard/minimize the effects of language errors when assigning scores or grades. Many thoughtful patterns of comments emerged in response to this question, varying from “I really prefer focusing on content/ideas” to “Cutting international students ‘slack’ sends the wrong message.” The following two quotations are illustrative of these perspectives:

I tend to be more lenient on language issues with international students. But I don't feel that being more lenient is doing them a favor; rather, it sends them the message that their skill level is adequate/acceptable in an advanced writing class.

I don't disregard language issues, but I am careful to distinguish between more serious issues such as subject/verb agreement and less serious issues such as prepositions. I still consider genre, organization, and ideas as the most important qualities of a student's writing.

To summarize this section: Writing instructors in our survey generally said they had made some pedagogical adjustments to better serve their more complex and diverse student population. Such adjustments tended to fall into three main categories:

1. Instructors said they “keep an eye out for” and offer extra help to international student writers;
2. Instructors reported that they are especially careful in class to facilitate student comprehension of important information; and
3. Instructors claimed that they think more about or adjust more to international students' needs for feedback/leniency when it comes to grammar/language issues in writing. However, it is important to reiterate that some respondents felt strongly that they would not or could not make any changes/adjustments because of the increased international student population—both because they thought it was not in the students' best interests (for either the international or other students in their classes) and because making such adjustments would create an unfair burden on teachers' workloads.

Instructors' Expressed Needs for Further Training

The majority of our respondents said they had received little formal training to work with multilingual or international student writers. Asked about such preparation in Q5, only 25% of the instructors said they had taken an entire course on teaching L2 writers. As for other types of preservice training, 35% said they had taken a course(s) in grammar and/or linguistics, and 35% reported having taken a general composition pedagogy class that included an “ESL day.” The majority of respondents, however, did report having had some relevant in-service training regarding multilingual or international students in the form of professional-development workshops (49%) or attending sessions at conferences (53%). In comments attached to various questions in other sections of the survey, some writing instructors alluded to their own lack of training to meet their students’ increasingly complex needs.

With these issues in mind—that most of our survey respondents said they had received minimal training in working with international student writers and that at least some of them saw their lack of preparation as a practical problem—we turn to the responses in the final section of our survey, in which we asked teachers about their need/desire for additional specialized training, given the increase in international undergraduate writers. In Q17, respondents were asked, “On a scale of 1-4, how do you feel about your own ability to work with international student writers from a range of backgrounds?” Table 2 summarizes the responses to this question.

Table 2
Respondents’ Self-Evaluation of Ability to Work With International Student Writers (Q17)

<i>Comfort Level</i>	<i>Responses</i>
1: Not at all comfortable	6%
2: Somewhat comfortable	39%
3: Fairly comfortable	36%
4: Very comfortable	20%

As Table 2 shows, only about 20% of respondents said they feel “very comfortable” in their own ability to work with international students in their writing classes (which roughly corresponds to the proportion of instructors who had said in Q5 that they had advanced formal training to do so). Forty-five percent of respondents chose the lower scores (1-2 or “not at all” or “somewhat comfortable). In short,

though only a small minority (fewer than 6%) said they feel “not at all comfortable” about their ability to instruct international students, many (75%) expressed varying degrees of ambivalence about their abilities, as reflected in their choices of “somewhat” or “fairly” comfortable. These expressed levels of discomfort suggest that consideration of improved/increased professional-development options for UC writing instructors may be important.

In Q18, teachers were asked to choose one from a list of items in response to the question “What would you say is your BIGGEST challenge in working with international student writers in your classes?” Table 3 summarizes the responses.

Table 3
Instructors’ Self-Identified Biggest Challenge in Working With International Students in Writing Classes (Q18)

<i>Option</i>	<i>Responses</i>
Knowing how to balance their needs with those of other students	28%
Helping them to read assigned texts accurately and critically	19.5%
Getting them fully involved in class discussion activities	15%
Giving feedback about language errors	15%
Giving effective written or oral feedback	13%
Knowing how to fairly and effectively grade/assess L2 writers’ work	9%

It is important to observe that Table 3 reflects the fact that respondents were forced by the question to choose just one option as their “biggest” challenge. Several in the comments noted that several/all of the choices were relevant for them. Still, the responses suggest some priorities for further teacher development. First, teachers said they struggle with knowing how to design/conduct their courses to meet a wide range of student backgrounds and needs. Respondents added that the “balance” issue went both ways: If teachers pitched their instruction toward majority/mainstream students (monolinguals and resident multilinguals), they worried about leaving international students behind. However, others were concerned that adapting instruction to better serve internationals would result in “*cheating my native speakers.*” Interestingly, though, when asked about topics for further training (Q20, discussed further below), the least-selected

option (15%) was “(re)designing my course syllabus to better meet international students’ needs.” It could be that instructors felt capable of doing such “retrofitting” themselves without any in-service training, but it could also be true that, while worrying about “balancing student needs,” teachers also felt that it would be wrong and/or too burdensome to overhaul their courses entirely to accommodate international students.

Second, teachers expressed concern about students’ reading comprehension and critical-reading ability (see also previous discussion about responses to Q10 and Q12) and about their own preparation for helping students grapple with reading materials for the course, as shown in these two teacher comments in response to Q18:

In the context of a writing class, reading is vitally important and often undervalued. The reading they must do for my class is esoteric and complex.

While I’ve taken a lot of pedagogy courses on writing, I have not been taught to teach reading, as we seem to assume that students entering college could do it adequately.

However, when asked about a range of topics on which they would like more information or training (Q20, see Table 4), teaching reading was relatively low on respondents’ priority list (only 25% selected it).

Third, the responses to Q18 also suggest that teachers may struggle with giving feedback of various types (written commentary, oral responses, error feedback) to international student writers. This observation is similar to that reported in Ferris et al. (2011); participants in that study also commented on their lack of specific training in how to respond to L2 writers in general (not only international students). However, in their responses to Q19, teachers seemed confident about their own knowledge of important grammar points. Thus, for those instructors who identified feedback issues as being their “biggest” struggle in Q18, the issue may be more pedagogical than content based (i.e., needing more informed/effective feedback approaches rather than remediating their own formal grammar knowledge).

In Q20, respondents were asked about workshops/training that they would wish for or need, and unlike in Q17, they could choose all options that applied to them. The responses are summarized in Table 4. The responses to this question, together with those discussed above in Table 3 (responses to Q18), suggest a range of options for designing in-service professional-development sessions that would address writing instructors’ perceived needs. It is also worth noting that for

both Q18 and Q20, respondents commented on other issues beyond those provided in the answer choices. Topics nominated by respondents included cultural differences, plagiarism, and valuing difference in the classroom.

Table 4
Areas/Skills in Which Respondents Would Like Further Information or Training (Q20)

<i>Option</i>	<i>Responses</i>
Designing in-class instruction to help international students participate better	52%
Analyzing language issues in L2 writing	43%
Providing language instruction	33%
Designing effective feedback systems	32%
Choosing and teaching reading texts effectively	25%
Writing assignments/prompts that are sensitive to international students' needs	23%
(Re)designing my course syllabus to better meet international students' needs	15%
All of the above	12%

In the final question of this section (Q21), instructors were asked what models/scheduling patterns for professional development would be most effective for them and their colleagues. They could select any or all options that they liked, and their responses are shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Model(s) of Professional Development Respondents Noted as Most Effective for Self and Colleagues (Q21)

<i>Option</i>	<i>Responses</i>
A series of targeted workshops on various language/usage/ESL topics	62%
An intensive workshop over several days between terms/during summer	31%
A list of online resources	28%
An informal reading/discussion group	24%
Online training modules	21%
A reading list	11%

The options in Table 5 varied from quite formal (workshops or several days of training) to entirely self-directed (reading list, online learning) and quite intensive (formal workshops) to fairly low-key (reading/discussion groups). It was interesting to see that nearly all of the options were selected by 20% or more of the respondents, suggesting that a variety of models will probably best serve the needs of different individual instructors.

Some commenters objected (strongly) to the suggestion that they needed and/or should be expected to participate in any formal training to work with international students. These objections took three distinct forms. First, some respondents complained that attending training sessions constituted an unfair workload expectation. One comment added to Q20 was “How about the university actually pays me to take courses on the subject?” Another, in response to Q21, was “You seriously need to consider paying people to scale (\$70/hr) if you think they are going to or should participate.” (We were a bit taken aback at this comment, as the use of “you” implied that we ourselves [the authors] should pay our colleagues to attend training that we might offer!)

Second, several commenters expressed the opinion that professional development for “mainstream” writing instructors was not the answer. Rather, international students should be placed in specialized courses taught by instructors with advanced training in TESOL/L2 writing (one commenter even suggested which California MA program we should recruit instructors from!). The following comments (in response to Q20) are illustrative:

I don't think there is a problem with the training and skills of the instructors. The problem is that students with completely different needs and skills are being crammed into the same classes.

This should not be the responsibility of instructors in general classes. There need[s] to be better screening procedures to identify international students who have substantive problems with language, and the university (as it has chosen to admit more international students) needs to provide additional infrastructure and resources to address these problems. It is unethical and unfair to place the burden for addressing these problems on those who are already teaching reading and composition courses, as these individuals already constitute an underpaid and overextended labor class.

Finally, there were comments that indicated a few respondents took umbrage at the implication in the survey as a whole that they were underprepared for working with L2 writers:

The assumption in this survey is that most writing teachers are woefully unprepared to teach international students. I question that assumption. . . . Too often those teaching ESL and international students have little experience teaching L1 students and L2 students born in the U.S. and therefore have too little of a sense of writing standards across all levels of writing instruction.

Such comments were at odds with the overall set of responses to the survey—in which most respondents said they had received little formal training for working with L2 writers and that they were only “somewhat” or “fairly” confident in their own abilities to instruct international students and could identify specific challenges/needs for further training; however, this statement does represent the attitudes of a number of UC writing instructors, including, perhaps, some of those who did not complete the survey. Unfortunately, some lecturers and TAs believe that the influx of international students in their classes is unfair and burdensome and resent either the institution and/or the students themselves for this new situation.

Conclusion

As stated, the original intent of this study was to gather data via a UC-wide survey to best inform us about the professional-development needs of our composition colleagues who may lack training and experience working with international student writers. The survey responses proved to be both informative and occasionally surprising about the needs and opinions of UC writing instructors working with the recent influx of international undergraduate student writers.

It is worth noting some of the unexpected/surprising responses that were elicited by the survey. First, some respondents complained that the international undergraduate students in their courses were misplaced and underprepared for university composition course work. Some faulted UC admission policies for bringing in these students for the financial benefit of campuses. Others thought that programmatic policies were an issue because of placement procedures and limited course offerings. These complaints make sense because each UC campus is autonomous and there is no systemwide sequence of courses, resulting in few to no ELWR courses designed specifically for multilingual students. Some respondents brought up labor and workload issues, both in terms of teaching and in-service training. Given the fact that nearly all writing instructors are lecturers with high course loads or graduate student instructors with their own studies to balance with teaching assignments, this is a valid concern. However, it is also fair to observe that effective teaching always requires

ongoing professional development, whether such training focuses on advances in technology, changes in assessment practices, or other pedagogical concerns. Claiming that “it’s not my job” to learn how to work most effectively with a more diverse student population strikes us as analogous to saying, “I wasn’t trained/hired to teach writing with computers, so it’s not fair to say I should learn to do so.” As stated earlier, some instructors took umbrage that the survey implied that *they* needed training; however, increased in-service training for working with multilingual writers seemed truly desired by most respondents.

As a result of the survey, we have formulated the following questions to consider for further action:

1. Various respondents expressed frustration about underprepared students in their classes. Is there anything (institutionally) we as writing programs/instructors can actually do about students’ lack of preparation and/or misplacement?
2. Does the influx of international students in UC writing classes result in an unfair labor/workload situation for instructors? If so, what if anything can we do about that? Are there issues that our union can address?
3. Many of our respondents did say they wished they had more training/input on a wide range of topics related to international students. Should UC writing programs do more to provide such in-service training, or is the answer to instead hire instructors with more specialized training?

This survey was an initial attempt to figure out how to best deal with the needs of our international undergraduate students and the instructors who teach them. We have several plans as a follow-up to this survey. First, we need to interview those respondents who supplied contact information and stated that they were interested in being interviewed. This information should be valuable in terms of informing us how to proceed with the next challenging task: working on the design of the in-service training as requested by the majority of the respondents. Initially, we planned to create online modules focusing on a variety of second language issues such as grammar and vocabulary, but as a result of the survey, we now know that other academic language needs are critical, such as improving oral skills for class discussions and teaching academic reading strategies. We have also learned, based on the options in Q21, that targeted workshops on various language/usage/ESL topics is the preferred model. Providing training at nine campuses presents logistical problems but perhaps running regional workshops or identifying second language experts at various

campuses to assist with the training may work. It is also obvious from the responses that personal interaction with those with second language expertise is preferred to reading lists or online modules.

Finally, we need to consider the advocacy role of UC writing programs within the UC system in general and in local contexts specifically regarding placement issues, course offerings, and teacher qualifications. Making curricular adjustments and providing additional in-service training may be good steps, but some (not all) multilingual undergraduates appear to be truly unprepared for work at the UC level upon matriculation. Even the most enlightened instruction available cannot solve that problem; an award-winning calculus professor will likely not be able to teach calculus to a seventh-grade pre-algebra class. Perhaps one takeaway from this investigation is that writing programs need to document student issues more precisely and help various administrative units understand that student qualifications for admission and needs for support upon arrival are just as important as hitting enrollment and revenue targets. If there is a better fit between student preparation and the programs/instructors tasked with supporting them, the results will be more satisfying for everyone.

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Note

¹The survey is available at http://www.catesoljournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CJ27.2_ferris-survey.pdf.

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