Keys to a successful writing program: a qualitative study [*]

Claves para un programa de escritura de éxito: un estudio cualitativo

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Resumen: La enseñanza de la escritura académica ha supuesto una preocupación en las universidades de Estados Unidos desde hace más de 50 años. El sistema de educación superior español, sin embargo, ha abordado esta cuestión más recientemente y todavía no existen programas de escritura institucionalizados en España. Este artículo pretende definir qué es escribir bien y describir los elementos clave para la creación de un programa que promueva la escritura en las universidades españolas. Para ello, se ha seguido una metodología cualitativa, concretamente las entrevistas cognitivas, con el objetivo de conocer las experiencias de 26 profesionales estadounidenses. Se diseñó un protocolo ad hoc para preguntar a los expertos/as por los elementos relevantes en el diseño de un programa de escritura y entender los argumentos que sustentaban sus respuestas. Las entrevistas se analizaron con Q-notes, donde se compararon y relacionaron las respuestas de los participantes. Los resultados demostraron que escribir bien es retórico y contextual. Además, los expertos/as destacaron la importancia de comprender el contexto en el diseño de un programa de escritura. Los resultados se agrupan según las diferentes fases de creación del programa y se reflejan en un diagrama. Finalmente, se abordan los retos y recursos necesarios.

Palabras clave: programa de escritura; educación superior; experiencia; análisis cualitativo; entrevistas cognitivas.

Abstract: Teaching academic writing has been a concern in universities all over the United States for more than 50 years. The Spanish higher education system, however, has addressed this question more recently and there are still no institutionalized writing programs in Spain. This paper aims to define good writing and to describe the key elements needed for the creation of a writing program in order to promote writing at Spanish universities. To do that, a qualitative methodology was followed, specifically the method of cognitive interviews, with the aim to learn from experiences of 26 US experts. An ad hoc protocol was designed to ask experts about all the relevant elements when designing a writing program and to understand the arguments supporting their responses. Interviews were analyzed using the Q-notes software where the participants' responses were compared and connected. Results showed that there is not a fixed definition of good writing as it is rhetorical and contextual. Moreover, experts emphasized the importance of understanding the institutional context when designing a writing program. Findings were grouped according to the different steps of the creation of the program and were reflected in a flowchart. Challenges and the main resources are discussed.

Keywords: writing program; higher education; expertise; qualitative analysis; cognitive interview methodology.

Introduction

Academic writing (Camps & Castelló, 2013) is a relatively recent issue in Spain, where it was not until the 90's when researchers started to address this question in the Spanish higher education system (Guzmán Simón & García Jiménez, 2015). In English-speaking countries, however, more specifically the US and the UK, teaching academic writing at university has been an issue since the 70's. Specifically the US has shown constant concern about students' writing skills since the end of the 19th century (Russell, 1994) and has been the origin of the movements *Writing Across the Curriculum* (WAC) and *Writing in the Disciplines* (WID), which have been very successful in providing models to improve academic writing.

The importance of teaching writing at university has been widely emphasized over the last decades, as writing requires competences that are not transferrable from previous academic stages. In this sense, writing programs (WP) have promoted the integration of writing in different courses worldwide.

This study embraces Thaiss' definition of *program* as the way an institution "conceives of the needs of its students in regard to learning a discipline, 'writing', that in basic ways crosses all disciplines and aids learning in all of them" (2012, p. 6). This paper differentiates two types of WPs: WAC programs, where writing is taught throughout the curriculum in different courses and is promoted as a means to learn, and WID programs, where writing is mainly fostered within a specific discipline to learn the characteristics of the texts of that field of study. These programs are usually complementary and although they do share some key structures, they are not implemented according to a standardized model as they are designed specifically at each institution (Condon & Rutz, 2012; Russell et al., 2009).

In this respect, Spain has few experiences and WPs are not integrated into the institutional curriculum (Castelló et al., 2012), although university students show *patent* difficulties with writing (Boillos Pereira, 2017). Burgess & Pallant (2013) point out three reasons why southern European universities have until recently provided little writing support: the belief that anyone who enters the university is a good writer; the difficulty to define good writing in the discipline; and the fact that it is possible to learn to write just by observation. Other possible reasons for this situation in Spain according to Castelló et al. (2012) are a decentralized university model in different autonomous communities; the fact that there are other co-official languages in Spain besides Spanish; and the possibility that faculty believe writing should be taught at earlier educational stages and teaching writing is not their work. This being the case, writing is still scarcely taught in Spain and although there are a number of recent interesting projects at Spanish universities, they do not constitute institutional initiatives, but isolated experiences (Castelló et al., 2016).

However, some northern European countries and the UK have addressed this issue for a long time. Still, academic writing was not much fostered before the Bologna Process (Göpferich, 2016). European universities were undergoing at that time the same initial phase US universities went through in the 70's (Kramer et al., 2003) and there were only small independent WAC projects not fully integrated into the institutions (Björk et al., 2003). In the US, in turn, writing has been taught across the curriculum at many universities for five decades now, because of the general belief that a single writing course is not enough to prepare students for the academic and professional world.

There is much literature on specific WPs and some authors explain how to get started (Walvoord, 2000) or describe characteristics of successful WAC programs (Townsend, 2008). More recently, Cox et al. (2018) explained their 'whole systems approach' to launching WAC programs and provided excellent tips for initiators. In fact, previous literature usually focuses on experiences narrated by recognized administrators (Sheffield, 2018). However, qualitative studies do not usually gather the opinions and experiences of a group of highly relevant experts around WP design and development, based on a predefined interview protocol. In this sense, experts in the field can provide relevant information to help administrators design and implement successful WPs.

This paper aims to describe the elements needed for the creation of WPs and to provide professionals in the field with a transversal tool for WP design. To do that, a qualitative study was conducted with experts who have been administering or working for WPs or writing centers (WC). Participants were recruited in the US, as the WAC and WID movements have inspired European writing initiatives (Björk et al., 2003) for the last decades.

To learn from the experience of experts and to gather complementary information to the literature published on the matter, semi-structured interviews were conducted, where the researcher leads a conversation based on an open-ended and semi-structured protocol designed to extract the intended information from the informants

(Corbetta, 2010). In this case, the protocol was created to collect the participants´ responses to questions regarding the keys for launching a successful WP, as well as arguments and explanations for their responses, that is, their response processes. For that reason, the interview protocol focused on the meaning of 'good writing' and the key elements in the implementation of WPs. Participants were asked to develop their ideas and why they answered the way they did, which provided information about the processes of their answers based on their experiences. In conclusion, the protocol was created to gather evidence for supporting a proposal for WP development.

The framework designed to guide the creation of WPs is relevant in the Spanish context, where writing is not much fostered (Gavari Starkie & Tenca Sidotti, 2018). However, it also aims to be useful for any administrator or researcher in any country worldwide, as the different recommendations can be applied to different contexts.

1. Method

This section shows the method used in the study and is presented in different categories: participants, instrument, procedure and type of analysis carried out.

1. 1. Participants

The method used was a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews to 26 professionals all around the US. The sampling was intentional as highly relevant and experienced researchers in the field of writing studies in different universities were selected all around the country. Most participants were selected by a literature review of research papers, while others were identified through snowball sampling or convenience. Finally, 27 professionals were contacted by e-mail and were asked to participate, with a response rate of 96.3%.

'Theoretical saturation' and 'theoretical relevance' were considered in the sampling design (Miller & Willson, 2014) as interviews were conducted until the full range of problems and interpretations were defined, and participants´ roles were diversified to reach the widest diversity in terms of interpretation patterns.

A total of 26 interviews were administered to fourteen women and twelve men, five of whom were retired. The universities represented in the sample and the number of participants from each institution was as follows: Auburn University (1), Clemson University (1), College of the Holy Cross (1), Colorado State University (1), Cornell University (1), Florida State University (1), Iowa State University (1), Maritime Academy (1), Miami University in Oxford (2), North Carolina State University (1), Northeastern University (1), University of California, Davis (1), University of California, Santa Barbara (9), University of Minnesota (1), University of Missouri (1), University of Oklahoma (1) and University of San Francisco (1).

The study was carried out in the University of California, Santa Barbara, where the highest number of participants came from (nine, one of whom was retired). The other universities were represented by a single expert, so that the highest possible number of universities were represented, except for Miami University in Oxford, which had two representatives.

A total of 10 respondents were the directors or associate directors of a WP or a WC at the time the interview took place and nine used to be in the past. Some respondents were internationally renowned researchers in the field (14) and, finally, 25 out of 26 informants taught or used to teach writing in the past. The one who did not teach writing was, however, included in the sample, as he was an administrator and had supported the implementation of the WP at his university. All interviews were conducted in the US in 2018, with a duration of 45-60 minutes. Most of them took place within an office or in a quiet public place (61.5%), whereas 38.5% were held online as participants lived all around the US. All respondents were coded as to ensure confidentiality. Correlative numbers from one to 26 were assigned according to the order the interview was conducted.

1. 2. Instruments

The interview protocol was designed to learn about experiences of people who are part of a WP. The protocol aimed to go through the entire process to get a comprehensive picture of the different phases involved in WP design (see Table 1).

Table 1
Interview protocol

Professional situation
1. What is your position at the university?
2. What university do you work for?
3. Do you teach writing?
Writing
4. What is good writing?
5. How can you teach good writing?
Implementation of a WP
6. Have you ever been involved in designing a new WP or writing curriculum?
7. What resources are needed to design a WP or writing curriculum?
8. How important is budget in the implementation of a WP?
9. Who is the key person in the implementation of a WP?
10. Where should writing courses be hosted?
11. How important is the cultural or institutional context in a WP?
12. Who should be the instructors in a WP?
13. How can instructors be trained?
14. How much self-governance should instructors have?
WCs
15. What do you think about WCs? Are they a good model?
WP at home university
16. What is the philosophy of the WP and how is it reflected in the structure?
17. What kind of writing requirements do you have at your university?
18. What have been the major challenges faced by the WP at your university?
19. How is your program assessed?
20. What is WAC and WID? How are WAC and WID developed in your WP?
Final questions
21. If you were to design a WP in Spain, what would you think of?
22. Where would you start?
23. Is there anything I haven't asked that you think might be interesting for me?

Source: own elaboration

1. 3. Procedure

All participants were given a consent form that they all read and signed before the interview. This form explained the purpose, procedures, risks and use of the information collected, which was kept strictly confidential and was used solely for the purposes of this research. Then, the interview was recorded for transcription and analysis purposes. The files were archived privately and will be destroyed according to the Spanish Data Protection Law. All data were collected in accordance with the standards and guidelines of the human subjects review board at the author's home institutions, as well as the UCSB Human Subjects Board, where this study was carried out.

The interviews were conducted in English by one researcher. Online interviews were both video- and audio-recorded, for which all respondents gave permission. Recordings were then transcribed.

1. 4. Analysis

The analysis of the interviews was carried out using Q-Notes software (https://wwwn.cdc.gov/qnotes/login.aspx), a data collection and analysis tool designed to facilitate organization and analysis of data gathered through interviews. This software was developed by the National Center for Health Statistics in the US.

Different levels of analysis were carried out following the approach suggested by Miller et al. (2014): conducting the interviews, summarizing interview notes, comparing across respondents and across groups and drawing conclusions.

After conducting and transcribing the interviews, the different topics the respondents referred to were identified, after which summaries were entered in the corresponding questions in Q-Notes for their analysis. All data could then be easily extracted from the software at any time for future reports.

The next level of analysis enabled to compare across respondents to extract themes and subthemes for each item. Once the

thematic schema was designed, the narratives were all coded. Two analysts met once a week during the coding process to make a global revision and to solve any possible discrepancies. Both themes and subthemes were agreed upon in a peer-review process to ensure correct coding and categorization.

Comparing across groups was the following level of analysis, which allowed to develop an advanced schema, where different groups of respondents could be compared to identify relationships. Two main analyses were developed in this stage: comparative analysis and sub-groups analysis, being the latter more precise, as it enabled to identify if one person had mentioned different categories or subcategories. Finally, the last level of analysis conducted was drawing conclusions. Results from the interviews were used to create a flowchart for decision-making and to guide administrators when launching a WP.

2. Results

This section aims at disseminating the results of the study, organized in five different parts: good writing; WPs; WCs; WP at home university; and final advice.

2. 1. Good writing
2.1.1. Definition of good writing

It was necessary to understand the concept of 'good writing' in order to define the focus of the WP and the strategies to be taught. In this sense, 'good writing' was defined in different ways by the respondents and six of them even stated there is no such thing as good writing. However, 18 participants believed it is contextual, 16 stated it is rhetorical and eight also added it had to do with critical thinking:

> Good writing is context-dependent. […] Secondly, it pays strong attention to purpose and audience. Who are you doing the writing for and why are you doing it? Purpose and audience are the essence of good writing. And thirdly, good writing is about ideas and arguments and has nothing to do… […] It has very little to do with the

correctness. If people want the writing to be correct, they're missing the point that good writing is about good thinking. (E14).

Participants also referred to correctness. One informant believed "there are things that get across contexts and obviously correctness is one thing. […] Good writing is generally correct, grammatically correct, mechanically correct and so on" (E17). On the other hand, another informant thought "most of the campus sees good writing as correct, as stylistically clear and grammatically error-free, mechanically error-free […]. And to me good writing is responsive to situation." (E8).

2.1.2. Teaching good writing

Learning how to teach good writing was also important, as it could determine some aspects of the program. In this regard, 69.2% of respondents referred to specific strategies, such as the rhetorical, context or genre approaches, followed by other strategies. Using a process approach or promoting reflective writing and self-awareness reflection were also common practices. Specifically, E19 used some of these strategies in the classroom:

> I teach a lot of process where I help students think about drafting, revising, invention strategies… […] I use a real process approach and then I use a really rhetorical approach. […] I always try to help them think rhetorically. I always try to help them think about the genre.

A few other strategies mentioned were using threshold concepts; building metacognition about writing; or using facts, concepts, practices and reflection, as mentioned by E20:

> Facts, concepts, practices and reflection. That's how you teach it. So the question is […] what facts are you introducing and when, what concepts are you introducing and when, what practices are students engaging in and when, what kind of assessment activities are you providing as a support as well and what reflection activities.

Other strategies, such as teaching students to think critically or showing them they are entering a community of practice with a particular way of thinking were also used by the informants, as well as

teaching students how writing works or to transfer skills. Finally, informants mentioned the type of activities they carried out to teach good writing, such as those promoting revision and feedback (19.2%), peer collaboration (11.5%) or real writing situations (7.6%).

2. 2. WPs

The results in this section are presented in two different phases: key elements before and during the implementation of a WP. In this regard, 25 out of 26 respondents had designed a WP or a writing curriculum at some point.

The resources needed for WP design were a central point in the protocol, as some institutions may need to start from scratch. In this sense, respondents referred to different stages: before, during and after the implementation of the program, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Resources

	Before the implementation of the program	Implementation of the program	Maintenance of the program
Previous assessment	22		
Coming up with a plan	3		
Buy-in	9		
Changing the culture	2		
Financial resources	18		
Human resources	24		
Time	9		
Faculty development			12
Developing the curriculum		7	
Developing infrastructure		2	
Physical resources	8		
Webs			3
Technology			4

Source: own elaboration

2.2.1. Before the implementation

This section presents the different aspects to be taken into consideration before the implementation of a WP, mainly the need to carry out needs assessment, as well as the necessary resources.

Alignment with the institutional culture

Even though respondents did not agree on all topics, there was a consensus on the fact that needs assessment should be the first step in WP design. They also agreed the program must be aligned with the culture and context of the institution, as well as its vision of writing:

> Everything affects the geography of the institution: who comes to that institution; who teaches at the institution; who is administrating; what are their thinking; […] how much budget do you have at the institution… All of those things affect. And how will it impact the students." (E21).

Assessing the needs and understanding the culture of the institution should therefore mark the beginning of WP design.

Human and financial resources

Participants agreed financial or human resources are necessary for designing a WP. Among the latter, faculty (73.1%), followed by human resources in general (34.6%) and people coordinating the program (30.7%) were the most repeated. Having experts was also considered important: "That's the number-one thing: […] you need faculty who are experts in writing. […] So you have to have faculty who are committed and who understand how writing is taught and how it's learned." (E1).

Regarding financial resources, even though it depends on the kind of program to be implemented, 69.2% of respondents agreed a budget is necessary to start a WP, specifically in four different categories: human resources; faculty development; infrastructure; and webs and technology. Among the people who referred to faculty

development (46.1%), 42.31% of them mentioned workshops, followed by allowance (23.1%). Bringing in consultants and giving incentives were other answers.

When it comes to budget for infrastructure, eight participants believed some kind of space is necessary to start a WP, like writing labs or WCs: "One of the things […] we've seen internationally […] is the idea of a WC, […] a kind of basis in many places now for the development of what you could call a program in writing" (E13).

Time as a resource

Time was also a recurrent theme, especially time to develop a program or the curriculum or time for the faculty involved in the WP. The participant E7 was especially concerned about the latter: "The faculty from across the disciplines when they're coming to get trained, they really just need time. […] They don't really care about getting paid; they just need time!"

2.2.2. Implementation of a WP

This section refers to the aspects to be considered when implementing a WP: key person; housing of writing courses; profile, training and self-governance of instructors; as well as possible challenges.

Key person in the implementation of a WP

There were a variety of responses concerning the key person in a WP, those identifying a specific profile and those referring to special aptitudes this person should have. According to the respondents, an administrator is the key person in the implementation of a WP. 'Someone from the upper administration' was specified by 14 of them, while six informants believed it should be a WP administrator. Someone with the power to 'speed things up' and the person with money were other options.

Participants also mentioned special aptitudes the key person should have, such as 'someone who is able to work with the community', 'a person with expertise' or 'someone who takes the initiative': "Ideally somebody who has an expertise in the field. And the field is not just expertise in writing; it's expertise in running administration, it's expertise in running a program…" (E20).

Housing of writing courses

Regarding this topic, there were three main answers. A total of 10 respondents believed it depends on the kind of program, while seven of them agreed writing courses should be independent (two of whom mentioned an existing department).

On the other hand, nine respondents like E18 specifically advised not to host courses within an inappropriate department, for example the English department or its equivalent in other places:

> And the reason is […] writing is a different subject […]. And typically there's like a tier system that develops in those kinds of departments where the prestigious positions… the important part of field is seen as the scholars studying literature and the writing kind of has secondary status.

Profile of instructors

Two different profiles of instructors were highlighted in the interviews: the instructors who teach students in the class; and the instructors who train the lecturers who, in turn, teach students. Regarding the former, there are special aptitudes instructors should have, according to informants, such as understanding the role of writing. In this case, 73.1% of respondents believed it should be disciplinary faculty, while 50% mentioned writing specialists. The respondent E14 explained it this way: "faculty who are teaching the discipline-based courses are the ones who […] are the experts in writing in their field".

On the other hand, all respondents who referred to the profile of instructors who train lecturers agreed that they should be writing

specialists, like E16: "The best-case scenario is to have disciplinary experts who have been trained by or work in collaboration with writing experts."

Faculty development

Participants mentioned three different models for faculty development: workshop model (80.7%), consulting model (26.9%) and other models (34.6%). In this sense, most informants stated instructors can be trained through workshops (73.1%) or teaching networks (23.1%), whereas other models were also mentioned: teaching graduate students/peer tutors or the expertise-based model. This model was explained by the informant E7:

> The model […] is really about training faculty to understand how writing works in general, how writing works in their discipline, getting them to bring to conscious awareness what they already know… Then they can make a decision about how to teach the students. […] So we call our model an expertise-based model. Working from their expertise.

Self-governance of instructors

Instructors should have ownership in their class, according to 21 informants, 10 of whom agreed they should follow some kind of syllabus, guidelines or outcomes. Moreover, two participants did not believe requirements were necessary, whereas 10 agreed faculty development or some kind of assessment or supervision is imperative:

> I think if you're gonna have something that's gonna be sustainable and work across the university, you need to set up some sorts of ways to keep track of what's going on and be sure that people are fulfilling their obligations as faculty. (E5).

Challenges

Informants were also asked about the challenges faced in their WP or WC. In this regard, the most common response was the lack of resources, especially staffing (46.1%) and financial issues (30.7%). The participant E24 talked about the need to pay the instructors a minimal salary in order not to lose faculty:

> If you develop a cohort of instructors who are dedicated to your particular institution and can make long-term plans with you, you have a very different kind of WP than one where they're just marking a couple of years while they find something better.

Other challenges mentioned were mainly getting buy-in and the lack of vision at the institution. Also, the heavy teachers' workload; false assumptions about writing or WCs; the cultural shift at the institution; large class size; too much bureaucracy; or the diversity of students' background were emphasized. This last point was specifically highlighted by three respondents, as more and more international students register at US universities every year.

The participant E11 explained how getting buy-in was a challenge, as some faculty complained at the beginning that they were not writing teachers and integrating writing in their courses was not their job. However, after a while "we started to change the culture and I had enough of those faculty members who had already bought in to writing in their departments. […] I worked with them to be allies within the department."

2.3. WCs

As regards WCs 18 respondents believed they are a useful complement to WPs or other writing on campus and should be aligned with them. They also agreed that WCs provide student writing support, although they showed their concern about the reputation WCs have, as 10 informants believed it is more than services on demand for correctness and four stated WCs help all writers and not only 'bad

writers'. Finally, four respondents suggested going to the WC should be optional and not required.

2.4. WP at home university

This section refers to the specific WP of the respondents' home universities and focuses on writing requirements, assessment and the different writing initiatives carried out.

2.4.1. Writing requirements

The most common writing requirements at the respondents' home universities were lower-division courses, followed by upper-division courses. Writing-intensive (WI) courses were also a requirement in six cases. Only the participant E25 confirmed her university does not have writing requirements, since the general level of writing ability of their students was very high.

In addition, 10 informants explained students can test out of some lower-division courses, for example E9, who stated students can place out of first-year writing "based on standardized tests, advanced placements or the International Baccalaureate."

2.4.2. Assessment

Most respondents confirmed their WP is assessed in some way (88.4%), even though only 15.4% informants stated they are required to assess their program and 46.1% said it is regularly assessed. Regarding the type of evaluation carried out, the WP assessment at the respondents' home institutions is in most cases only internal (46.1%), whereas in 19.2% of the cases it is both internal and external or exclusively external (19.2%).

As regards the assessment approach, the most common variables assessed are students and faculty. However, among those evaluating the curriculum, the most assessed variables are guidelines/classes, followed by learning outcomes. Other options are mainly the program itself, goals, needs, etc. As an example, the participant E3 explained they

assess curriculum vitaes for every faculty in the WP, goals and needs, upper-division courses and students' writing.

Regarding the procedure the informants' home institutions implement for assessment, external consultants visiting the university is the most common answer among those whose review process is external (five respondents). For those whose review process is internal, external consultants (six), followed by surveys (five), are the most repeated procedures. Other procedures include focus groups; sample essays; and conversations with people in internal review processes. Regarding external processes, multiple people reading and scoring; conversations with people; and classroom visits were other responses.

A few participants referred to the impact of the assessment (15.3%), as it results in changes to the curriculum and improves the program. However, some challenges related to the assessment also came up, such as bureaucracy or not knowing what to do with the collected data, as explained by E19: "They were collecting samples of writing throughout a student's four years at the college. […] And the problem with that much data, of course, is how do you analyze it all?"

2.4.3. WAC and WID

Respondents were asked in the first place about WAC and WID and four of them thought distinguishing between both concepts was confusing. Moreover, five different informants believed WAC and WID were complementary and interchangeable terms, as explained by the participant E9:

> In this country, there's a historical distinction between the two. […] And they use the terms interchangeably quite often. So I think it's hard to characterize certain programs as either WAC or WID… Cause I think they most have elements of both.

Other informants referred to a series of characteristics of WAC and WID that helped understand the difference between them, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Characteristics of WAC and WID

Category	WAC	WID
General description	Umbrella term	
Type of writing	Informal writing, general writing, writing embedded	Formal writing
Principles	Writing to learn, no specific writing instruction in the class	Learning to write
Scope	Interdisciplinary Writing across the university, institutional initiatives	Disciplinary
Training	Faculty development	Faculty development
Strategies	Engaging people in conversations Teaching is the key	
Focus	Teaching/writing outside the English department	

Source: own elaboration

The respondent E14 compared both terms as two sides of the same coin:

> Writing to learn versus learning to write. Learning to write is WID. That's where I am learning to write like a historian writes. That's WID. [...] So when I say writing to learn, I am referring to writing about something so that you learn it better for yourself. [...] You can use both WAC and WID in the same course. WAC writing is usually shorter; it's usually not graded. [...] It's writing to master an idea. [...] Informal versus formal writing. WAC is informal writing; WID is formal writing.

Finally, 17 respondents explained they develop WAC in some way (writing-to-learn activities across the university); 14 informants acknowledged they implement some kind of WID initiatives (learning-to-write initiatives within the disciplines); and three implemented a few mixed initiatives, where formal and informal writing is fostered.

2.5. Final advice

When respondents were asked where to begin, 42.3% of them recommended to start with some kind of writing courses, whereas

15.3% advised to begin with a WP and 15.3% mentioned a WC. Only 7.7% informants recommended to start with writing requirements and other 7.7% suggested faculty development. Regarding courses, 19.2% of respondents proposed general writing or first-year composition courses, whereas 23.1% of them specifically advised against implementing this type of courses. WAC/WID programs or WI courses were not recommended either by three informants each. That is the case of E22, who believed WI courses atomize writing instruction only within some courses. Among those informants who advised against them, first-year courses or WAC/WID programs, common suggestions were having a WC, designing some kind of writing courses and conducting faculty development.

3. Characteristics of a WP

According to the respondents, a WP should have certain characteristics. Three flowcharts are shown in this section representing different phases: design, implementation and assessment of WPs.

3.1. WP design

Informants agreed previous needs' assessment is key in WP design, as this program will be affected by the geography of the institution. To do this, getting buy-in and support at the institution is really important, as well as engaging stakeholders in conversations, so that all groups are confident in the process and the results, as Barlow et al. (2007) indicated in their study. In this respect, respondents agreed that common aspects of nearly all WPs are institutional buy-in, staff support and funding, something confirmed by Boyle et al. (2019). Although this idea has been highlighted in previous WP literature, bibliography is connected through this study with the specific experiences and processes detailed by the respondents. In this sense, interviewing professionals made it possible to reach the reason why some activities work or do not work, and to learn about specific situations to be considered in WP design.

Therefore, previous needs assessment in terms of students' writing skills has to be carried out to make sure the WP is aligned with

the institutional culture and to get institutional buy-in and support for the program. As far as resources are concerned, a budget to hire human resources as well as time for faculty to develop the program would be necessary. Figure 1 summarizes a proposal for WP design.
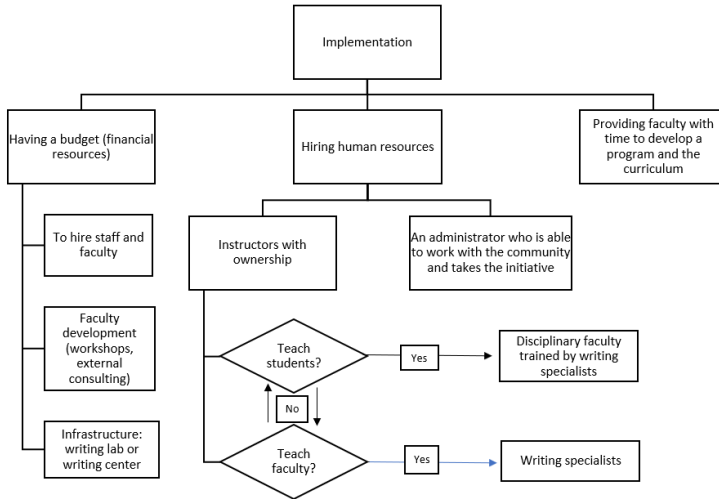
Figure 1
WP design. Needs Assessment
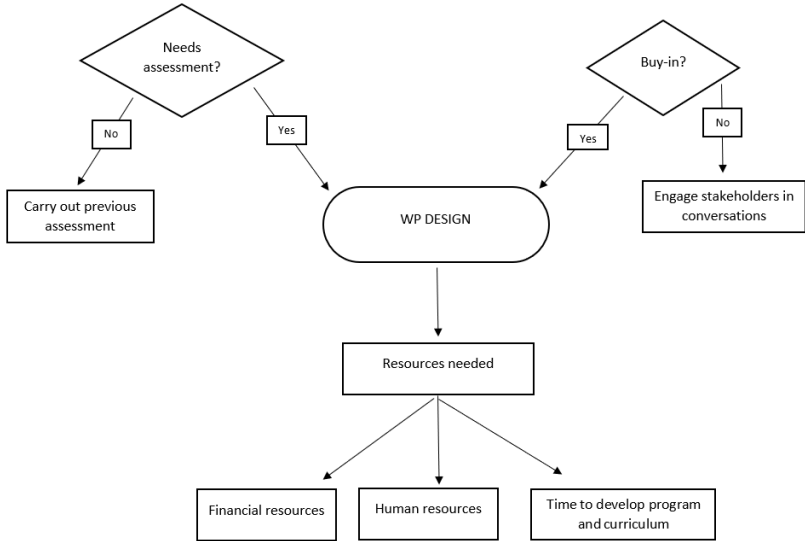
Source: own elaboration

3.2. Implementation of a WP

Following the respondents' advice, a proposal was developed for the implementation of a WP, summarized as a flowchart in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Implementation of a WP

Source: own elaboration

Informants agreed that financial resources to hire staff and faculty and providing time to the lecturers involved in the program are crucial to start a WP.

Moreover, human resources are key, mainly a WP administrator with special aptitudes. In this sense, McLeod (2007) supports the idea that writing at the university almost always takes place within a WP under the supervision of an administrator who will need to deal with staffing and staff development. The proposal therefore suggests hiring administrators who are able to work with the community and who act as initiators of the program.

Furthermore, the flowchart shows faculty are also a necessary resource in WPs. Specifically, disciplinary faculty are the experts in writing in their field and should teach students to write in a specific discipline, since they are more concerned with disciplinary knowledge. Writing specialists, for their part, should work in collaboration with disciplinary faculty in order to train them how writing works in general (Montes & Vidal Lizama, 2017) and to help them integrate writing in

their courses and have ownership in their class. In order to do this, results show that faculty development is implemented mainly through workshops, as confirmed by quite a few studies (Bazerman et al., 2005; McLeod, 2007), as well as external consulting. A budget is also necessary to invest in faculty development and infrastructure, as shown in this flowchart.

Finally, the proposal also suggests providing time to the faculty involved in the program, like for example reduction in their teaching load.

3.3. Assessment of a WP

The interviews have revealed that assessment is necessary to monitor WPs, even though it is not always compulsory to do so. External evaluation is necessary for state or national accreditation, whereas internal assessment aims to get the perceptions of students and faculty, promote the faculty, meet some state requirements and conduct other kinds of internal controls. In this regard, previous studies agree that assessment should be local and contextual (Barlow et al., 2007; Johnson, 2014; Lannin et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2009), as these programs must be aligned with the institutional context and must meet the needs of the community, which has been emphasized by the respondents. The proposal, summarized in Figure 3, agrees with that and specifies different procedures and variables that could be valid, even though their convenience depends on each institution.

Figure 3
Assessment of a WP
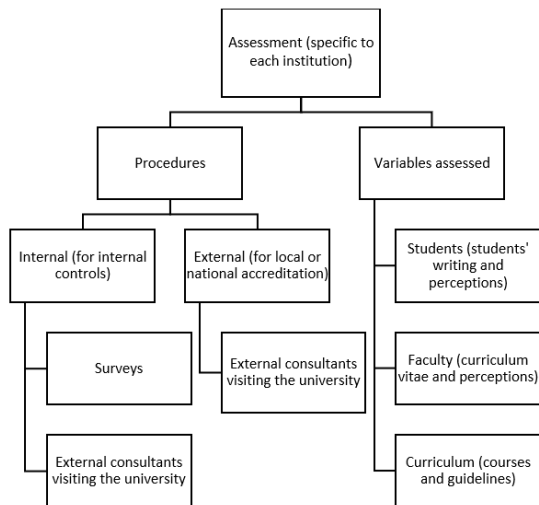
Source: own elaboration

Moreover, since a coordinated assessment should take place at all sites where writing takes place, instead of focusing on a specific course (Wardle & Roozen, 2012), this flowchart suggests not only assessing student writing, but also evaluating the faculty and the curriculum in general.

This proposal shows specific procedures and variables but should be carefully applied according to the specific context of the institution.

Discussion

This paper aimed to describe the key elements of WPs in order to provide a transversal tool for professionals interested in implementing this type of initiatives. Although diverse projects are conducted in universities around the world, the aim was to collect

information from US researchers, as the US has a long tradition of development of institutional programs across the curriculum.

To reach that aim, a qualitative method was followed to delve into the experts´ arguments. Information provided was used to create a framework for guiding the creation of WPs, which will be relevant in the Spanish context, where there is a need to promote writing. However, the framework was designed to be useful for any researcher, as guidelines can be applied to diverse contexts, thus providing a tool for WP design in any country.

First, the concept of good writing was explored since it is relevant to determine the aims of the WP to be developed and the strategies to be taught. In this sense, the literature confirms the results of the study, as some authors believe there are no absolutes in good writing (Huck, 2015) and it has several profiles (Crossley et al., 2014). Writing is a situated activity, so better than classifying the writing as good or bad, the question is how effective it is for the context it is produced (Williams, 2016).

When teaching writing, respondents mainly use the rhetorical, context and genre approaches, which share the objective to make students aware that they write to accomplish certain functions (Cheung, 2016). Writing is a difficult task involving complex cognitive processes and strategies need to be taught. However, even though these strategies enable students to use effective procedures for particular standards (certain rules of punctuation, grammar, rhetorical situations...), it has not been demonstrated they promote "anything so broad and subjective as, say, good writing" (Huck, 2015, p. 25). Teaching should therefore be taught within a context, as reinforced by the informants.

Although some results of this study are widely known in the field and do not need to be analyzed in detail, the aim was to provide decision-makers with an overview of the different steps and key aspects of WP design, in case they need to start from scratch. Therefore, engaging stakeholders in conversations and getting buy-in are key in the initial phase of the program, as well as carrying out previous

assessment. Financial and human resources will also be necessary, as proved by respondents and the literature on the field.

The interviews have also shown that most universities in the US have writing requirements and require lower-division (mainly first-year composition) or upper-division courses. However, previous studies have proved that requiring first-year composition does not mean students will be prepared for the writing they will do later in their studies and beyond the university (Wardle, 2007). In this regard, there are differences of opinion between experts who advocate for first-year writing and those against it, based on the idea that writing is not a transferrable skill. As shown by Wardle (2007), there is little evidence that the knowledge and skills provided by first-year writing can transfer to other courses.

In this sense, Bazerman et al. (2005) state that viewing writing as a situated activity has led researchers to support the abolition of first-year writing and to embed all writing in disciplinary courses. Therefore, as a complement to first-year composition, disciplinary faculty have become more engaged in the teaching of writing in their disciplines. Writing experts, in turn, as shown in the results, train disciplinary faculty to help them facilitate students' learning of the discipline through the practice of writing (Russell, 2013), since content faculty are the experts in their field.

The results also show that the theory about WAC and WID is not so clear to all experts. In this regard, the theory shows that WAC sees writing as an integral part of the student's learning process across the curriculum and not only in a single writing course (International Network of WAC Programs, 2014) and promotes the epistemological role of writing as a means to create knowledge (writing to learn) (Carlino, 2011). On the other hand, WID raises awareness of the specific texts of each discipline and its genres (Núñez-Román & Gallardo-Saborido, 2017) and promotes the role of writing as a way to teach the characteristics of a specific field of studies (learning to write) (Carlino, 2011). The interviews have also provided evidence that WAC and WID are almost interchangeable and complementary and

sometimes difficult to differentiate. Finally, respondents highlighted the distinction between writing to learn/informal writing (WAC) and learning to write/formal writing (WID), as supported by the theory.

Regarding who owns writing at the university, even though composition had traditionally been located in the English department since the late 19th century, now English has become more focused on literature (Bazerman et al., 2005; McLeod, 2007) and more and more universities have independent WPs all around the US. In this sense, respondents advised not to host courses within the English department or its equivalent in Spain, as writing has a secondary status in relation to literature.

Even though this issue about whether or not to house writing within the English department was mentioned by informants, this is a local question affecting US institutions mainly. However, a transversal discussion must be initiated when designing WPs as to make a decision about implementing an independent program or situating it within a department. This can be then extrapolated and adapted to different contexts, as decision-makers need to determine whether independent WPs could facilitate incorporating all disciplines in the teaching of writing.

In addition, results suggest there is a concern about the reputation of WCs. In this regard, Bazerman et al. (2005) confirm that almost all WCs focus on learning to write rather than just providing correction service to students. However, in order to be a useful complement to WPs, WCs should be aligned with other writing on campus and should serve writing across the university.

European WCs have developed with the Bologna Process, which has promoted the collaboration of writing and disciplinary faculty (Göpferich, 2016) and the integration of writing in content courses. Spanish universities, however, have only recently started to offer writing support through WCs and even though some universities have been implementing different projects to embed writing in specific courses for the last years (Ballano & Muñoz, 2014, 2015; Romero

Oliva, 2014), these are not university-wide initiatives and constitute isolated experiences.

There is a concern for the writing skills of students and for the need to integrate them in the community of writers of their fields of study and this is proved by the increasing number of researchers in the teaching of academic writing (Castelló, 2014). Furthermore, the creation of the European Higher Education Area has led to educational reforms that make it necessary to address the question of academic writing. However, resources at universities are still scarce and there is not much institutional support for the development of this kind of programs. This study sheds light on how WC and WP are run in the US and helps with the creation of WPs not only in Spain but worldwide.

This study also has some limitations such as the fact that informants did not know the Spanish higher education system and could not give specific advice to be applied in this context. However, they all agreed the institutional culture is key, as something that works at one university may not be effective at another, even in the same country. Another limitation is the fact that the experts lived all around the US and some interviews were held online, which at some point made interactions more difficult. Nevertheless, as the aim was to reach the highest number of universities possible, this could not be avoided. Finally, another limitation is not having included any European professional, although some universities in the UK and other countries in Continental Europe have been running excellent WPs and WCs in the last decades and the university system may be more similar to the Spanish system. This would have made the sample too big, though, so it was decided to limit the study to US universities, where there is a long tradition of embedding writing throughout the curriculum.

Future studies should address these questions and should focus on WP design within a specific context to improve the students' writing skills in their discipline, as well as on the faculty development to help faculty integrate writing in their courses.

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