

Lessons Learned in Establishing a University Global Course

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Abstract

This paper outlines the creation, implementation, and subsequent development of a Global Leadership course at a national university in Japan. In 2014, our university in central Japan, with the encouragement of Japan's Ministry of Education, established a Global Leadership course for elite students. The purpose was to foster leadership and develop relations with other Asian countries using English. Students accepted into the program take supplementary English classes and participate in a foreign internship. The application was open to all matriculated graduates. Since the establishment of the Global Course, adjustments have been made to improve the application procedure, academic rigor, and assessment. The authors address the adaptations that have been made to improve the Global Course program, particularly the application process and method of selection as well as some changes made to the curriculum.

Keywords: *Global leadership, intercultural communication, language proficiency, motivation.*

Introduction

In 2014, our university was encouraged to create a Global Leadership course by the Japanese Ministry of Education. The program involves supplementary classes including courses in English culminating in an overseas internship. In the first year, 15 Japanese students were selected to take these courses along with foreign students from China, Vietnam, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, and Taiwan. Among many objectives, the university hoped that these students would develop intercultural communication skills and a deeper knowledge of each other's cultures. For this paper, the English instructors who have been with the program since its inception will

reflect on the development of the program with a focus on the English language component. The challenges of the selection process, administrative obstacles, and the presentation and academic writing components of the course will be examined in more detail. Finally, there will be a reflection on the experience, a look at the future of the program, and some advice concerning starting a global course.

There was a basic agreement among Global Course committee members about what courses should entail and what type of students to admit. Everyone agreed the ideal candidates should have motivation, maturity, and English ability. Questions remained about how to evaluate candidates while keeping the procedure open to

all students. A secondary issue was the content and objectives of the new English courses.

It was readily apparent to the committee members that this was a long-term project and that changes and adjustments would have to be made. As Graves (2006, 2007) posits, curriculum, and course design are dynamic. The English instructors knew that for this course to improve some sort of monitoring was necessary. We were aware that embarking on a new course would inevitably entail encountering errors. As English language educators, our main duties revolved around two key aspects: the careful selection of students and the creation and maintenance of the English curriculum. Given the uncertain proficiency levels of the students, we found it necessary to make ongoing adjustments as the course progressed.

Employing Markee's (1997) linkage model, we considered bottom-up feedback from our students, consultation with other instructors, and our own observations and experiences to help make adjustments to the course but remain committed to the general principles set by the university. This practical approach provided a useful framework to help guide the changes needed to improve the course.

The Selection Process

The initial major challenge was determining the selection process for the Japanese students. All incoming first-year students in the Faculty of Economics were eligible to apply. Shortly after the students were enrolled, they were sent an explanation of the program and were offered an introduction orientation conducted bilingually by the Dean of the Faculty of Economics. Surprisingly over one hundred students applied and attended the orientation in each of the first two years of the program.

The selection process was complicated by the fact that there were only a few days before the start of the semester to screen the would-be participants. The program was unable to rely on traditional methods of evaluation (Turner & Phillips, 2007) since the students would be evaluated in both Japanese and English. The applicants were asked to write essays in Japanese to explain why they should be considered for the Global Course. Later, group interviews were conducted in both English and Japanese and each faculty member evaluated the students based on their responses. As there were over 100 applicants, it was decided to conduct interviews in groups of five students at a time. In the end, 15 students were selected for the initial cohort of students after much deliberation as each faculty member had different criteria for selection. Of less debate were the classes to be conducted in English. In the first year, students were to take Essay Writing I and II and Presentation I and II. In the second year, those same students would take Academic Writing I and II and Modern Presentation and Debate.

The results after the first year were mixed. The English proficiency level of the students varied greatly. There were also issues with motivation and life-balance choices. In the end, four students dropped out of the course. While the true reasons for dropping the course will never be known, three of the students claimed they were confused or dissatisfied with foreign internship arrangements.

The following year, some changes were made in the selection process. First, the course and its additional workload were explained in greater detail. Second, a timed English essay writing activity was introduced. Essay writing has been known as an accurate indicator of English proficiency (Jacobs et al., 1981). From over 100 essays, readers chose the best 30, and those candidates were interviewed.

This in turn provided more time to screen the applicants during the interview process. In general, the committee thought that this helped us select the most suitable and qualified students. There were fewer dropouts, and the academic performance of the students was noticeably better.

Selection has evolved since then. One major change was to have the selection of the students occur after the first semester. The idea was that instructors would be more familiar with the students from working with them in their introductory English classes and we could recommend outstanding students to apply for the program. Unfortunately, there were negative results from this decision. In earlier years, there was a larger pool of applicants, but after this change was made, the number of initial applicants was reduced by roughly half. We theorized that students had gotten into a regular routine in their college lives meaning that they had become busy with after-school activities, part-time jobs, and joining school clubs and circles. Many students did not wish to make their lives significantly busier. Despite this, the performance level of the course members remained high (possibly due to strong motivation and a better understanding of what was expected of them).

Also, because the course now starts in the second semester, students would get three semesters of G-Course English coursework instead of four. This is a 25% cut in classroom time. As a result, a debate course and a writing course were dropped. To overcome the lost classroom time, the English instructors decided to increase the workload in the remaining classes to compensate for the hours lost due to the cuts.

Further changes occurred in 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interview portion of the application process was halted. Instead,

students wrote essays in Japanese and took the CASEC test. CASEC is a standardized English language proficiency test that gives an equivalent TOEIC score. Fortunately, we screened and selected students to continue the Global Course. We repeated this process for the selection in 2021, again due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Presentation Classes

There have been some changes to the content of the presentation component of the courses. Initially, the courses were set up to have the students advance from giving standard PowerPoint-style presentations to more modern dynamic presentations. In Presentation II and Modern Presentation, students were asked to give presentations on self-selected topics. The idea was to prepare them for the Debate class in the final semester of the course. Students researched and presented on current events or other “hot topics” in the news. They were encouraged to become more knowledgeable about the topics they would later be asked to debate. With the debate course eliminated, students were asked to give response presentations to be exposed to more than one view on any given topic. In addition, the amount of homework was increased. Students were now asked to write summaries and be prepared to talk about 45 TED Talks instead of 30. While some students balked at the increase, others exceeded expectations and did more than was required as they began to recognize the benefits of this task.

The most significant change was the addition of another presentation instructor. The addition of another teacher allowed for the class to be split in half which therefore allowed more time for students to present. As a bonus, the teacher who joined the course was a TED Talk veteran. His skills as a public speaker

added another voice to provide feedback and advice. Another significant change is that some students now have opportunities to give presentations outside the classroom. In the past two years, selected students from the course have given presentations to wider audiences, mostly at regularly held PechaKucha events hosted by another university in Japan. In addition, Global Course students have had the opportunity to volunteer at a TED Talk event and learn more presentation skills firsthand.

Essay Writing and Academic Writing Classes

Writing has evolved since the first year of the Global Course in 2014. Students are doing more and longer essays. The classes have added more communicative activities, such as peer review and group writing activities. Reading skills are also a focus. Intensive reading of newspaper articles and summarizing, explaining, and reporting are also now part of the essay writing courses. Various genres of essays are explored and practiced. Special emphasis is placed on the persuasive essay, including refutations and concessions. Some of these activities share the content taught in the presentation classes. Timed writings of ten minutes on various topics are important to have students process the topic in English and focus on content and speed over form for these imperfect writings. In response to student needs, the writing courses include some essay writing in the style of the TOEFL and IELTS standardized tests. Most of the Global Course students take these tests in order to apply to programs abroad.

Additional Challenges

There have been several other challenges that we still must continue to address. These

include but are not limited to faculty member changes, number of students, dropout/ failure rate, and also the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Retirement, job transfers, and new hires have resulted in a regular change in the makeup of the Global Course committee members. With each change comes a different set of ideas. This has caused some minor differences in opinion and productive debate. About half the original members have been involved from the beginning (including the authors of this paper). Some of the core economics and business classes taught at the university are now taught in English, so new members have been recruited from faculty who have overseas experience and are essentially bilingual.

Another problem we are monitoring is the dropout/ failure rate. Almost every year since the course was established, at least one student has dropped out or failed to meet the requirements of the program. When we switched to a second-semester start, we thought this would help us separate the students who have difficulty living alone, adapting to university life, or are struggling academically. Unfortunately, even after the change, other problems arose. While most of the Global Students become close friends and spend time together, students sometimes isolate themselves. This could be for a myriad of reasons, but ultimately, we would like to see a 100% success rate.

Conclusion

After examining some of the challenges and adaptations made to the university's Global Course, the overall results are positive. Many of the students who have completed the Global Course have been very successful. Almost all the students have either studied abroad and/or

experienced overseas internships. Many have gone on to attend graduate schools including the London School of Economics and UC-Berkley. Some graduates have been employed by top global corporations, while others have gone into public service. For example, two G-Course students have been hired by JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency), which is one of the most competitive jobs to acquire. We recognize the need to do more detailed qualitative research on the students who have completed the course. The success of our students has helped raise the profile of the course as well as the university. Just as importantly, the students have made friends from around the world and have indeed become more globally aware, achieving one of the main objectives of the program.

Three megatrends that will increase the demand for global leaders have been identified by Gundling et al. (2011). These trends include the significant and ongoing population growth in developing countries, shifts in GDP between developing and developed countries, and the rapid urbanization occurring in Africa and Asia. Meeting this demand is crucial, and the college classroom serves as an excellent starting point, considering that language acquisition and intercultural understanding require a significant amount of time. We would strongly encourage other universities to offer a Global Course. Such a program has the potential to attract more ambitious, potential global leaders. It also improves the reputation of the university, as the high-achieving students boost the profile of the university within the community, with employers, and with other universities. It takes a committed effort from faculty and staff as well as extra work for instructors, but the rewards and satisfaction can make that effort worthwhile for students and faculty.

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