

A Study in the Development of the Program for Incoming International Students in the Department of English Language Education, Tamagawa University

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Abstract

Since 2008, the Department of Comparative Cultures has hosted up to ten students from Evergreen State College, Washington for three weeks a year. With an increasing number of Evergreen students wanting to join the program and the Department of Comparative Cultures being replaced by the Department of English Language Education in 2015, new challenges have arisen. This report describes how our research project sought to find ways of meeting such challenges, chiefly by clarifying the needs and interests of the Evergreen students, but also taking into account changes in the curriculum with the introduction of the new department. Based on these findings, we make recommendations for developing a more viable program.

Keywords : incoming international student programs, “Experience Japan” program, Evergreen State College Washington

Introduction

This project arose from the “Experience Japan” program, which has been conducted by the Department of Comparative Cultures since 2008.¹⁾ Up to ten students from Evergreen State College, Washington participate in the department’s classes and extra-curricular activities for three weeks in late June to early July, while also pursuing their own research projects. More specifically, it is agreed that Tamagawa will provide:

- opportunities to participate in its classes at the Department of Comparative Cultures;
- opportunities for Evergreen students to observe its English classes at different levels and to assist instructors in some of the classes;
- opportunities to arrange social events to promote student interaction from time to time;
- opportunities to visit various clubs on campus and exchange with their members;
- information about home stay and lodging options in Tokyo area for the duration of the program.

With an increasing number of Evergreen students wanting to join the program, and the Department of Comparative Cultures being replaced by the Department of English Language Education, new challenges have arisen. These range from the provision of adequate on-campus accommodation to designing a program that as far as possible matches the academic interests of Evergreen students. The general aim of this project was to find ways of meeting such challenges, chiefly by clarifying the needs and interests of Evergreen students involved in the program, but also taking into account changes in the curriculum, with the introduction of the Department of English Language Education. It is hoped that this research will result (and has already begun to result) in a more viable program, as well as a firmer foundation for possibly increasing numbers of incoming international students in the future.

Research Methods and Activities:

1. **Survey:** On 9th July 2015, a survey was conducted with nine out of the ten Evergreen students who stayed on campus and visited the Department of Comparative Cultures and Department of English Language Education between 19th June and 11th July, 2015. The students were asked to comment on:

- Overall program contents: *good points* (e.g., personal relevance, interesting topics/activities) and *suggestions for improvement*;
- Duration, Timing of Program and Schedule: *suggestions for improvement*;
- Tamagawa student exchange activities and coordination: *good points* and *suggestions for improvement*;
- Accommodation (On-campus house): *good points* and *suggestions for improvement*;
- Other comments (e.g., ambience, university facilities, medical services, costs).

One additional question was asked: *What were your main aims in joining this program, and did you achieve them?*

2. **Visit to Evergreen:** Philip Rowland visited Evergreen State College from 18th November to 21st November 2015, where, as well as observing a class in Japanese cultural studies, he conducted a meeting with ten students, including several who had participated in the program in the previous year and others who were considering participating in 2016. One of the aims was to follow up on the survey given at the end of the 2015 program. Main topics discussed with the students (both as a group and, in several cases, also individually) were the extent to which their stay at Tamagawa helped them with their research projects; their level of interest in English education in

Japan; their experience of studying Japanese language and culture at Evergreen; accommodation and staff support. A meeting was also held with the two of the academic deans and the coordinator of international programs: feedback on past programs was given, current conditions in the Departments of Comparative Cultures and English Language Education were explained, and it was suggested that a process of selecting students for the program be introduced (having previously been done on a first-come, first-served basis). Longer-term possibilities for developing the exchange between Tamagawa and Evergreen were also discussed.

Problems identified: While feedback from Evergreen students was generally positive (especially regarding social interaction with Tamagawa students), the following problems were clearly identified:

- Some of the Evergreen students joined the program without specific interest or experience in Japanese language or culture studies and/or without knowing much about the program in advance. For example, one student's stated aim in joining the program was to focus on "art and business management and how the Japanese intersect the two with manga and anime culture," subjects unrelated to classes offered and research specialisms of professors in the departments. Another student described her decision to join the program as "last-minute," "a sort of last hoorah" before graduating, having "never [previously] thought about going abroad." Additional stated aims related to Japanese film, car culture, architecture, tea ceremony, food, technology – again, topics outside of the scope of the program, although students were of course free to explore them on their own.
- Most of the students felt that they were being used too much as a "tool" to help Tamagawa students with English and/or their understanding of American culture, rather than learning about Japanese culture or language. For example: "It felt as if a lot of the time we were being used as tutors, which is fine, but a little awkward; not much opportunity to learn about the language"; and: "interesting topics, but after a few classes it started to feel like several sessions of 'look at the Americans ... I felt like a broken record explaining about America, Washington, and Olympia over and over again. I would have preferred to participate in the classes as a student rather than as an attraction." Another student acknowledged that while "it's difficult to balance 10 students' varying interests ... I did hope for more intensive Japanese lessons. I ended up acting as a kind of English tutor."
- Most of the students expressed a wish for more English-language assistance with on-campus accommodation.

Changes and improvements decided upon:

- As of March 2016, a selection process has been introduced, in which applicants are interviewed by the coordinator of the program at Evergreen, as well as being required to write an essay in which they explain their reasons for wanting to participate in the program. Priority is now given to students with some experience of studying Japanese and an interest in English language education or language in general. The students' applications are reviewed by program coordinators at Tamagawa before final decisions are made on acceptances.
- Fuller orientation at Evergreen is to be carried out regarding the nature of the program, not least to ensure willingness among participants to observe and assist in English classes.
- Tamagawa Library's collection of books on Japanese culture has been greatly expanded, to enable Evergreen students to explore their own research interests more easily. During the 2016 program, these books, which allow the students to explore a wide range of subject-matter, were prominently displayed near the entrance to the library.
- Volunteers among the department's students will be sought to offer Japanese lessons for the Evergreen students at least twice weekly during their stay. These lessons will be conducted in the Learning Commons area of the library at times agreed upon by the students.
- Formal recognition will be given to the lead volunteers among the students (usually between one and three students), in appreciation of their time and effort in coordinating volunteers, and to enable them to add the experience to their CVs. This may also serve as an incentive for them to take their roles as coordinators seriously.
- More volunteers among faculty will be sought to offer lectures and seminars specifically for the Evergreen students, related to Japanese culture and society and English Language Teaching. In the past, these lectures and seminars have included introductions to Tamagawa University, to Japanese and English-language haiku, and Japanese religion. Responses to these special seminars were particularly positive, and it would be fitting if more were related to ELT.
- From 2017, all departmental classes, whether conducted in English or Japanese, will be open to the Evergreen students for observation during the second and third weeks of their stay, in addition to their attendance at scheduled classes. This change is in response to the expressed wish of a number of students to visit a wider range of classes, including some conducted entirely in Japanese, in order to observe the teaching and

learning styles. During the first week interested students should contact any member of the department whose class they wish to visit.

- The visiting Evergreen coordinator has agreed to assist more on campus, particularly during the students' arrival and departure.
- Notices in English have been added to campus accommodation, to ensure understanding of instructions as regards cleaning, rubbish disposal, and so on.
- Minor changes to the official agreement between Tamagawa and Evergreen are soon to be made, to allow up to ten students to attend (rather than eight, as previously stated), and to remove the obligation to provide "information about home stay and lodging options in Tokyo area for the duration of the program."

Conclusion

Through this project a number of problems were identified and rectified, enabling a more successful program in 2016. Three main areas in need of improvement were found: in program contents, administrative support, and accommodation management. Further recommendations for the improvement of the program are as follows:

- More departmental faculty involvement in the program, not only in opening up more classes for observation, but also in the provision of more seminars specifically for the visiting students, in areas related directly to professors' research areas. This would ensure a more diverse and balanced range of courses for the Evergreen students to visit.
- More involvement of administrative staff at Tamagawa, to assist with practical matters such as transportation on arrival and departure, accommodation issues (possibly including supervision of home stay arrangements), healthcare, and the collection of receipts for purchases by student volunteers in support of the program. Ideally, these assistants would be staff at the Centre for International Programs, who already have experience with university-wide, outgoing programs. This would allow faculty coordinators to concentrate more on the academic and student-managed sides of the program.
- It would be helpful to have at least one English-speaking member of staff among accommodation managers, particularly to facilitate communication in cases of difficulty or emergency.

Topics and questions for longer-term consideration are as follows:

- The feasibility of involving administrative staff at the Centre for International Programs in departmental programs for incoming international students. Currently, such

programs are managed almost entirely by academic staff, whose experience and expertise in these areas may be limited, their primary duties and skills being in teaching and research.

- In the absence of modern, on-campus dormitory accommodation and Japanese language teaching in the program, incoming international students may be better served by home stay accommodation. This would enable a greater sense of immersion in Japanese culture and better opportunities for Japanese language practice.
- In view of their diverse interests in Japanese language and culture, Evergreen students could be better served if the “Experience Japan” program became a faculty or inter-faculty program, rather than one restricted to the Department of English Language Education. This would necessitate significant revision to the contract between the two universities, but as far as Evergreen is concerned, this change would pose no difficulty. The expansion would be particularly appropriate following the establishment of the Department of Japanese Language Education within the College of Humanities in 2017, leading to more Tamagawa students doing Japanese teaching practice at Evergreen and thus, more of an exchange. Moreover, the Department of English Language Education’s curriculum introduces more English-oriented course content. The Faculty of Liberal Arts might also have courses in which the incoming students would be interested.
- Alternatively, the program could be kept within the Department of English Language Education, with a restricted focus on English Language Teaching. Strictly speaking, this would create a more balanced exchange program, as the only Tamagawa students who are eligible to visit Evergreen are those who have already reached a certain stage of the Japanese language teaching course, and the primary purpose of their visit is Japanese teaching practice and observation. (See footnote 1, above.) On the other hand, requiring Evergreen students to be actively interested in ELT in Japan would undoubtedly reduce the number of applicants.

With these recommendations in mind, it is hoped that continued work on developing the program will enable a closer correspondence between Evergreen students’ interests and the Department of English Language Education’s profile in teaching and research, as well as helping to pave the way for new programs for incoming international students in the future.

Note

- 1) This is in fact an exchange program, in which Tamagawa students on the Japanese teaching course can visit Evergreen State College for three weeks in February or March, in order to observe and

practice teaching Japanese classes. However, the focus of this study is on the incoming side of the exchange, which has been much more active than the outgoing. The number of Evergreen students wishing to join the program has been steadily increasing, while the number of Tamagawa students visiting Evergreen has been erratic and decreasing overall, due to tight restrictions on eligibility and inconvenient timing for students at the end of their third year. In short, the outgoing side of the program has a narrower focus than the incoming – an issue outside the scope of this study but needing to be addressed.

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文学部英語教育学科における海外からの学生 受け入れプログラム展開に関する研究

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要 約

2008年以來、文学部比較文化学科は米国ワシントン州立エヴァーグリーン大学から10名程度の学生を3週間にわたり受け入れてきた。近年参加希望者は増加傾向にあり、改組により2015年度より英語教育学科が開設されて以降もプログラムは継続している。本研究は、受け入れ学科のカリキュラムが変わったなかで生じた新たな課題を明らかにしたうえで、プログラムに参加したエヴァーグリーン大学生の日本文化への関心とニーズを分析し、プログラムを安定的に運営していくための提言を行うものである。

キーワード：海外からの学生受け入れ、「日本経験」プログラム、ワシントン州立エヴァーグリーン大学