Managing a Writing Center in Japan
A Case of Osaka Jogakuin College

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Introduction
Now in Japan there are more universities offering content courses taught through English. These are not merely conversation courses, but courses where essays and research papers in English are required. However, a number of studies have pointed out that it is not easy for many Japanese learners of English to write essays and research papers in English (Bamford, 1993; Gorsuch, 1998, 2001). Thus, not surprisingly, more Japanese universities have begun examining ways of supporting students in these English assignments. One way to do this is through the establishment of writing centers to help students with their writing. However, although U.S universities have a fairly long history of operating writing centers, there are only a limited number of studies on writing centers in Japan. Furthermore, it is not appropriate to try to move the U.S. model to Japan since Japan is more of an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context and not an English as a Second Language (ESL) one as in the U.S. The researchers, then, started the project that aims to investigate university writing centers in Japan and abroad in order to explore the fittest model writing centers in the Japanese EFL context. This project has been granted by Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (Kakenhi) as a three-year project, “Research on the Establishment and Management of Writing Centers in Japan— from the EFL Perspectives”.

Purpose of the Project
The purpose of this project has three threads with the aim to suggest models of writing centers appropriate for the Japanese context. The first goal is to investigate the roles and functions of the university writing centers in Japan and abroad in the EFL/ESL context. The second is to explore desirable writing centers in Japan by analyzing longitudinal data obtained in one existing writing center. The third is to analyze the roles and structures of the writing centers whose demands are expected to increase in the near future.

Purpose of this Presentation
Among the three project goals, this presentation reports the case of a writing center at Osaka Jogakuin College (OJC) in Japan. The report includes the descriptions of the writing center of OJC as well as numerous attempts to improve the writing center in order to meet institutional and students’ needs since its establishment in 2004. Relevant information and
references on starting and managing writing centers will be also provided.

The Writing Center of OJC

OJC is a liberal arts college with about 1000 students. Students in the four-year college major in International & English Interdisciplinary Studies and students in the two-year college major in English. It is one of the few colleges in Japan where most of the courses are taught through English and students have many writing assignments including essays, summaries, and research papers. The six-day writing center was established in April 2004 when the four-year university was established. Prior to that, there was a "writing center" one evening a week. The writing center is part of the SelfAccess & Study Support Center (SASSC) which includes Japanese tutors, a Grammar Exam Workshop and a Phonetics Exam Workshop.

The targeted students of OJC's writing center are all students in the college. The writing center aims to help students with writing, presentations and applications for studying in their semester abroad program as well as with students' discussion projects. In the year 2008-2009, it employed four part-time native English teachers to work in the writing center. It is open after most courses ended from 17:00 to 20:00 Monday through Friday and in the afternoon on Saturday with 15-minute sessions. In addition, as part of the research on the writing center, it had hours during the day in the fall 2008 semester.

The Data

There are multiple sources of data. These include writing center tutors' descriptions of the sessions, data on the number of visits and the purposes of the visits, student feedback on their visits, as well as questionnaires on students' perceptions toward the writing center. The results of the data analyses will be discussed in the presentation.

References


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