

Monitoring/Mentoring vs. Muddling/Meddling Finding the Right Tenor to Nurture English for Intercultural Leadership Honors Students

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Abstract

ESP by its very name is a highly specified area of instruction. The usual assumption is that learners in an ESP group share the same specialization. What happens when instructors need to monitor and mentor a diverse group of students? In 2013, Hirosaki University established the Hayabusa College honors program to cultivate future leaders with cross-cultural competency. The authors will describe the program and process using actual case studies. They will explain the monitoring and mentoring techniques employed in the administration of the program. They will share the various pre-departure language learning approaches and cross-cultural training techniques utilized. And, finally, the authors will offer case studies and detail how the faculty has helped students get ready for presentations on research topics.

Key words: ESP, EAP, mentoring

I. Introduction

A. HIROSAKI Hayabusa College – Overview

HIROSAKI Hayabusa College (hereinafter “Hayabusa”) is a special program open to students in all Hirosaki University departments designed to raise their awareness of the world. Hayabusa strives to promote internationalization, and in turn, develop the ability to cope with domestic issues. Launched in 2013, the program has already trained three generations of students who aspire to make contributions to both the nation and the world.

Although limited to a select few, Hayabusa participants study for 3-4 weeks, free of charge, in both an English-speaking country and a country in Asia. The goal is, in two years, to get students, sometimes starting out at an intermediate level to be able to reach TOEFL iBT 68 or TOEIC 645 and be capable of delivering a professional 15-minute presentation, followed by a research paper in English on a topic that combines their academic pursuits with their cross-cultural experiences. Students are selected for their international perspectives and their leadership capabilities. Hayabusa offers a great opportunity for students with limited financial resources to gain extraordinary international experience during their university years.

The initial three groups that have made up the program thus far have included 17 students; five students to start with, followed by two groups of six. Prior to going abroad, the students took part in global studies courses in the university’s language center, the English Lounge (hereinafter “EL”). They also attended lectures offered in English among the International Exchange courses, whereby they studied together with international students.

The curriculum is designed to start in the fall of the freshman year and be completed in the summer of the junior year. This schedule was designed to create avoid conflict, as much as possible, with most major courses, making it available to students from different faculties.

The design of the program is 1) students attend a number of English communication and cross-cultural classes; for example, the students might take classes on communication and cross-cultural competence in

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English, as well as international exchange courses such as Japanese literature, Regional Japan, Japanese Society, or International Studies, etc., 2) after completing the two study-abroad trips, they make presentations and write final papers in English in their respective fields of expertise.

B. The three key goals of Hayabusa College.

When the university submitted its plan to the MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, Japan) it stated that the program aims for participants to achieve three main goals.

First, the ability to communicate in English. By the end of the program, the student should be able to attain the equivalent of TOEFL iBT 68 or higher. Due to the variety of majors and background, the organizers have developed a lenient policy, so that students can submit the results of an alternative standardized test such as the TOEIC. Second, to have two opportunities to study abroad. Every participant has traveled to two different countries for the past three programs. They've been to New Zealand and Korea. This helps the students to develop their perspectives as global citizens, trying to achieve a balance between East and West. Before traveling abroad, they take classes on subjects such as Tsugaru art or Japanese literature together with international students. One purpose of this is to increase their self-awareness and their own national identity. The third purpose is to take their newly developed cultural competence and apply it to an oral presentation and a final research paper. In addition to this, they are expected to make a presentation to the student body describing their trips, as a way to give back to the university.

As the English Lounge faculty, we actively play roles in the program. In principle, we work together with the Japanese Language and Culture group. However, we're responsible for the lion's share of interaction with students.

II. Mentoring Plusses

A. Instilling Core Values

The intimate nature of the small Hayabusa groups present a unique opportunity to work closely with students, instill core values toward the language, and encourage them to maintain a daily English habit. Their first directive is to speak, listen, read and write more. In addition to activities in communication classes, they maintain an e-mail relationship with the mentor, exchanging two to three messages per week. This allows the facilitator to respond to students both for the purposes of getting to know them better and modifying their language usage. The mentor employs Counseling Learning (Curran, 1972) techniques to reframe the language of the original e-mail in the response. In addition, students enroll in the e-learning program, "EnglishCentral," which encourages them to practice all skills frequently outside of the classroom. The mentor is able to suggest courses and video clips for the Hayabusa EnglishCentral course and can audit each student's speaking practice from time to time, as a facilitator of the course.

B. Establishing a Baseline

The mentor has each student find the approximate number of words in his/her vocabulary, by taking the short quiz on the website Testyourvocab.com. This site helps students determine their overall vocabulary level with very little effort. The results create a baseline through which they will be able to measure improvement in their language skills tangibly.

C. Organizing projects

1. Family Feud

Students are introduced to a form of project-based learning. During their communication courses they collect domestic data and conduct a trial run for their "Family Feud" project. Then, in New Zealand, they survey people for the formal version. Family Feud is a quiz show that is based on a survey of 100 people. Each of the students surveys a segment of the 100 to create an answer base for other university students and staff to play the game at a later point. Employing a PowerPoint template available online, students create an actual game shows with sound effects. Some students work behind the scenes setting up the slideshow and grouping similar answers into global categories. When actually playing the game, members of the group take turns acting as the emcee. A strong benefit of the project is that it is socially acceptable to ask a complete

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stranger to take a short survey for “a school project.” This is an excellent tool to give students the confidence to approach people outside of their circle of peers and have a short interaction.

2. Study Abroad Presentations

Following their trips abroad students give oral presentations. One project involved creating an interactive quiz using audio response clickers (“Turning Technologies”) Students chose the topic of “New Zealand Slang” and were highly motivated to participate in this project.

III. Mentoring Minuses and Limitations

The biggest drawback to mentoring is that it is extremely time-consuming for the faculty. It requires many hours of individual attention. With group of five or six it is highly manageable, but the program is being revamped and may increase exponentially, especially in the early phase of the program, which contains the communication courses.

Another issue is the age-old leading the horse to water phenomenon. The educator can only do so much with a student not interested in taking advantage of the personalized opportunities. While this is not the fault of the mentoring program itself, it explains why the experience can be so varied among participants.

In the past some students signed up for uber-mentoring and were part of a program called “Superstars,” where they had extra lessons on Skype and worked on some individual study projects. Looking at the program as a whole, the degree to which students engaged in mentoring has varied greatly among the individuals involved. However, it is difficult to imagine what the facilitator’s schedule would have looked like had all of the participants utilized every mentoring opportunity available.

IV. Minimizing Muddling, Maximizing Monitoring

A. The need for continued English study

Analyzing various cases of participants (Berman, 2016) at later junctures in the program, it appears that one downside in the program structure is not holding the students accountable for actively maintaining their English abilities after the study abroad component of the program. Suggestions have been made to improve this aspect of the program and offer some monitoring of continued student progress in English.

B. The imperative for stronger faculty guidance and cohesion

Another pitfall of the program may lie in lack of clear leadership and differences in philosophy between the language educators (faculty of the EL) and the Japanese language and culture faculty of the international “Center” (the Center name has changed repeatedly). The Center teachers have advocated less “hand holding,” despite the positive results of the mentoring by EL faculty. In theory having the students become more independent learners is attractive. Unfortunately, the potentially independent stage of the program occurs when students are just starting to be immersed in their major studies and their growing independent becomes tantamount to ignoring their obligations to Hayabusa and letting their English level slide. It seems that students end up drowning in too much freedom, so perhaps they would benefit from just dipping their toes in the water of independence while still maintaining a strong connection to their language mentors and the program parameters.

V. Conclusion

Hayabusa is still a young program. The first three generations have experienced opulence in both the financial and educational aspects of the program. The university is looking to increase numbers and decrease the per capita financial support. The larger numbers will make it impossible for the limited English education faculty to maintain the level of individual care it has offered in the past. Nonetheless, as those that have taken advantage of the mentoring and consultation begin to join the workforce, it is a safe bet that they are far better prepared to take their place as global citizens than they were before participating in Hayabusa.

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