Report on Proposed Writing Center
at University of Tokyo, Komaba Campus

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Part 1—Project overview
I would like to thank those at the University of Tokyo, Komaba campus who were responsible for my visit. I had a very enjoyable and interesting stay with excellent lodgings and warm hospitality. This was my first trip to Japan, and I received a wonderful first impression of both the university and the city.

I was invited to University of Tokyo, Komaba campus by Professor Yujin Yaguchi who asked me to consult with him and some of his fellow faculty on strategies for the proposed writing center. I have over fifteen years experience as an instructor of college composition courses in the US (University of Houston, Houston Community College, and University of Hawai'i) where I have also worked in a writing center and served on curriculum development committees.

Professor Yaguchi requested that I discuss American college composition courses and writing lab philosophies and methods. He was particularly interested in the different expectations for writing in English as opposed to writing in Japanese. Academic writing in English requires students to be able to structure original, thesis-driven arguments with adequate, logical, and convincing support. This is often especially difficult for foreign students who have been differently trained to think and write. It was my understanding that the Writing Center Committee had been formed in response to a general sentiment amongst faculty that student writing needed to be strengthened and that the goal of the committee was to research and set up a writing center at the Komaba campus. I was told that committee members had done some preliminary research in American university writing centers, but that the models investigated were not necessarily adaptable to University of Tokyo needs or circumstances.

Between 6/20 and 6/24, I gave two public presentations. The first presentation, "Teaching Introductory Academic Writing," was to given to faculty involved with the writing center. It focused on philosophies and methodologies for teaching academic writing and the function of academic writing centers in American universities. The second presentation, was co-presented to students with Professor Mari Yoshihara, and the subject was academic writing in the United States. I also had several informal meetings with Professor Yaguchi, other faculty, and several graduate students.

Part 2—American University Writing Courses and Centers
In American universities, the primary function of a writing center is to support writing curriculum. Both are often administered through composition divisions of English departments although some writing centers exist independently of English departments.

Courses in academic writing
Writing curriculum in the U.S. usually consists of one to two mandatory composition courses to be taken by first year college students with more advanced courses available within particular disciplines. The mandatory composition courses are designed to prepare students in all disciplines for academic writing tasks from essays to research papers (see composition guidelines in appendix). A two-semester approach is usually divided into one semester focused on short essay composition (from narratives to arguments) and a semester devoted to rhetorical analysis and writing research papers. A one-semester approach combines these goals into a single semester. In each course, students are generally expected to write a minimum of 6,000 words in informal and formal, graded and ungraded writing.

Undergraduate writing courses have certain goals in common:
- Instilling the importance of writing in all disciplines
- Instilling the importance of revision in good writing
- Developing student writing that is coherent and complex
- Developing student resourcefulness and autonomy in writing
- Expanding student skills to include a variety of writing tasks and situations
- Developing critical thinking skills
- Teaching research skills and documentation

A variety of methods are used for teaching writing, and most current methods combine elements from approaches introduced in the last two decades. In general, these approaches have evolved from text-based to student to community-based methods. Most of the methods currently being used consider writing as a process as much as a product and encourage students to revise their work repeatedly. Peer edit groups are a crucial element in this process. There are many good textbooks that detail the use of peer edit groups in the classroom (see attached list of sample texts in appendix).

Writing centers
In writing centers, writing support is principally done through tutoring students on an individual basis, usually in ½ to ¾ hour sessions on a walk-in or appointment basis. While in the past writing centers were staffed by faculty, many universities now utilize peer editors in tutoring labs, relying on honors students or graduate students who receive academic credit or pay for their time. These editors act as writing coaches rather than instructors, and are carefully trained in how to interact with students and their writing in a non-interventionist, non-directive way that motivates students to take responsibility for their own work. Although it is difficult to measure the effects of tutoring quantitatively, writing center staff claim that one of the chief advantages is that students tend to be more forthcoming with a tutor and in a tutoring setting than with a professor and in class. There are many good guides to tutoring philosophy and methods. Writing centers may also present workshops and provide access to computer and text-based writing resources.

Part 3--Assessment

The following is my assessment of the available resources and potential challenges for creating an effective writing center:

AVAILABLE RESOURCES:
- Funding for development
- Space
- Motivated faculty
- Advanced technology
- Technologically adept faculty
- Pilot course in fall of 2005 (to be taught by Prof. Paul Rossiter)

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:
- No writing curriculum
- No designated director/staff
- Rigidity of current curriculum
- Emphasis on quantitative testing
- Lack of assessment tools
- Faculty resistance

Despite potential obstacles, there is clear potential for the creation of a successful writing center. The University of Tokyo, Komaba campus does not have a mandatory, standardized writing curriculum in place in either English or Japanese, and its students ideally need to develop writing proficiency in more than one language. To attend to these needs, the writing center concept should be adapted from the American model to the unique needs and circumstances at the University of Tokyo. Along with or instead of a separate writing curriculum, a writing intensive approach to existing classes in the core curriculum might be considered, modeled on the writing intensive courses currently taught at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (for more information, go to resources link).

Part 4--Recommendations

I recommend that the writing center committee take the following incremental approach:

    1. Contract a consultant to implement the following steps.

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    2. Conduct a needs assessment survey of faculty and students. A survey will serve the dual purpose of gathering valuable information and involving faculty in setting the goals of the writing center.

    3. Establish a resource library for students and faculty of relevant writing text and reference books, journals, software, and articles in the writing center space. Office staff could be used to research and obtain materials.

    4. Train TA's for existing courses. Prof. Paul Rossiter has expressed an interest in implementing peer editing groups into his pilot course in the fall of 2005. A TA can be used in this class in the capacity of a tutor in a writing center—facilitating peer edit groups, clarifying techniques, and providing feedback to students.

    5. Create a sub-committee for developing writing curriculum. To fit the general studies curriculum, a "writing intensive" approach that can be integrated into the current curriculum should be developed (see resources link).

    6. Create faculty development workshops in which faculty can share their views, concerns, and techniques, as well as be provided with useful information.

    7. Create writing workshops for students. The students with whom I spoke seemed eager for this kind of information. Workshops can be on specific topics responsive to student needs at the undergraduate and graduate levels; e.g., developing topics, thesis statements, avoiding plagiarism, essay exams.

    8. Create and implement writing assessment tools for all courses that involve writing (see resources link).

    9. Create a virtual writing center. University of Tokyo, Komaba campus has cutting edge technology and talented personnel, like Prof. Yaguchi, who are currently creating curriculum materials for the general education course that highlight faculty and their research. The same format and approach could be used to create virtual classroom writing modules that teach writing skills within the general studies core for undergraduates. More advanced modules could be created that apply to graduate student writing needs. Other features might include a website with writing resource links and a tutoring hotline.

    10. Set up a staffed writing center/tutoring lab. This final step would involve designating a director and setting up a tutor training program.

<u>Conclusion</u>

University of Tokyo, Komaba campus has many enviable resources and is in an excellent position to create a writing center that serves its particular needs and student body. The outcome should be a writing center that will serve as a campus-wide faculty and student resource that supports and supplements the current general studies core curriculum. Because the faculty on the writing center committee are not trained in this particular area and are occupied by teaching and other obligations, securing the services of a consultant on a project basis would be a cost and time effective way to move forward with this project. I would be happy to serve in that capacity.

<u>Additional resources</u>

The following University of Hawai'i website on writing intensive courses includes a wealth of material about teaching writing, including the use of peer edits, sample course evaluation tools, and methods for reducing the paper load for instructors: http://mwp01.mwp.hawaii.edu/resources.htm