

A Practical Report on Study Abroad in the U. S. : in the Case of *State University of New York, College at Buffalo.*

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Introduction

The aim of this present paper is to provide a special report on the matter of studying abroad in the U. S., with an introductory remark about courses of an American college, which realizes an aspect of education in the U. S.

In recent years we have keenly felt that it becomes increasingly important to understand the way of thinking presented in the rest of the world. This means a necessity for using a foreign language sufficiently, — in most cases, it is the English tongue as an international language, — in order to promote our mutual understanding.

The students of the English department tend to forget that “ language ” is a means of communication. Needless to say, they have to learn the history of the language, read the significant works of Chaucer and Shakespeare, and know the lessons from the Authorized Version, as well as practice their pronunciation and build up their vocabulary. All the same, they necessarily ask themselves what their efforts to master English are for. It is no use speaking the language only in the classroom in Japan, even if students' speech is very fluent. They should be more active and give it a try outside. The purpose of learning English as an international language must be to use it to make the acquaintance of people all over the world and learn to know their culture for reciprocal comprehension.

One of the present writers, M. Teramoto, is qualified for describing an accurate and concrete picture of a contemporary university in the U. S., on the basis of her experiences she had in the country; since she received education for two years in Hawaii and ten months in New York State, she can easily give us a short sketch of an American way of teaching and learning on the college level. She had several courses in *State University of New York, College at Buffalo*, which are surely helpful to lead the students thinking of study abroad to a clear understanding; however, unfortunately we do not have enough space to make an exhaustive remark about all the courses. Thence we pick out two courses and give comments on each subject to get them fully understood among the readers.

A Brief Outline of Buffalo State College

The college where the writer studied for nearly one year in the U. S. is officially

called "State University of New York, College at Buffalo." The history of Buffalo State College, which is an alias of the school, is longer than we expect. It was originally built as the Normal School at Buffalo by the legislature in 1867, and now the college is the largest of the thirteen SUNY (State University of New York) four-year colleges. Buffalo State College has more than 12,000 students including about 300 international students. The beautiful 115 acre college campus is located in one of the finest neighborhoods in the city of Buffalo.¹



On the basis of the description of Buffalo State College in *The College Blue Book* (21st ed., 1987), we can obtain more precise information as follows:²

Buffalo State is the largest arts and science college in the SUNY system. The college purposes a broad spectrum of goals, including education in the arts and science, career preparation, continuing education for the non-traditional student, service to the community and teacher education. It is the only SUNY college located in a major metropolitan area. Enrollment recently totaled 12,008.

Buffalo State College is fundamentally an undergraduate institution, granting five bachelor's degrees in more than 70 major fields; besides, several master's degrees are presented in wide fields, such as Biology, Chemistry, Education, English, etc.

The college adopts a semestral system. The first semester begins in September, and the last begins in January. Each semester is about 16 weeks long. They have classes from Monday through Friday. Classes on Monday, Wednesday and Friday are fifty minutes long each, while classes on Tuesday and Thursday are seventy-five minutes long each.

It is important to pay attention to the fact that they have a numbering for every course to indicate the degree of difficulty. Generally 100- and 200-level courses belong to the lower division for freshmen and sophomores, while 300- and 400-level

courses belong to the higher division for juniors and seniors, or often more advanced students. However, it does not necessarily mean that a freshman has to take 100- and 200- levels only.

An Illustration of Actual Courses in Buffalo State College

The following examples are the courses the writer actually took in Buffalo State, which will show the readers a firm picture of teaching and learning in the college: "Geography of Buffalo and Niagara Frontier (Geography)" and "Social Dynamics of Poverty (Social Work)."

1. A Course in Geography ³

< COURSE PROCEDURE AND GRADING POLICY >

<i>Course Name</i> : Geography of Buffalo / Niagara Frontier	<i>Credit Hrs</i> . : 3
<i>Course Number</i> : GEG 357	<i>Class / Studio / Lab Hrs</i> . : 3
<i>Instructor's Name</i> : Dr. Gregory Stein	<i>Date</i> : Fall 88

ATTENDANCE :

Regular attendance is expected. Roll will be taken regularly during the first weeks and at selected intervals during the semester. Spot checks will also be made on a random basis. Frequent and/or prolonged absences, noted and unexplained, subject the student to the lowering of his/her grade, since small group work is a major part of the course. You are expected to participate in the class field trip and attend lectures.

COURSE FORMAT :

Required for this class will be assigned readings (over) and participation in the field work, field trip and field work discussions. Since there is no complete text for the course, the lectures and small group field course project will constitute the basis of the course. This course will consist of both lectures and the *creation* of a small group, self - guided field tour of Buffalo. Therefore much of class time after an introductory two weeks of lecture will be devoted to these discussion groups who will propose, reconnoiter and write up, in a formal paper with (a) map(s), the modes and routes to be taken on a hypothetical field trip of a portion of Buffalo and/or the Niagara Frontier, this portion to be decided by the group and the instructor. Assigned readings and handouts will complement the lectures. Questions and group discussion are essential and will be used to raise grades for participants. Discussions and small group field work on the course project will begin in the third week. Lectures will be cut back to the equivalent of one hour a week. Since the field work project is open-ended, the topics listed on the syllabus are lec-

ture subjects, which may be changed if necessary to fit the direction of the field work groups. The project report is a group endeavor, its form subject to approval of Mr. Stein. It may involve papers, slides or other presentations. However a map is required, its form subject to Mr. Stein's approval. After an objective (locational) midsemester, lectures will increase in amount toward the end of the semester.

EVALUATION & GRADING :

Grading will consist of : (1) one short objective midsemester emphasizing map locations and based on readings and lectures, (2) a written final exam will include as a major part a discussion of the field project area in relationship to the whole Niagara Frontier. It will be worth three times the midsemester, and (3) approximately *half* of the grade will come from the students *participation* in reconnaissance of, and presentation of, the field work. Because it will be done in small groups during class, the instructor will give individual evaluations based on these discussions. These involve both leadership (taking, keeping notes from day-to-day) and research (field work, library research, etc.) as necessary. In addition, individual knowledge of downtown Buffalo and the # 21 bus route to the Delavan-College LRT station and the LRT line to UB and downtown are expected. The project report is to be in formal written form.

Texts :

Required readings : R. Banham, *Guide to Buffalo Architecture*, MIT Press, 1981. Assignments will be announced. You will be required to purchase a Buffalo/Niagara Frontier road map of your choice. Additional readings on reserve, assignments to be announced.

The aim of this course was to explore the people, problems and places of Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, with a special emphasis on the qualities of real sites and cultural situations. The number of students in the class was about 30, and most students were juniors and seniors, since the course was labeled " 300 - ." We had to take the lesson three times a week . Lectures proceeded with the aid of slides and OHP to show vivid pictures of the area of Buffalo until we had a Midterm Examination, which was called " take - home exam." We were required to write reports on what to observe from the City Hall in downtown and how to take # 21 bus from the college to the downtown area. This meant that we had to go outside and see the views ourselves. After the Midterm Exam, we were divided into small groups (5 - 6 people in a group) and started to discuss a plan for guiding people without a good knowledge of Buffalo. It was the main part of this course. During the discussion in the project, the professor just gave us some valuable advice and interesting suggestions. After each group presented its own plan in class, they went out for a

field trip, in which the individual projects were greatly helpful at that time. A Final Examination was a kind of writing essays on a "blue book," which is a notebook covered with blue paper prepared for the exam. Since the text used in class did not give much information on the matter expected in the exam, we needed to get most of it from other materials in the library. This course was interesting to the writer as an exchange student, in respect of focusing on the realities of Buffalo, which was effective in calling her attention to the culture of Buffalo.

2. A Course in Social Work ⁴

< COURSE PROCEDURE AND GRADING POLICY >

Course Name : Social Dynamics of Poverty

Credit Hrs. : 3

Course Number : SWK 319

Instructor's Name : Dr. Shirley A. Lord

Date : Spring 89

ATTENDANCE :

Regular attendance is optional; however classroom participation / attendance is 10% of final grade, and periodic attendance checks will be taken throughout the semester.

COURSE FORMAT :

Requires for this class will be :

Assigned readings.

Participation in classroom discussions.

Volunteer work 2 hrs. / week for entire semester in a community dining room, soup kitchen, or shelter serving the poor. (List is provided.)

Midterm and final examinations.

Written Assignment.

CATALOG DESCRIPTION :

Social Dynamics of Poverty is designed to acquaint students with the predominant theories, policies, and programs dealing with poverty in America. In addition to a general knowledge of poverty, the course explores the effects of poverty on individuals, families, small groups, and communities. Ageism, sexism, and racism are discussed in relation to poverty. The historical treatment of the poor and views of poverty are also discussed.

MAJOR OBJECTIVES :

- (1) Students will be able to identify and explain theories of causation and subsequent approaches to the poverty problem.
- (2) Students will understand the relationship between the economic system and

the development of poverty.

- (3) Students will debate and discuss various theories and programs to develop analytical thinking.
- (4) Students will begin to understand the meaning of poverty to affected individuals, groups, and communities.
- (5) Students will have knowledge of the principal social welfare programs designed to deal with the problem of poverty.
- (6) Students will understand the historical treatment of and view of the poor.

EVALUATION :

Grade in the course will be based upon :

Midterm Examination	30 %
Final Examination	30 %
Classroom Participation / Attendance	10 %
Volunteer Work	20 %
Volunteer Work Paper	10 %

Assignments :

- (1) Read assigned chapters in textbooks and class handouts.
- (2) Volunteer 2 hours a week for the entire semester in a community dining room, soup kitchen, or shelter serving the poor. — 20% of grade
- (3) Midterm Examination — 30% of grade
- (4) Final Examination — 30% of grade
- (5) Classroom participation / attendance — 60% of grade
- (6) Written report on volunteer work experience — 10% of grade

The purpose of this written assignment is to provide an opportunity to integrate knowledge learned about poverty from readings and classroom discussions with your volunteer experience.

Texts :

The Mean Season: The Attack on the Welfare State. Fred Block, Richard A. Cloward, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Frances Fox Piven. Pantheon Books, 1987.

The Economics of Poverty and Discrimination. Bradley R. Schiller. Prentice-Hall, 1984.

This course was designed to analyze the effects of poverty upon individuals, family, and community development reflected in various cultural groupings. The class size was middle (about 40 students), and we had to take classes twice a week. The first thing we did in this class was to memorize all the names of classmates, and such a tiny thing led us to a big effect, i. e. , we were able to feel at ease

in the class. During the lesson, we were always excited to have a discussion on different matters. Students asked the professor many kinds of questions, and expressed their opinions explicitly. The professor, Dr. Lord never said that you were right or wrong, but she tried allowing us to develop our ideas. From the second week it was required to start serving as a volunteer two hours a week in the community dinings, the soup kitchen and the shelter having services to the poor. Since the present reporter was not able to find a place to work for it, the professor permitted her to work for CEM after school program where she worked as a volunteer in the first semester. Midterm Examination in this course consisted of several parts: true and false, matching, multiple choice, completion, and short answers. After that, the professor gave the answer sheets back to us and explained every answer. A Final Examination was the same style as Midterm Examination. At the end of the course, we handed in a reporting paper on volunteer work experiences. Besides, we had a troublesome time to evaluate the course and the professor in various points of view. (This system does not seem to have been established in Japan, though the Ministry of Education advocated introducing the system into Japanese universities.) This course permitted the writer as an exchange student to open her eyes to the political system, economic conditions and history in America.

3. Analytical Summary

From the observations on the two courses above, we can point out advantages and disadvantages in the way of American education, through a comparison with that of Japanese.

(1) Advantages over Japanese systems

- A. A syllabus of a course is clearly described.
 - a. It is easy and convenient, particularly for international students, to grasp the objectives of a course and its outline.
 - b. It can be easily expected what our grades will be, since a policy to give credits in the course is shown by the professor.
- B. Professors or instructors encourage the students to develop their ideas, even if their opinions are different from the professors'.
- C. Some courses are based on a concrete and practical concept, i. e. , experiences of field trips and volunteer work in a community will help the students with doing their jobs in companies after graduation.
- D. They have an evaluation system for courses and professors in various points, which does not seem to have been established in Japan.
- E. They have a well-equipped library which housing reserved books and materials related to the courses lectured in the semester.

(2) Disadvantages in American systems

- A. In class some students express their opinions or impressions without

enough preparations for the lesson, so that the discussion in that case will not bear much fruit.

- B. Students have to study fundamental matters written in textbooks for themselves, since professors or instructors go along with their classes, as presupposing that attendants should have a lot of knowledge of such fundamental things before making a decision to take their classes.
- C. Instructors are so strict with keeping how long their classes should be lectured that we sometimes have to leave our discussion unfinished.

When thinking of a challenge to introduce an American way of teaching and learning system into Japanese universities, we will emphasize the importance of the following points:

- (1) In one semester, it is more effective to have a seventy-five-minute-long class twice a week or a fifty-minute-long class three times a week than to take a ninety- or a hundred-minute-long class as it is now carried out in Japan. Particularly for students of language, this method will lead them to a great success in mastering a foreign language.
- (2) If all of the classes and professors are evaluated in detail by the students who took them, college education in Japan will get rid of an ordinary and discouraging one and have the prospects for making much progress in the future.

Conclusion and Additional Remarks

The present writers are coincidentally graduates from *Kansai University of Foreign Studies*, which has quite a unique way and a wide range of international education in Japan. The university annually dispatch more than 800 Japanese students to other countries, such as the U. S., Canada, Australia, U. K., Spain, Mexico, and China; which, particularly in America, has 87 sister colleges and universities as of March in 1990, exchanging students reciprocally. This fact proves that the university has a positive attitude toward teaching and learning English as an international language to communicate with other people in the rest of the world. In this respect, one of the writers, M. Teramoto, may be a person who took advantage of the open system above to have an opportunity for studying several subjects taught in an American way of education in New York State. It is no doubt that the experience as an exchange student in the U. S. has greatly influenced her way of thinking, i. e. , “ responsibility ” and “ flexibility. ”

The English department of *Nagoya Women's University* has developed the English Language Study Program at Mills College in California.⁵ Unfortunately it is to our knowledge that after a 2 or 3 week overseas study program one is not able to gain a good and fluent command of English. Indeed, it takes a long time to master a foreign language. Even a short stay in America, however, will bring more advan-

tages than a long time study and practice in Japan, as they can, at the same time, personally experience the language and its culture. It may well be said that our language study program in America is valid and significant for its emphasis on that point. After returning to Japan, the students always show confidence in themselves as well as in their speaking and listening English skills. We think that this should be a strong motivation for them to brush up their English. Here lies the merit to study abroad.

The present writers are most grateful that this short report would represent a vivid picture of studying abroad, looking through a case of *State University of New York, College at Buffalo*, in 1988 – 1989.

NOTES

1. The official address of *State University of New York, College at Buffalo* is 1300 Elmwood Ave., Buffalo, New York, 14222 – 1095. (716) 878 - 5511. International Student Affairs Office is located in Cassety Hall 115.
2. *The College Blue Book* (in 5 vols.), V (Narrative Descriptions), p. 470. Degrees' information is from the Book III (Degrees Offered by College and Subject), p. 204 - 205.
3. An outline of this course is based on the professor's handout and *the 1987-89 Undergraduate Catalog* published by Admissions Office, State University College at Buffalo.
4. An outline of this course is based on the professor's handout and *the 1987-89 Undergraduate Catalog* published by Admissions Office, State University College at Buffalo.
5. Professor Tatsuro OKITSU, the former Dean of the English department, reported on the Study Program at Mills College, with detailed descriptions and discussions of teaching at the English Center for International Women in Mills, in "Some Observations on the Intensive English Program Conducted by the English Center for International Women, at Mills College, Oakland, California," *Journal of Nagoya Women's University*, No.32(1986), pp.279 - 283.