

Nagoya University Freshman Seminar: An Introduction to Local Culture

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Abstract: Over the past five years Nagoya University has been expanding its English taught curriculum in tangent with participation in the national Global30 program. This paper will introduce a Freshman Seminar that is both an introduction to university life and the region surrounding Nagoya University. The cultural importance of Nagoya and the Aichi region begin with the oldest histories of Japan, the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki, and continues into the present day as the home of Toyota Industries and as an “Anime Pilgrimage” point.

Each week, students presented on reading material focused on Nagoya and Aichi. They created original reenactments of key historical episodes and interactive lessons to discuss topics ranging from poetry to textile making. This paper will introduce the reading materials used in class as well as the students’ presentations. This paper will also consider the students’ reactions to the course and present some initial feedback.

Keywords: Global30, Freshman Seminar, local culture, Nagoya University, Aichi region

Background and Course Goal:

Since October 2011, Nagoya University has been offering full-degree programs taught in English called the Global30 (G30) International Programs. Undergraduate degrees are offered in Automotive Engineering, Biological Science, Chemistry, Fundamental and Applied Physics, Japan-in-Asia Cultural Studies, and Social Science-Economics. The academic year follows the American model, with the first semester running from October to March and second semester from April to September. In the first year of their degree, all students take Liberal Arts and Sciences courses as well as Japanese language classes. One of the Liberal Arts and Sciences courses they are required to take is a Freshman Seminar; they take one seminar each semester of their first year. Past Freshman Seminar topics have included Postwar Japan, Introduction to Social Science, Marine and Freshwater Sciences, Introduction to Biology, Mathematics in Science, and a Model Diet.

I designed my course with the goal that students familiarize themselves with the library facilities on campus and research methods that would be useful in all future classes. The stated topic of the course, Japanese history, literature and culture, was a secondary consideration and students were not quizzed on their readings. I chose to focus on Aichi/ Nagoya to give them a sense of belonging to the town where they will live for the next four years. Many of the students come to Japan with an interest in Japan and some students have already studied some Japanese history and culture and know the cultural significance of Kyoto and Tokyo, but the Nagoya area is rarely covered in history, culture, or literature courses. The topic of Nagoya gave us a lens through which to study the full historical range of Japan.

The purpose of this course is for students to learn the skills that they will need for major courses during their second, third, and fourth years of college. The skills that students will need include reading and writing. First, students learned how to find something they want or need to read. Second, students evaluated the text: is the text

outdated? Is the text biased? Is the text accurate? Third, students used the knowledge that they gained from reading the text to produce original content. Fourth, students received feedback on their work and on how to improve. As these four basic skills will be needed in all future classes, I determined it was more important to evaluate students on their writing and not on their retention of Japanese history, literature and culture topics.

Course Content:

Each class session consisted of a mini-lecture (about 30 minutes) on the week's topic given by the instructor, and a student led activity/ discussion (about 30 minutes). If time permitted, class sessions also included education about the library facilities on campus, how to evaluate texts, and writing guidelines. Some weeks had additional time spent on research methods and other weeks included time for students to give each other feedback on their writing.

Each week students were given readings based on the topics listed on the syllabus, but their homework assignments were related to academic research methods and paper writing, and not necessarily related to the topics covered by the readings. The first two weeks' homework consisted of finding books on certain relevant topics in our central library. The course was a spring course, so the students were in their second semester and had already some familiarity with researching papers, but most of their methods were limited to Google searches. The goal of these assignments was to familiarize the students with the OPAC search for the University library system as well as finding books based on subject and not just title.

For the class session on May 19th, we went to the central library for a tailored library orientation. This presentation was given by a graduate student working in the library and consisted of a detailed introduction to online journals and databases available to Nagoya University students. The library orientation began with a simple introduction to the structure of a scholarly article with a focus on using the bibliography in the article to find other relevant literature. The orientation then shifted to finding articles in electronic databases subscribed to by the Nagoya University Library. After finding the article, students were instructed to find whether there was an online version or a physical copy on campus. If there was neither, they were told how to order a copy using the inter-library loan.

The syllabus for the class included a week-by-week list of the topics to be covered in class and during the first class students chose which week they would be in charge of making a mini-presentation. The topics were arranged more or less chronologically, with pre-history the first week and modern Japan in the final week. The last class was reserved for "review." Although there are several books available that cover Japanese history¹ in general, there are very few resources that cover the specific topics that I wished to cover in class.

¹ Varley, H. Paul. *Japanese Culture*. Honolulu, Hawaii: U of Hawai'i, 2000.
Totman, Conrad. *The Blackwell History of the World: A History of Japan*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2000.
Mason, R. H. P., and J. G. Caiger. *A History of Japan*. Rutland, VT: C.E. Tuttle, 1997.

Topics	Readings to be discussed	Homework Assignments Due
April 14 Introduction to Japanese History		
April 21 Atsuta Shrine: Why is the Kusanagi Sword in Nagoya?	<i>Kojiki, Nihon Shoki</i> parts	Booklist (find call numbers and library locations)
April 28 Aichi inspiring poetry and legends	<i>Man'yōshū</i> poems	Book scavenger hunt (find books related to the <i>Man'yōshū</i>)
May 5 Holiday	<i>The Tale of Genji</i> chapters: The Ivy and The Eastern Cottage	
May 12 National Treasures in Nagoya: The <i>Tale of Genji</i> Picture Scrolls	<i>The Tale of Genji</i> chapters: The Ivy and The Eastern Cottage	
May 19 Library Orientation		Assignment: Paper Topic
May 26 <i>The Tales of Ise</i> and Chiryu	<i>The Tales of Ise</i> section 9	Find textbooks, books or encyclopedia articles related to topic
June 2 Holiday		
June 9 Osu Kannon	Oda Nobunaga's biography	Find journal articles
June 16 The Hatsune Furnishings and Nagoya Castle is less than 60 years old!	Tokugawa chapter	Paper Part 1 due
June 23 Edo Brand Awareness: Arimatsu Shibori Dying	Arimatsu chapter	Paper Part 2 due
June 30 The Birth of Toyota: What do sewing machines have to do with it?	Toyota Chapter	Paper Part 3 due
July 7 Postwar development	<i>Nagoya Changing Geography</i> chapter	Paper Intro & Conclusion due
July 14 Nagoya: Pilgrimage Site for Anime Fans	<i>Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga</i>	Paper Rough Draft
July 21 Review		
July 28 No Class		Final Paper Due (email)

First, I would like to introduce the topics/ weeks that had sufficient English language readings. *Kojiki*, *Nihon Shoki*, *Man'yōshū*, the *Tale of Genji*, the *Tales of Ise*, a history of Arimatsu indigo dying have all been translated in English and I was able to make portions available via our class website. Some students printed their readings, but most used a mobile device or tablet.

Although these readings were sufficient for class use, there were still some disadvantages. For example, the translations of the *Kojiki* were not perfect because in the 1919 translation by Basil Hall Chamberlain there are segments translated into Latin instead of English, due to their mature content, and the new 2014 *Kojiki* translation by Gustav Heldt is hard to read due to the fact that the names of the characters have been translated for meaning rather than given phonetically. Therefore, I chose to use the 1969 translation by Donald Philippi. Second, the *Man'yōshū* has never been fully translated and most of the poems relating to Nagoya have not been translated. Finally, two of my resources were unreliable and unverified: the book on the origins of Toyota Motor Corp. was written by the company and the pamphlet I found on Osu Kannon was written by the temple. In giving this class again in the future, I will probably avoid the Osu Kannon and Toyota Motor Corp. readings.

I was unsatisfied with the readings I gave for the other weeks. There are no concise English language biographies for Oda Nobunaga or Tokugawa Ieyasu. Moreover, their relation to Nagoya Castle or Nagoya Palace has not been explored in English language scholarship. For readings in these weeks, I gave excerpts of the *Chronicle of Oda Nobunaga* and a book chapter on Tokugawa Ieyasu, but I do not believe that the students were able to incorporate these topics into their mini-presentations successfully. In the week focusing on the *Tales of Ise*, I discovered that the students had used the 1968 McCullough translation, which is available on Google books, rather than the 1972 Harris translation excerpt that I had uploaded to the class website. In retrospect, the students' choice may have been better than mine as the McCullough translation is more readable and avoids esoteric terms used by Harris.

To supplement the scarce and sometimes unreliable readings, as I mentioned previously, I translated some texts into English and will continue to translate more for the future versions of this class. I also attempted to make the mini-lectures given by the instructor as accessible and informative as possible. For example, I created a slideshow on pre-history in the Nagoya region, translated portions of the *Shoku Nihongi*, translated the history of the Osu Kannon temple, and created the only comparative research on the Hatsune Furnishings in the Tokugawa Museum, Nagoya.

Fortunately, regardless of my doubts about the readings, the student-led activities were engaging. In the first week, the student presenting on the *Kojiki* readings had all students take part in an interactive reading of the text as if it were a play. For the week dealing with the *Man'yōshū*, the student created a PowerPoint with the locations and fauna described in the poems. The student who chose the *Tale of Genji* scrolls gave a presentation explaining the plot of the excerpts given as readings. For the week when we discussed the *Tales of Ise*, the student directed the classmates to imagine alternative meanings for the poems before revealing their context in the assigned reading. The student who chose Oda Nobunaga repeated the success of the interactive reading. The week focusing on the Nagoya Castle was a presentation about the historical background of Tokugawa Ieyasu. For the week when we tackled Arimatsu Shibori dying, the student had the classmates guess the

meanings of different dyed patterns. The Toyota week was again an interactive reading acting out the drama of the origins of the Toyota Motor Corp. The final student prepared a PowerPoint presentation on the Post War development and housing found in Nagoya; this week was particularly informative as the student introduced the UR housing which most students had never heard of.

Evaluation and Final Paper:

Grading was based on attendance and participation (30%), weekly writing assignments (20%), class discussion (20%), and the final paper (30%). Students were allowed to choose any topic for their final paper with the preference that it be related to their major. Students said they hoped the paper they wrote in my class would become part of their senior thesis. I also offered students an opportunity to gain extra credit by taking a “selfie” with a book. If they went to the library and took a “selfie” with the book, they got one extra point. Each week I gave students a list of suggested readings; the books in note 1 were the suggested readings for week 1.

The final paper was organized around the principle of three segments. Students were instructed to organize their papers in three parts, with no more than three pages per part, with one page each for introduction and conclusion. They were allowed to write the parts in any order, but they were only allowed to work on one part per week. This forced students to conceptualize their paper as a general theme with three main arguments. Students also had the option to write four parts (two pages per part), but my intent was to have them distil their arguments into just a limited number of concepts with supporting ideas.

Prior to actually starting to write their papers, I assigned several weeks of homework asking students to prepare for writing. First, each student turned in their topic on the day of the library orientation. The library orientation contained search practice for set topics, but concluded with free time to search for subjects chosen by the students. Using this class as the background, I assigned the students to find two journal articles that they would use as sources for their paper. Most students used the online database JSTOR for their resources. The next week, students were assigned to find books relating to their topic and an encyclopedia article. Some of the books and articles found by the students were out of date (from the 1960’s) and in the future I might set a year limit to encourage students to find current research, but there are limitations given the books available in the Nagoya University Library. The first three weeks of paper writing they wrote their individual parts. Each week, we spent time in class working in pairs to give immediate peer feedback and I gave them detailed feedback before the next class session. On the fourth and fifth week of paper writing the students wrote their introduction and conclusion and they had one final draft with my comments before they turned in the final paper.

I instructed students to write the introduction and conclusion at the end, which forced them to consider what they had actually written, rather than what they had intended to write. Some students changed topics midway and I believe that the tactic of writing the primary arguments of the paper first before setting down the introduction and conclusion avoids the gap between the writer’s declared goals for the paper and what actually is written in the paper. Students had never been introduced to this tactic and, although I believe it was an unfamiliar concept to them, I received positive feedback on the writing process.

Feedback from Students:

The nine students answered a general survey from the department and several questions that I designed myself. The numbers in parenthesis indicate the number of students who responded with that answer.

University Designed Questions:

- Was the course conducted by following the course objectives and content explained in the materials such as the course syllabus
 - 1) Completely agree (5)
 - 2) Mostly agree (4)
- Did you actively and voluntarily take part in the course?
 - 1) Completely agree (4)
 - 2) Mostly agree (5)
- Were you able to understand the content of the course?
 - 1) Completely agree (4)
 - 2) Mostly agree (5)
- Has the course inspired your intellectual interest, provided you with a foundation for further study, and/or a sense of accomplishment?
 - 1) Completely agree (2)
 - 2) Mostly agree (3)
 - 3) Slightly agree (4)
- Was the instructor enthusiastic about the teaching, and/or was the course content creative?
 - 1) Completely agree (6)
 - 2) Mostly agree (3)
- Were you given the opportunities to ask questions and/or express opinions and/or give presentations?
 - 1) Completely agree (8)
 - 2) Mostly agree (1)
- Were the teaching material and method appropriate?
 - 1) Completely agree (5)
 - 2) Mostly agree (4)

Instructor Designed Questions:

- Why did you choose this course?
 - 1) The other Freshman Seminar B was full (4)
 - 2) The topic looked interesting (3)
 - 3) Related to major (2)
- Which part did you find most useful?
 - 1) Instructor Presentations (4)
 - 2) Student Presentations (4)
 - 3) Library Orientations (1)
 - 4) In Class Paper Discussion (0)
- What would you suggest to improve the class?
 - 1) More instructor presentations (2)
 - 2) More student presentations (2)
 - 3) More library/research methods information (1)
 - 4) More writing support (4)

Feedback on the course was generally positive. On the question asking if students participated actively, about half the students answered, “mostly agree,” which implies that some students felt they could have interacted more. For future preparation, I will do my best to encourage more student interaction during the instructor-led presentations and direct my students to make sure their presentations are interactive.

About half the students stated that the instructor presentations were useful and about half the students stated the student led activities were useful. Though my intended focus for the class was on writing, about half the class stated they felt more writing support would improve the class, none of the students found the in-class paper discussions most useful. Given this feedback, I will consider changing the format of the peer review or exclude it.

Reflections and Thoughts for the Future:

When this paper was presented at the “Japan in the World, the World in Japan: A Methodological Approach” conference, I was asked about the seeming lack of connection between the final paper and the topic of the class. As a teaching assistant at Nagoya University, I observed a freshman seminar taught in Japanese for regular students several years before I taught the current class. The professor for the course said that his goal for the class was not for the students to retain a certain amount of knowledge, but to ready themselves for the university experience. The class was meant to be a bridge between high school and university. The professor also was keenly aware of the time demands on the students in their other first year classes and purposefully avoided adding to their workload. I took this philosophy to heart when I designed my class.

I purposefully separated the in-class themes from their homework assignments on research methods and preparing for their final paper. Also, given the heavy load that students were taking, I determined that an extra paper on a topic unrelated to their major would be an unreasonable expectation for a freshman seminar. I hoped that if students chose a topic similar to their major it would not be overwhelming or wasted effort.

In retrospect, I should have included a question about the choice of paper topics on my exit survey. Some possible alternatives to the open paper topic include: setting the topic to be the same as the student’s in class presentation or allowing students to choose a free topic related to any of the topics covered in class. In future, I will perform an entry survey and ask students what topic they feel is appropriate for their final paper as well as an exit survey asking how students feel after completing their papers.

In conclusion, I feel that for the first version of this class, although there were some difficulties in preparation, the students really made it work. The students were willing to be inventive and participate actively. Giving a class is always a challenge, but today’s students are active and participative and they strengthen us as instructors and help prepare us for future challenges.

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