

2012 Winter Intensive English Program

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A seven-week intensive English program was piloted at MIC during January and February of 2012. Initially, the idea of a winter offering was suggested to help prepare one student, Minjoo Park, for upper division coursework starting in April 2012. The concept then evolved into a program whose broader purpose was to address the needs of students with low English proficiency, in particular, third-year students with TOEIC scores below a certain threshold and first-year students either with TOEIC scores below the same threshold or who had not yet completed level four in the streamed program. Thirteen students were initially identified and asked to participate in the program.

Feedback from Winter Intensive Faculty

The following is a summary of feedback from members of the English faculty who taught in the program:

Student Attendance

Attendance averaged between two and three students for morning and early afternoon classes, and a bit higher for the last session of the day. Min Joo Park and Yuki Shiragasawa attended most class sessions, but no other student can be considered to have gotten any semblance of a sequenced program of instruction.

Program Strengths

- It was beneficial for students willing to take advantage of it. It gave participants practice with and access to English during the long winter break, and it gave one student help with objectives for level 3 in the streamed program.
- The course prepared Min Joo for upper-division courses.
- The small class size was favorable for students. Specifically, Min Joo had nowhere to hide and therefore participated more than he had in previous coursework, and Yuki Shirasagawa had the time she needed to formulate questions and could receive individualized feedback.
- The textbooks, chosen according to publishers' recommended TOEIC levels, were well suited for Yuki and Min Joo.

Problematic Areas

- The range of English proficiencies was problematic. For instance, the chosen course materials, which targeting students with 450-500 TOEIC scores, were inappropriate for some students.
- The program failed to address the need of students to catch up in the streamed English program. At the end of the fall term, first-year students not yet having

completed level 4 in the program were in jeopardy of failing to complete the program prior to study abroad, which would necessitate continued English coursework into the third year. Though the listening-speaking strand was designed in part to target level 3 objectives, students needing that instruction rarely attended.

- Attendance was problematic, as some of the students most in need of this program chose not to attend. Reasons for this included the distance between home and the college, work, travel, etc. Also, there was no penalty for absenteeism, as the courses were not credit-bearing.
- The program raises questions regarding winter duties, equitable distribution of work over the winter among members of the faculty, and possibly contractual issues.

Suggestions for the Future

Note that because the suggestions below comes from a number of faculty members, the ideas may at times be somewhat contradictory.

- The program could be improved by having more coordination between its various strands (i.e. reading, writing, listening, and speaking).
- Shorter, more specialized courses with certain students in mind (rather than a long one-size-fits-all program) could be offered. This would need to be set up early so that students could plan their winter schedules. One such approach might include a sequence of levels equivalent to those in the streamed English program, perhaps each lasting two weeks.
- The program – or at least one strand of it – should specifically target students who are behind in the streamed English program. This includes first-year students in level three or lower, and any second-, third-, or fourth-year student who has not completed the program.
- Ways to improve attendance urgently need to be explored. Making strands of the program credit-bearing may be an unlikely solution because of the contractual issues it raises. Perhaps opening up the program to all students would elicit participation from those who are actually interested in winter study.

One response went into considerable detail on this issue:

It might be difficult to improve this attendance problem. For a start, It might help if we planned the program and informed students well in advance (e.g., November) and then held it in March, so that students from other areas could move back here early for the first semester and take the intensive program.

However, even if we do those things, we still have to increase student interest in the program to significantly greater levels. Without doing that, we are probably always going to struggle to get more than 10 students on a regular basis.

In light of all of that, my feeling is that it would be more effective to take a very different approach. Something like extending the Moodle Reader program over the winter break could achieve benefits for a far greater number of students, if it were compulsory in some way, perhaps as part of their English 2 grade. That requirement could be applied to all first-year students or just those below a certain level, e.g. Level 4. If we felt it necessary, the reading program could be combined with one or two weeks of intensive listening and speaking practice on campus in late March, just before the beginning of the semester.

- Students in the program could be separated by year rather than by level. It may be that some low-proficiency second-year students stopped attending early in the program because of discomfort being with first-year students with higher proficiency.
- Strands of the winter intensive could be offered to the Miyazaki community as continuing education coursework. This could enable the college to provide participating faculty members with a stipend for their work, and it would significantly increase MIC's community outreach.