

Miyazaki International College's 2016 Active Learning Symposium
Dr. Benjamin A. Peters, Vice President

Miyazaki International College (MIC) held its 2016 Active Learning Symposium in Odaiba, Tokyo on Saturday, November 12th. The purpose of the Active Learning Symposium was to report on the progress the college has made toward completion of its Acceleration Program for University Education Rebuilding (AP) project. After a competitive application and review process, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) awarded an AP grant to MIC in 2014 for the combined themes of "Active Learning" and "Visualization of Learning Outcomes". MIC applied for AP funding to strengthen further its well-established program of teaching critical thinking through active learning and to make it easier for students and faculty members to visualize and track student progress through tools like rubrics and e-Portfolios. At the 2016 Active Learning Symposium, members of the college's AP project Working Groups gave presentations about their current activities and their future plans.

Professor Anne Howard and Lecturer Chathrine-Mette Mork led the keynote session as representatives of the Active Learning Working Group (ALWG). They were assisted with translation by Lecturer Aya Kasai. The ALWG has been observing and measuring active learning activity at MIC. They reported on the group's classification of active learning activities and the results of research conducted on faculty and students. The ALWG classifies active learning activities with two measures. One is classification of activities as "outward" (interpersonal strategies) or "inward" (intrapersonal strategies), and the other is classification of activities as "prepared" (prepared or rehearsed strategies) or "extemporaneous" (impromptu strategies). The ALWG's research shows that the most frequent active learning activities employed by MIC faculty are outward and extemporaneous, for example informal debates. The second most frequent are inward and prepared, for example writing one's reaction to a text. One important finding of their research into students' views of their own participation is that 95% of students report that they persist with challenging learning activities even when they do not first succeed. I believe this reflects the cultivation of the students' diligence and their strong determination to succeed.

In a presentation by Lecturer Christopher Johnson with translation by Satoshi Ozeki of the AP Office, the Critical Thinking Working Group (CTWG) reported on its progress in designing and administering an original critical thinking test. The practice and mastery of critical thinking through active learning has been a core educational objective of MIC since its founding. Through the AP project the CTWG aims to evaluate students' progress in mastering critical thinking skills and create a test instrument that helps to visualize those learning outcomes. The CTWG reported on the design of MIC's Critical Thinking Test, including the kinds of CT skills it measures, the test format, and the results of a pilot test administered to first-, third-, and fourth-year MIC students in the fall of 2016. Taking into account the preliminary results, the CTWG will refine the test instrument and begin official testing of CT skills in the next academic year.

Associate Professor Anderson Passos led a session on visualizing outcomes of active learning with e-Portfolios. The e-Portfolio Working Group (ePWG) presented the criteria they have developed for student e-Portfolio submissions and their assessment. The presentation included a description of the MIC portfolio system, which employs the Mahara platform, and an explanation of how it developed criteria to guide students in the School of International Liberal Arts (SILA) and School of Education (SEDU) to visualize outcomes of active learning across the four years of college. The ePWG showed examples of students' e-Portfolio pages and explained the phase-in of the e-Portfolio, including its inclusion in core SILA first-year courses and the study abroad program. All first-year students in the required ICT, Introduction to Liberal Arts, and Introduction to Global Citizenship courses as well as all second-year students completing study abroad submit assignments through their e-Portfolios on the Mahara platform.

In a presentation by Assistant to the Dean (SILA), Lloyd Walker, the Rubric-Based Syllabus Working Group (RBSWG) reported on the college's progress toward the development and implementation of rubrics for assessment and visualization of learning objectives and outcomes. After research and faculty consultation, the RBSWG developed an institution-wide rubric, and all classes are currently using rubric-based syllabi. The purpose of including a rubric in course syllabi is to help students understand the learning objectives related to the college's Diploma Policy and to track their progress toward achieving the objectives. It was reported that MIC faculty members have been allowed to amend and supplement the institution-wide rubric, and the RBSWG has surveyed them on the results of such usage to continue to improve the institution-wide rubric. The RBSWG also showed symposium participants samples of students' self-evaluations using course rubrics.

The final session of the 2016 Active Learning Symposium was an active learning workshop led by Professor Julia Christmas. Although MIC has used active learning since its establishment in 1994, the acceptance of such learning strategies is only just beginning to gain widespread acceptance in Japanese higher education. While lecture-based teaching has its place and is sometimes necessary, it is often a passive learning experience for students. Research shows that students learn more when they are active and engaged with the content and process of learning. In this session, Professor Christmas used active learning to teach the symposium participants about different approaches to engage students in the learning process. For some of the participants, it was the first time to experience active learning, so they could get concrete ideas about how to use active learning in their home institutions. Thanks to Professor Christmas's effective active learning approach, the participants could experience the joy of learning in a fresh way and understand the value of active learning.

From the beginning of Miyazaki International College's AP project in 2014, it has been a faculty-led initiative. Currently more than one-third of MIC faculty members are on an AP Working Group, and the college has several staff members with assigned roles in the project, including two professional staff in the AP Office. MIC has made steady progress toward achieving its AP project objectives thanks to the dedicated efforts of everyone involved. Now that the Working Groups have finished the steps outlined in the first three years of the AP plan, they are moving toward increased coordination and further integration of their aims. I feel certain that the presentations at the 2016 Active Learning Symposium

indicate that they are on track to succeed. Of course MIC is grateful to the symposium attendees, and we hope there was something of value for everyone.