The EEC's English Professional Course : History, Structure, and Results

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INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the English Education Center in 2001 marked an important step in Ehime University's general education English curriculum. The university recognized that providing first-year students with an organized curriculum would best help them further develop the English they had acquired in junior and senior high school. Like many reforms, the establishment of a new program has been an on-going process, and subsequent changes have made today's EEC curriculum more attuned to students' needs than it was in the early years of its existence. One of these changes involved the establishment of a higher-level set of English classes called *The Professional Course*. This report initially outlines the general development of the EEC, and proceeds to report on the development and performance of the English Professional Course (hereafter referred to as the *Professional Course*), with particular focus on the academic years (AYs) 2009－2012.

EEC BACKGROUND AND ORIGINS OF PROFESSIONAL COURSE

In the first few years after its establishment in 2001, the EEC focused on courses designed to activate students' latent English communicative potential. English A and English B were communicative courses in students' first year, with English C a four-skills integrated course completed in the first semester of students' second year. After a few years it was determined that, in order to better prepare students for their academic and professional lives (as it related to their English skills), further reform was necessary. In 2007, a new EEC curriculum was established, one with common textbooks, common learning aims, and common tests and assessment guidelines. The new curriculum focused not only on communicative competence, but also on developing first-year students' writing, listening, and reading abilities.

While the establishment of the new four-skills curriculum was seen to address an important need for all first-year Ehime University students, a realization had already surfaced among university management that an English course serving the needs of higher-level students was necessary. In 2006, a planning committee was created consisting of the EEC director and EEC faculty members to study options and develop a proposal for such a course. Special intensive courses (S3) had been part of the EEC curriculum since its inception, and most had proven to be popular (and remain so) with students. When consideration arose of adding a higher-level multi-class English course, the S3 classes proved to be useful starting point. A careful study was conducted of what worked in these courses, and these findings served as a basis for the recommendations the committee eventually produced in AY 2007. The planning committee produced a list of classes then asked EEC full-time faculty members to select one class and create a course. The committee also created the position of Course Coordinator － an EEC permanent faculty member whose responsibility it became to administer aspects of the program, communicate with other EEC faculty about program matters, and to coordinate with EEC office staff on other administrative matters regarding the course.

THE ENGLISH PROFESSIONAL COURSE (AYs 2009-2012)

In AY 2007-2008, with a view towards developing an organized set of courses for higher-level students, the EEC coordinated and revised appropriate S3 intensive courses towards this end. After evaluating the

performance of this unofficial trial, the EEC organizing committee finalized its selection of required and elective classes – a selection that focused on communicative competence and also on practical skills that will likely be necessary for students in their future academic and professional work. It was then proposed to the *Kyoiku Gakkusei Shien Kaigi* (教育学生支援会議) that the Professional Course officially be made part of Ehime University's curriculum. In AY 2008-2009 the proposed course was conducted as an official trial. Upon completion of the trial, the course was judged to be successful, and was then authorized by the *Kyoiku Gakkusei Shien Kaigi* to be officially included in Ehime University's curriculum from AY 2009-2010.

The remainder of this report details the Professional Course curriculum, assessment mechanisms, student survey results, admission policy, and added features of the course.

Required and Elective Courses

The summaries below represent the most-recent list of Professional Course courses, some of which were added or revised after the period that this report covers (AYs 2009-2012).

Required Courses (AYs 2010-2012)

- *Oral Communication* aims to improve overall fluency, with a focus on travelling abroad, and office/workplace situations. Students also learn common aspects of western societies and cultures and how to deal with social issues in communication.
- *Writing Workshop* focuses on writing for professional and academic purposes. Students learn different styles of writing, common forms and expressions, common research conventions, and independent study techniques.
- *Speaking and Reading Strategies* focuses on reading strategies and skills to help students be more resourceful and time-efficient when using the Internet in English to accomplish work-related tasks.
- *Effective Presentations* teaches students the process of creating good presentations – from generating ideas and organizing ideas to then researching and presenting them in a professional manner.

Elective Courses (AYs 2010-2012)

- *TOEIC Experience* familiarizes students with the TOEIC format and vocabulary particular to the test. Students also extensively practice the questions in the reading and listening sections.
- *TOEIC Intensive* gives students extensive listening and reading practice directly related to TOEIC, as well as grammar and vocabulary practice. Understanding test strategies is also stressed.
- *Business English* focuses on the four skills and language common to many business situations. Students learn various methods of written communication, various cultural aspects of international business, and dealing with non-Japanese employees.
- *Writing Strategies* provides students the basics of academic writing, the underlying structures of academic papers, and the skills and strategies for writing them.
- *Academic Reading* teaches students the style of academic publications in English, and the importance of "why-questions" in English grammar. Students learn how form, meaning, and use are interconnected.
- *Introductory Interpretation* teaches students how to express themselves, in both Japanese and English, about familiar topics (i.e. college life, business, families, life and culture in foreign countries, and current issues). Students practice note taking about what is spoken in simple terms, and express themselves based on the notes both in Japanese and English.
- *English for Tourism* helps students learn what needs to be explained about Japanese culture and society while guiding. Students also learn how to plan tours, manage time, and gather information for guiding purposes.
- *Discussion Skills* develops students' discussion skills in English, focusing on agreement and disagreement strategies, supporting one's arguments, and overall oral fluency. (*Note : This course was added in AY 2013-2014*).
- *International English Experience* aims to make students more proficient in authentic, daily communication in a foreign country, and to help them understand American and Hawaiian culture. During the three-weeks that the course moves to the University of Hawaii, students use English to

accomplish everyday tasks (i.e., public transportation, banking, shopping), experience a homestay, and attend daily communicative classes with students from various countries. (*Note : In AY 2013-2014 this course was expanded to include study abroad programs at schools in various countries. Students are able to choose among them.*)

Study Abroad Course (AY 2011-2012)

In the continuing effort to improve the Professional Course, a study abroad elective course was developed and proposed in AY 2010-2011. Named *International English Experience* (IEE), the course is centered around the three-week *New Intensive Course of English (NICE)* program at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in August. The NICE course offers various oral communication classes half-days Monday to Friday, voluntary cultural activities both on-campus and off-campus, and a homestay that allows for language development in an intensive and authentic environment. The IEE course includes preparatory lessons in the weeks prior to departure to Hawaii, then concludes with follow-up interviews and essays after students return to Ehime University.

Three Professional Course students participated in the trial of the IEE course in AY 2011-2012. In AY 2012-2013, the IEE was officially approved as part of the Professional Course. Two students participated and passed the course that year. No students applied the following year.

As noted above, the IEE was expanded in AY 2013-2014 to include various study abroad programs in the U.S.A. Programs in other countries will likely be added in the future.

RESEARCHING THE PROFESSIONAL COURSE

When the Professional Course began in AY 2009-2010, there was recognition that the first years of the course would establish certain aspects and precedents that would give the course its "personality" and direction. At the same time, it was also clear that it would likely grow and change over time. There also was the recognition that formal research of students' opinions regarding the course should be gathered. In consideration of these recognitions, two strands of research were undertaken – interviews, and formal student surveys.

Interviews

In order to better understand how the Professional Course could benefit both the students individually and the university overall, the Professional Course coordinator conducted internal interviews with EEC faculty and students, interviews with various faculty members in the Law & Letters faculty and Education faculty (since students from these faculties provided over half of the applicants and a large majority of admissions to the course), and interviews with teachers within Japan.

Internal EEC Research

By the end of AY 2009-2010, the coordinator began one-to-one discussions with other EEC faculty members to determine their views on one basic issue : Should the Professional Course include career-focused professional training with its central language-learning component, or should the course be "only" a skills-focused language course designed to help students prepare for their future academic and professional working lives ? Teachers unanimously thought the latter -- that the Professional Course should teach practical language and skills students will need in future academic and professional situations.

Interviews and surveys with students confirmed this, revealing that students' most-common preference was the opportunity to "speak more English." A distant second was an interest to work on specific skills or areas of interest, such as writing a thesis, ESP, or studying about foreign cultures.

Internal Ehime University Research

Interviews with faculty outside of the EEC began in 2009, with follow-ups in 2010. These interviews were mostly with Law and Letters faculty members, and also some Education faculty. Interviews were also conducted with staff and teachers of Ehime Leaders School. The purpose of these interviews was to determine the "fit" that the Professional Course achieved within the overall Ehime University language-learning curriculum. There were three core questions- 1) Is the Professional Course content, level, and time demands appropriate in regards to their students ? 2) Are there suggestions for changes ? 3) Is the course

complementary or redundant to their faculty's curriculum ?

The second purpose of interviews with faculty outside of the EEC was for the coordinator to familiarize himself with the types of courses that the majority of the Professional Course students themselves were either enrolled in presently or would be enrolled in eventually in their faculty coursework. This would help inform the EEC about the levels, abilities and coursework of many of the Professional Course students.

The response from *all* the interviewees was very positive towards the Professional Course. All respondents considered the course content, level, and time demands to be appropriate, and considered the course overall to be beneficial to their students English language development.

External Ehime University Research

The course coordinator also sought out other universities in Japan with programs comparable to the Professional Course. The most helpful sources included on-line list-serv communities, and various groups and contacts within a nationwide Japan teacher's organization. As was the response of the Ehime University faculty members, the feedback the coordinator received from interviewees outside this university (after a thorough explanation of the program) was unanimously positive.

Formal Student Surveys

In order to quantify the effectiveness of the various aspects of the Professional Course, the course supervisor developed – on instructions from the center director – a series of student surveys.

Overall Survey

This survey, begun in AY 2010-2011, is conducted annually among third and fourth-year Professional Course students near the end of the second semester. It asks for students' satisfaction level and opinions on how the course overall can be improved.

Table 1 : *Overall* Student Survey Findings
(combined AY 2011 and AY 2012. n=35)

1. Academic year	
2nd year	14%
3rd year	49
4th year	37
2. Faculty	
Law & Letters	29%
Education	31
Science	17
Engineering	14
Agriculture	9
3. Reasons for joining course	
Wanted more English practice	62%
Interested in class offerings	24
Wanted Pro Course certificate	14
4. Satisfaction with course classes	
Very satisfied	34%
Somewhat satisfied	52
Somewhat unsatisfied	14
Not at all satisfied	0
5. Suggestions to improve course ?	
No. Good as it is	74%
Yes	26
6. "The course taught me skills for my future academic and professional life."	
Agree strongly	34%
Agree somewhat	49
Disagree somewhat	14
Disagree strongly	3

Individual Class Survey

This survey is conducted by each EEC faculty member who teaches a Professional Course class. It is designed to determine the extent to which the learning aims of a particular class were achieved. In the first week of the class, a pre-survey is conducted, asking students their perceived abilities in certain skill areas, i.e. organizing an academic paper, searching the Internet in English, the elements of a presentation, etc. Responses are taken on a *Likert* scale. At the end of the semester, students are again asked to assess their perceived abilities in these specific skill areas. The results help the teacher determine if he/she successfully taught the learning aims of the course to the students.

How to interpret Table 2 below

This survey produces *group* data, not individual data. The intent of this survey was to help the teacher determine if the class, *collectively*, made progress.

Table 2 : below are the results for seven teachers

who taught the Professional Course in the second semester of AY 2012-2013.

- Each teacher has learning aims specific to his/her course. The number of learning aims differ among teachers.
- Post avg. is the class average score for each learning aim by the end of the semester.
- Pre avg. is the class average score for each learning aim at start of the semester.
- Students rate their ability according to this survey prompt :

"I am not at all capable, not very capable, somewhat capable, very capable, at doing the following in English..." (*Teachers then insert each learning aim of the class*).

The Likert Scale :

1. Not at all capable	2. Not very capable
3. Somewhat capable	4. Very capable

- The yellow row in the tables below is the percentage gain or loss, post-survey compared to pre-survey.

Table 2 : Pre & Post Individual Class Survey Results, AY 2012-2013 Semester 2

Teacher	Learning aim -->	1	2	3	4	5	6	
1	Post avg.	3.6	2.8	4.0	3.5			n=5
	Pre avg.	2.0	2.2	2.5	1.8			n-6
	% pt. differential	1.6	0.6	1.5	1.7			
	% differential	80%	27%	60%	94%			
3	Post avg.	3.0	3.0	2.7	2.7			n=6
	Pre avg.	1.8	2.6	2.2	2.0			n=5
	% pt. differential	1.2	0.4	0.5	0.7			
	% differential	67%	15%	23%	35%			
6	Post avg.	3.2	2.7	2.8				n=6
	Pre avg.	2.0	2.0	2.0				n=6
	% pt. differential	1.2	0.7	0.8				
	% differential	60%	35%	40%				
10	Post avg.	3.1	3.4	3.4				n=9
	Pre avg.	2.0	2.0	2.0				n=15
	% pt. differential	1.1	1.4	1.4				
	% differential	55%	70%	70%				
11	Post avg.	3.1	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.4	n=8
	Pre avg.	3.3	3.2	2.6	1.9	1.8	2.3	n=9
	% pt. differential	<0.2>	0.2	0.8	1.4	1.6	1.1	
	% differential	<6%>	6%	31%	74%	89%	48%	
19	Post avg.	3.3	2.8	3.1	2.9			n=11
	Pre avg.	2.9	2.2	2.0	1.7			n=14
	% pt. differential	0.4	0.6	1.1	1.2			
	% differential	14%	27%	55%	71%			
13	Post avg.	3.6	2.8	3.3	3.2	3.6		n=16
	Pre avg.	1.9	2.1	2.1	3.2	3.6		n=18
	% pt. differential	1.7	0.7	1.2	0	0		
	% differential	89%	33%	57%	0%	0%		

Example: For teacher 1, the students (collectively) rated their capability for learning aim number 1 as a score of 2.0 – "not very capable". By the end of the course, the students (collectively) rated their capability for learning aim number 1 as a score of 3.6 – approaching "very capable".

Finding: Students (collectively) of Teacher 1 learned learning aim number 1 very well.

The data in the table below shows that nearly all of the learning aims in each Professional Course class were successfully taught to the students, as a whole.

Table 3: Mentor Program Survey Data AYs 2011-2012 and 2012-2013

1. Academic Year (n=25)	
2nd	48%
3rd	16
4th	36
2. Faculty	
Education	48%
Law & Letters	28
Science	8
Engineering	12
Agriculture	4
3. Reasons for joining Mentor Program	
Specific goal I want advice on	29%
I like the teacher	26
Occasionally want advice	41
Other	3
4a. Chances to get advice from mentor?	
More than enough chances	16%
Enough chances	52
Not enough chances	16
Far from enough chances	16
5. Enough contacts with mentor?	
Too often	4%
About right	62
Too little	34
6. Reasons for contacting mentor (multiple answers)	
Current classes advice	11%
Study tips advice	23
Study/travel abroad advice	37
Questions about mentor	6
General problem	11
Mentor requested meeting	11
7. Type of contact preferred with mentor	
Once or twice per semester	13%
Occasional e-mails	30
Visit mentor office if needed	37
In class, around campus	20

Space limitations do not allow for the reporting of each semester's *Overall Survey* results. Likewise, because each teacher's learning aims are unique and sometimes vary, overall composite data is not possible. However, results of each semester's *Individual Class Survey* consistently resemble the table below, in that nearly every learning aim in every teacher's class shows significant gains. This clearly shows that students are achieving the learning aims of their Professional Course classes.

Mentor Program Survey

This survey is administered annually via e-mail from the EEC office because, unlike the other Professional Course surveys, the respondents of this survey are not physically present in a classroom when it is administered. As is common with voluntary-response surveys of all types, the response rate for this survey has been near 20 percent, but it nonetheless provides useful feedback for evaluating the effectiveness of the Mentor Program. (The Mentor Program itself is explained near the end of this report.)

ADMISSION POLICY

Among the important initial decisions to be made regarding the Professional Course was the admission policy – who to admit, how many students to admit, and on what criteria should applicants be admitted. The planning committee considered what resources the EEC had to support the addition of this type of course, and decided that 30 students would be admitted annually based on their GTEC scores in their first year. It was also decided that each faculty (the Faculty of Medicine does not participate in the Professional Course) be allowed three automatic admissions. The remaining 15 would be evaluated according to their GTEC scores.

Admission policy (AYs 2008 and 2009)

- Qualified applicants: 2nd-year students.
- Total admitted annually: 30.
- Application period: February.
- Selection period: March.
- Application requirement: Application document only.
- Admittance criteria: 1st-year GTEC.
- 15 admitted: Each faculty, three spots.
- Remaining 15 admitted: 1st-year GTEC.

Table 4 : Program Applicants and Admitted Students AYs 2010-2012 by Faculty

	2010		GTEC	2011		GTEC	2012		TOEIC Bridge
	Apply	Accept	Accept/Non	Apply	Accept	Accept/Non	Apply	Accept	Accept/Non
Edu	14	5	612/588	11	5	632/577	10	7	164/151
Engin	9	3	605/561	4	3	556/538	6	3	161/149
Ag	3	3	592/na	6	5	647/517	5	3	160/149
LL	35	16	630/572	28	14	643/567	26	13	163/151
Sci	4	3	601/496	3	3	576/na	11	4	164/147
	65	30		52	30		58	30	

Example: In AY 2010-2011, Education Faculty students admitted to the Professional Course (5) had an average GTEC score of 612. The average score of those not admitted was 588.

Table 5 : Graduates from Professional Course by Faculty (AYs 2009-2012)

Law & Letters	24
Education	10
Science	8
Engineering	6
Agriculture	4
Total	52

Graduates complete four required classes (8 units) and four elective classes (8 units), and receive a *Certificate of Completion*. Credits for course classes are noted in a student's official record.

Revised policy features (AY 2010-2011 onward)

- Applicants considered : Top 45 ; per GTEC (TOEIC Bridge scores from AY 2010)
- Application requirement :
  - Application document.
  - Typed essay in English (200-300 words).
  - History of extra curricular activities, volunteer work, experience abroad, awards won, special merits, and other relevant considerations.

In AY 2010 the course coordinator proposed expanding the criteria for admittance to include achievements and experiences other than standardized test score. The expanded criteria included an essay and a history of extra curricular activities, volunteer work, experience abroad, awards won, special merits, and other relevant considerations. This was considered the fairest way to judge applicants.

Mentor Program

In AY 2009-2010, a *Mentor Program* was established. Participating students could request a particular EEC permanent faculty member to whom the student could turn to for advice, information, and support. Most student requests were met, but where their first preference could not be met, students were assigned their second or third choice. There were about 20 applicants each year.

After discussions among teachers and after receiving feedback from students, the Mentor Program was revised beginning in AY 2013-2014 to better meet the needs of participating students. The program will continue to be monitored and adjusted according to the needs of Professional Course students.

CONCLUSION

Findings from the various student surveys that have been administered for each course component, and the extensive interviews with language teachers inside and outside of Ehime University, have shown the Professional Course to be meeting the needs and desires of the students, and fulfilling the vision that university leaders have of providing motivated, higher-level English-speaking students with both the practical skills and language skills that will help students succeed in future academic, professional, and English-speaking social envi-

ronments. While the present course has received positive reviews from both observers and participants, the EEC will continue to monitor all aspects of the course and make adjustments it feels will improve it.

APPENDIX

English Professional Course Overall Survey

1. Academic year : 3rd　4th
2. Please mark your faculty.
3. Why did you join the Professional Course ? （*mark one or two answers*）
   1. I wanted more chances to study English
   2. Interested in classes the course offers
   3. I want to get the certificate for the course
   4. My friend persuaded me
   5. Other
4. Describe your level of satisfaction, overall, with the classes that you have taken so far in the Professional Course.
5. Do you have suggestions on ways to improve the Professional Course ?
6. Mark your level of agreement/disagreement with the following statement : "The Professional Course has taught me skills and content that will help me in my future academic and/or professional life."
7. During any job interview that you might have had so far, has your participation in the Professional Course been commented on in any way by the person or persons interviewing you ? 就職活動中の面接などで，面接担当者から「英語プロフェッショナル養成コース」に関して，何らかのコメントや質問を求められたことがありますか？
8. If yes, mark your level of agreement/ disagreement with the following statement : "In at least one job interview, my participation in the Professional Course was a positive point of discussion." 少なくとも１つ以上の就職活動中の面接において，「英語プロフェッショナル養成コース」を受講していることが，あなたにとって有利な（プラスの）アピールの要素となった。

Individual Class Pre and Post Surveys

1. How satisfied were you with this class ?
2. How was the difficulty of this class ?
3. Consider the teacher's explanations in this class regarding the following three points : The explanation of what was expected of you to successfully complete : (a)homework assignments, (b)in-class activities, and (c)class objectives overall ? In general, did you understand your teacher's explanations of these items ? Mark the following... 以下の３点に関する教員の授業での説明は，あなたがこの授業で十分に成果をあげるために理解できるものでしたか：(a)課題の提示 (b)授業中の活動の指示 (c)授業の到達目標

Qs 4, 5, 6 etc.

The following questions ask you to check your proficiency level for the following skills in English. Be fair and honest in your opinion about your ability.

"I am not at all capable, not very capable, somewhat capable, very capable, at doing the following in English ..."

4. (*Teacher writes class learning aim 1 here*)
5. (*Teacher writes class learning aim 2 here*)
6. (　　*etc.*　　)

Mentor Program Student Questionnaire

1. Academic year ?
2. Faculty ?
3. Why did you join the Mentor Program ?

4a. Do you feel that you have enough chances to get the help or advice you need from your mentor ?

5. Which statement below best represents your opinion about the number of contacts your mentor has with you each semester ?
6. Describe the reasons for you contacting your mentor. (Check any that apply) :
7. Describe the type of contact you prefer with your mentor. (Choose one) :

About the author

The author was the English Professional Course coordinator from AY 2008-2009 through AY 2012-2013.