

First-Year Experience (FYE) - Preparation, Content, Achievement and Future Perspective of Online Teaching and Learning Activities of Freshmen Seminar

T a n S e o h K o o n †

1 Introduction

First year experience (FYE) at universities has increasingly drawn attention of many scholars. According to Fujita (2006), FYE is mainly designed for freshmen of universities who have considerably different level of academic ability, motivation, learning approach. FYE aims to help students to bridge the sudden change of life from high school to university. In other words, it aims to guide the freshmen to gradually become capable university students in terms of learning ability and consciousness.

In Japan, FYE in tertiary education started to gather attention in 2000s. As a result, the Japan Association of the First Year Experience at Universities and Colleges was established in 2008 and in the same year, the First Japanese Annual Conference on FYE was also being organized (Yamada, 2013, as cited in Ito, 2014).

As for the Faculty of Economics of Josai University, Freshman Seminar, a compulsory course for all freshmen, is designed to train freshmen to act independently and autonomously. Through Freshmen Seminar, all freshmen are expected to deepen their

learning by exchanging opinions and participating in group work in class. By completing the course, freshmen will be equipped with some basic core competencies as university student, which include logical thinking skills, communication and interpersonal skills, as well as career development skills, basic library skills, information gathering skills from various internet sources, report writing skills and presentation skills.

Different from previous years in which lessons were being conducted face-to-face, Freshman Seminar for the academic year 2020 are carried out online with real-time two-way communication approach via Microsoft Teams due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This article aims to report on the preparation, content, achievement and future perspective of the online teaching and learning activities of Freshman Seminar of the first semester of academic year 2020 by reflecting on the online lessons being conducted from 13 May 2020 until 5 August 2020.

2 Preparation for Online Lessons

There is a total of 18 students (17 males, 1 female; 17 Japanese, 1 Chinese) in Freshman Seminar this year. All necessary preparation was started around mid-April, to achieve the following targets:

1. equip lecturer with necessary competencies in using online teaching and learning platforms (Webclass and Microsoft Teams)
2. reach out to all students via webclass, e-mails, SMS and phone call to ensure
 - a. no students being left out from important information about all teaching and learning activities and important decisions of the faculty and university
 - b. all students are equipped with smartphone, tablets or computers with internet access and are ready to attend the online lessons.

The following strategies were used to achieve the abovementioned targets:

1. Important messages were posted on timeline of Webclass

Date	Information
4/23	Welcoming message
4/27 (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide students with step-by-step instructions on how to login to webmail using computer or smartphone • Instruct students to send

	<p>confirmation e-mail to notify lecturer in-charge about successful login to Webmail</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind students to check JUNavi and Webmail daily for important information. • Inform students about email address created for general enquiries (eco-covid19@josai.ac.jp)
4/27 (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit students to take part in large scale Microsoft Teams and Zoom connection tests.
4/28 (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruct students to take part in survey on online lessons to find out if students are equipped with smartphone, tablets, computer with internet connections to join online lessons.
4/28 (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform students on the selected online platforms for Freshman Seminar (Webclass and Microsoft Teams) • Provide students with step-by-step instructions on how to download and login to Microsoft Teams using smartphone, tablets and computer. • Provide students

	<p>information on how to join the Freshman Seminar group in Microsoft Teams via invitation email being sent to their webmail address (ee20xxx@josai.ac.jp)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform students that they are expected to complete the installation of Microsoft Teams and join the Freshman Seminar group in Microsoft Teams by 3rd May.
4/30	Remind students to complete the survey on online lessons and to send confirmation email to notify lecturer in-charge about successful login to webmail.
5/5	Remind students to add courses on Webclass and to check out important information of those courses in webclass.
5/7	Inform students about copyright of materials and netiquettes when participating in online lessons.
5/8 (1)	Provide students information about course registration.
5/8 (2)	Provide students step-by-step instructions on how to join Freshman Seminar

	group using the Microsoft Teams code.
5/8 (3)	Provide students with information of first lecture (Date, time, learning objectives).
5/11	Inform students that learning materials for first lecture were uploaded to Microsoft Teams.
5/12	Provide students information on how to login to Office365 applications and Cloud Campus.

2. Emails with information being posted on timeline of Webclass were being sent to students just in case that students did not login to Webclass.
3. On May 1, SMSs were sent to 7 students who did not send the confirmation email of successful login to webmail to the lecturer in-charge. 6 out of 7 students responded to the SMS.
4. On May 2, phone call was made to reach out to 1 student who did not respond to the SMS.

Despite all the challenges faced, by May 3, all 18 students were reached out to and the following matters were confirmed:

1. all students are informed about the class implementation method for Freshman Seminar.
2. all students are equipped with smartphone, tablets or computer with internet access for attending the online lessons.

3. all students are informed about the selected online platforms for Freshman Seminar and have installed and joined the Microsoft Teams group.

3 Contents of the lessons

Table 1 shows the syllabus of Freshman Seminar for the first semester of academic

year 2020, which was documented in JUNavi. However, due to the sudden change of implementation method from face-to-face to online real-time lesson, some of the planned contents were not being able to materialize. Therefore, the contents of the syllabus were being adapted to suit the change and the actual contents of the lesson which were being conducted are shown in Table 2.

Lesson	Content
1	Orientation Building relationship to prepare for learning environment
2	Learn about university and life as a university student
3	Worries and troubles after enrolment
4~6	Off-campus training
7~8	Basic academic skills
9~10	Career development
11	Reflection on off-campus training
12~13	Logical thinking skills
14	Reflection on the learning in first semester

Table 1 Freshman Seminar Syllabus for First Semester of Academic Year 2020
(the initial plan for face-to-face lesson)

Lesson	Content
1	Orientation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Introduction of lecturer • Course contents • Class implementation method • Grading system • Attendance • Netiquettes • Getting used to Microsoft Teams
2	a. Introducing oneself in English b. Learning about university and life as a university student
3	a. Introducing the university library b. Basic library skills
4	Worries and troubles after enrolment
5	How to create visual aids using PowerPoint

6 ~ 7	Basic academic skills - Presentation skills Informative presentation (in Japanese) Topic: Country I wish to visit someday * focusing on evaluating the effective use of PowerPoint
8	Logical thinking skills
9 ~ 10	Presentation skills: Informative Presentation (in English) Topic: Country I wish to visit someday * focusing on evaluating English language proficiency
11 ~ 12	Presentation on logical thinking skills (in Japanese) Themes: i. University students: adults or children? ii. Which is more important in spouse: Look or Character? iii. If I have a time machine: to the past or to the future? * focusing on student's multifaceted thinking and logical thinking ability
13	Reflection on the learning in first semester

Table 2 Freshman Seminar Syllabus for First Semester of Academic Year 2020
(adapted for online real time lesson)

Generally, most of the contents were covered as planned, except for off-campus training and career development. Instead, time was spent on improving students' English language proficiency in both speaking and writing, as well as improving students' confidence in presenting ideas in English to prepare them for the increasingly globalized workplace in Japan. Students were also given opportunity to comment on, to agree or disagree to the ideas of their peers after presentation, as an effort to train their logical thinking skills and to prepare them for some lessons in the second semester, which will be focusing on group discussion skills and debating skills.

4 Achievement and Future Perspective

One interesting scenario of online lesson is that the attendance rate of students is higher

as compared to the previous year when lessons were conducted face-to-face. 11 out of 18 students had full attendance and none of the students had absent more than 4 times. Besides, surprisingly, students were more focused during online lessons. This was proven when students' names were called during online lessons, they were able to answer to the questions immediately without asking "where were we?", which is a common question being asked during face-to-face lesson in classroom.

Besides, students showed improvement in their confidence in presenting ideas using PowerPoint as visual aids. Students gradually showed creativity in creating PowerPoint that suited their needs and presentation style instead of following only the example provided to them. And above all, the experience of attending online lesson has provided students invaluable opportunity to

improve their information technology skills, which is very important for their future.

Based on the data in students' reflection sheet, students were satisfied with their online learning experience. As most of the other courses were online on-demand lessons, they felt that the real-time two-way communication lessons were more interesting and more "like what lesson in university should be".

However, since all lessons were conducted online, students are missing out in opportunity to mingle with peers, to participate in club activities, to take part in university events and to enjoy the actual campus life. Some of the students mentioned during their reflection that they still do not feel like a university student as they have never even been to the campus. Besides, students still do not know each other very well, thus most of them do not have friends who can share problems and learn together.

Since the lessons for the second semester will also be conducted online, the following measures will be taken to resolve the problems:

1. to plan for at least one face-to-face session to allow the students to meet each other.
2. to plan for more group work to provide students opportunity to work together and to mingle online.
3. to plan for some team building activities online to strengthen students' relationship.
4. to plan for online collaboration with other Freshman Seminars

5. to focus on other academic skills, such as report writing skills, email writing and information gathering skills, debate and group discussion.

References

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