

# Addressing Declining Academic Skills among Japanese College and University Students: Are Study Support Services the Answer?

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## **1. Introduction**

Research for this paper was undertaken by the University of Shimane Study Support Study Group and funded by a University of Shimane Special Research Grant (2003 academic year). It sought to describe and compare student academic support systems at select Japanese and American colleges and universities, with a particular interest in considering the effectiveness of respective systems in aiding student learning and in addressing students' declining academic skills, a recent point of concern in Japanese higher education and one with which American colleges and universities have already been dealing for several decades now.

## **2. Problem, Purpose, and Method**

With the continuing demographic trends of declining birthrates and the decrease in the number of college-aged young people in the country's overall population, Japan is quickly approaching a period of full college and university admissions in which all applicants will be accepted for study in the higher education system. Given the need to meet admission quotas and increasing lack of competition for admissions to many institutions, many in Japan have felt that there has been a general decline in the overall academic skills of incoming college students (e.g., Suzuki, Arai, & Yanai, 1999; Tose & Nishimura, 2001). At many tertiary (i.e., college and university) institutions now, no longer do student support services include only psychological and career counseling, but more recently, a much broader range of support services. For example,

during the 1998 academic year approximately 20% of Japanese four-year colleges and universities conducted supplementary remedial (*hoshû*) courses taught by either full-time college faculty members or graduate students, or by high school and private cram-school instructors (*Sundai Kyôiku Kenkyûsho*, 1999). Based particularly on examples in American higher education, recent years have also seen such things as the introduction of teaching assistants into Japanese college and university classrooms. Study support services—also something found on most American campuses—which target the improvement of today’s more diverse college students’ academic skills are an even more recent development and are still in their infancy in Japan. As a result, there is a clear lack of research and institutional bases to guide practice. On the other hand, tertiary institutions in the United States have a much longer history of offering formal academic support services to their student bodies as a result of their diverse enrollments, particularly following the Second World War, and naturally served—and will likely continue to serve—as a model for designing and implementing such services in Japan. The purpose of the present inquiry was two-fold. The first was to describe some salient features of current academic support services at both American and Japanese tertiary educational institutions. This entailed a survey of research literature, news media, and online materials, and was followed by three brief case studies of two American and one Japanese university program. The second was to consider the appropriateness of American study support principles and practices with regard to higher education and improving student academic skills in a Japanese context.

### **3. Support Services at American Colleges and Universities**

There are a reported 3,700 tertiary institutions in the United States, which includes both two-year junior/community colleges and four-year baccalaureate colleges and universities, serving a total of approximately 14 million students. One remarkable feature of U.S. tertiary institutions is the high degree of diversity of their student bodies in terms of race/ethnicity, age, marital status, family income, educational background, first language, and special needs and abilities. This diversity unsurprisingly results in different degrees of readiness and abilities and resources for tertiary level studies upon entering the higher education system. In order to meet the diverse needs of their student bodies, American colleges and universities are well-known for offering a wide array of academic support services. The following is an introduction to the types of support services available on most American campuses today.

#### ***Remedial Education and Placement Testing***

As much as ninety percent of all American tertiary institutions offer remedial classes (sometimes also referred to as “developmental” classes and corresponding to Japanese *hoshû jogyô*) for under-prepared students who do not possess certain basic academic

knowledge or study skills as a result of their high school studies (Tomlinson, 1989), even at such prestigious schools as Harvard and Columbia Universities and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (“Glance,” 1998; Ritter, 1997). In a 1995 survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, nearly 30 percent of all American incoming freshmen were found to have enrolled in at least one class that was explicitly or essentially remedial in nature (cited in Ritter, 1997), ranging from English composition, reading comprehension, and basic mathematics to note-taking and basic college-level study skills. In many cases, additional fees are required for such courses in addition to regular tuition, and in most cases credit may not be applied toward fulfilling any graduation requirements. It is quite common for students who are unable to successfully complete remedial courses to be withdrawn from an institution after a certain period of time. For example, in the California State University system, the largest in the United States, approximately seven percent of all freshmen—or 2,277 students—dropped out or were withdrawn due to failure to meet remedial course requirements in 2001 (Clayton, 2002).

Enrollment in remedial classes can of course be voluntary, or a requirement of conditional admissions. At a large number of tertiary institutions, particularly public ones with open admissions policies, placement testing is conducted in English and mathematics before incoming students can enroll in classes. At other institutions, Scholastic Aptitude Test (the SAT run by the Educational Testing Service and required by many four-year colleges and universities to be considered for admissions) or other pre-admission standardized test scores are used. On occasion, placement may also be determined based on failure to take certain classes in high school.

There have been increasing criticisms of remedial education in the U.S. beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Annual expenditures on remedial programs amount to somewhere between one and two billion dollars (Clayton, 2002; roughly 10 to 20 billion yen), with many, particularly politicians, questioning the educational benefits relative to such large costs. Low achievement among students in remedial programs has been noted and has been associated with lack of student interest in learning basic reading and math skills (Clayton, 2002). Some have disputed many of the interpretations and claims made by critics of remedial education. They note that remediation as a support service has had a long history in American higher education since in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and thus there was probably never any “golden age” when remediation was unnecessary at colleges and universities in the U.S.; that most students at four-year institutions who require remediation need only take a single course in a single area of a particular weakness and are able to take normal classes concurrently and subsequently; that as a group remedial students include a large number of immigrants and older, or non-traditional students, who have been away from formal education for long periods of time; that costs represent less than one percent of total higher education expenditures; and that percentages become inflated when two-year and four-year

institutions are lumped together since the essential purpose of junior colleges is to provide remediation for students wishing to further their studies, most often in hopes of transferring to four-year institutions (Adelman, 1996; Breneman & Haarlow, 1999). Despite such counter-arguments, there has been pressure to continue efforts to formulate alternative measures and methods for more effectively teaching basic high school knowledge and academic skills to under-prepared college underclassmen, including, in state systems, requiring high school students to pass standardized tests in order to graduate (Hotakainen, 1998), and shifting responsibilities at four-year institutions to partnered community (junior) colleges which, it is believed, are more experienced and better able to focus more on classroom teaching to remedial students (Adelman, 1996). Some universities have alternatively turned to private companies to provide remedial education services (Gose, 1997).

### ***Tutoring***

Whereas in Japan, use of tutors is believed to end with graduating from high school, many American college and university students study with tutors in courses with which they experience difficulty. One often sees notices on most American campuses in newspapers and on bulletin boards of students seeking or offering tutoring services. In many instances, institutions themselves run or promote tutoring services. For example, many schools maintain a list of tutors available by course name online. In some cases, faculty instructors will recommend study with tutors for students experiencing difficulty with a course. Depending on the institution, services may be free or require a certain fee. For example, online information available from two sample schools indicated that at the Ohio University, tutoring services are free, and at Harvard University, services cost a reasonable four dollars per hour.

### ***Writing Centers***

The history of writing centers at American colleges and universities is a relatively long one and can be traced at least back to the 1930s (Pemberton, 2001). Writing centers serve to offer guidance in student writing outside their regular classes and seek to nurture writing skills. Although frequently they are headed by English department faculty, they are most often headed by an administrative director independent of any department or administrative school within a university and are open to an institution's entire community. Most instruction and guidance is offered by upperclass and graduate students in one-on-one sessions in which the tutor will give feedback on a student's written assignment. Tutors are required to undergo pre-service training and will not do or even correct students' assignments, but they do offer advice at the global level as well as ideas for various writing strategies. Writing centers can be found at most American tertiary institutions and reflect the emphasis on writing in the curriculum. They are generally considered to be integral to their institutions.

### ***Teaching Assistants***

It is usual at American universities for select graduate students to teach undergraduate classes as teaching assistants (TAs). The most common situation is for several TAs to work for a regular faculty member who teaches a large introductory lecture class with upwards of 100 students. Usually, all students enrolled in the class will gather one day a week for a lecture taught by the faculty member, with additional smaller section meetings of 20 to 30 students taught by the TAs on one or two other days. The purpose of the smaller section classes is to expand on the week's lecture content through discussion or application/experimentation (for example, in the sciences). The TA is also seen as a liaison between the faculty member and students (often believed to be more approachable due to a relative lack of social/age differences), in addition to being a teaching and sometimes research assistant to the faculty member.

While the lecture/section situation is the most typical one, it must be noted that it is also not uncommon for TAs to be largely or wholly responsible for teaching some smaller classes in their entirety, with only slight faculty member oversight. In return for their teaching performance, TAs are usually given a tuition reduction or full waiver and a small stipend. The educational and vocational (in terms of training future faculty) benefits are generally recognized, but in recent years with decreasing budgets, more and more TAs performing regular faculty teaching duties when they are entirely responsible for classes, and the shortage of open positions for new Ph.D.s have led to anecdotal criticisms of the system as the exploitation of cheap and unskilled labor.

### ***Counseling***

American colleges and universities are known to offer a variety of counseling services that reflect the diversity of their student bodies. Group-specific counseling may include services available for international students, students from immigrant families, minority students, and so-called "non-traditional," or older, students, and student-athletes for example. Health and lifestyle counseling includes rape prevention, alcoholism, drug use, marital, and same-sex relationship counseling, in addition to general health services and psychological counseling. In addition to these, there are usually extra-curricular and general student-life services and counseling for choosing academic majors and for course selection. Frequently, American colleges and universities also regularly sponsor social events intended to reduce stress levels in students.

### ***Integration of Academic Support Services***

In a number of universities examined for this paper academic support services were integrated in a central office. The Bureau of Study Counsel at Harvard University offers psychological counseling, peer counseling, academic major and course selection

counseling, and tutoring services. At Ohio University, the Academic Advancement Center offers academic counseling, peer counseling, tutoring services, and runs a writing center and math center. In her survey, Tomlinson (1989) found that 33% of American institutions had independent and centralized learning centers. In the 15 years since then, that number has surely increased. As noted below, there is a large degree of centralization of support services at the two American site universities visited for the purposes of this study as well.

#### **4. Support Services in Japanese Higher Education**

As remarked above, it is generally believed that the already universal nature of Japanese higher education has brought new students to colleges and universities who in the past may have failed to gain admission. This has led to the perception that there is an increasingly greater level of diversity among today's students in terms of preparation, goals, and needs. However, according to Ôyama (2003), attempts to establish student support systems at Japanese colleges and universities date back at least to the 1950s and are not only a recent phenomenon. Just as is the case today, principles and practices in American higher education exerted much influences (Ôyama, 2003). This is not surprising given the reorganization of the Japanese education system under Occupation directives in the early postwar years. It must be noted, however, that the Student Personnel Services (SPS, or *gakusei kôsei hodô*) discussed during this early period appears to have mainly referred to non-academic support—that is, to issues of student living, extra-curricular activities, health services, psychological counseling and the like (Ôyama, 2003). It is interesting to note that even 50 years ago the Ministry of Education and university educators remarked on the increasing “diversity” (*tayô-ka*) of student bodies due to higher enrollments (Ôyama, 2003), much as is the case today (and thus, perhaps, the idea of a “golden age” during which academic support was unnecessary in Japanese higher education might also be questioned).

The mid-to-late 1950s saw the founding of many study groups and several tertiary institutions' (examples cited by Ôyama include Tokyo University, Yamaguchi University, and Kyoto University) attempts to establish centralized offices for student support, the precursors to the Education Centers found on some Japanese campuses today. Ironically, perhaps, such measures were opposed by the students themselves in the context of the student protest movements of the late 1950s and early 1960s (Ôyama, 2003). It seems that students viewed such measures as heavy-handed and smacking of administrative control of student life. As a result, such centralized support plans were abandoned, with psychological counseling folded into general health services and other aspects of student life dealt within the general administration of university affairs. It is for this reason that Ôyama characterizes today's support services as largely health and administrative issues (*hoken kanri gyômu*) rather than educational ones.

Ôyama credits the expansion of support services at American colleges and universities during the 1980s and 1990s as in part a result of the influence of more “learner-centered” approaches to education, which have only more recently begun to catch on in Japan. Subsequently, he attributes Japanese slowness to expand their own services to the still strong influence of the chair system (*kôzasei*) which revolves around lecture classes. It is clear, however, that many of the country’s higher education institutions have been making efforts to develop educational offerings and academic support. In 2000, the Ministry of Education reported that, 78% of the country’s approximately 650 four-year institutions had readjusted or were in the process of readjusting their curriculums; 26% offered remedial classes; nearly 50% conducted placement test and proficiency level streaming for English classes; approximately 72% had adopted a semester-system; 10% had introduced strict grading practices and GPA systems; 52% were involved in “faculty development” activities; and 7% were running “education centers” (Izokura, 2001).

The last figure, that for education centers, which represent a move away from the purely administrative handling of academic guidance toward more centralized and integrated academic support services frequently found on American campuses, appears rather modest (also of note is the fact that there were zero such centers at local – that is prefectural and municipal – public institutions in the survey). While the proportion of institutions offering remedial education was not small (26%), nor was it particularly large (although that number has also likely increased). Rather, it appears that most types of academic support provided to Japanese students are curricular and pedagogical in nature, with full-time faculty members tasked with addressing student skill development in regular classes (cf. *Sundai Kyôiku Kenkyûsho*, 1999; Mizogami, 2003). Several factors are likely to determine the choice of such approaches and will be discussed below, but are likely related to budgetary constraints, lack of perceived need or demand from students’ perspectives, and possibly, to greater perceived effectiveness.

## 5. Site Visits

Two American tertiary institutions and one Japanese one were visited to get first-hand examples of student support services in the two countries. The chosen American sites, the University of Kansas and the University of New Hampshire, represented a convenience sample. While convenience was also a consideration in the selection of the Japanese site, Hiroshima University, it had the clear benefit of having been originally founded as a teachers’ college and thus was expected to have a strong institutional base for establishing and operating study support services. It must be additionally noted that site selection was biased toward large public/national institutions in both countries. However, the following case study descriptions do paint a picture of possibilities given sufficient resources.

### ***University of Kansas***

Founded in 1864 in the city of Lawrence, the University of Kansas is the state of Kansas' largest public institution with approximately 20,000 undergraduate and 6,000 graduate students studying in its 11 colleges and more than 100 academic departments every year. The university's Office for Student Success (OSS), a division of the Provost's Office, is responsible for coordinating and overseeing a wide array of student counseling and support services, including academic, psychological, living, and recreation, across 20 departments and with a staff of 650.

The site visit for the purposes of the current report consisted of interviews with the directors of two of the academic support offices within the OSS: the Student Development Center and the University Writing Center. Both centers were found to be often used campus resources, particularly by first-year students and international students at the university.

According to its director, Mary Ann Rasnak, Ed.D, the Student Development Center's two main support responsibilities are to (1) oversee the university tutoring program, which offers small-group supplementary instruction for required low-level math, science, foreign language, and other courses with high failure rates, and to (2) offer counseling by appointment and workshops on general study skills and time management. While the latter services, which include guidance in such things as listening to lectures, note-taking, and exam preparation, are free and conducted by the center's director and handful of full-time-staff, participation in the supplementary tutoring, which takes the form of twice-weekly group sessions led by a high-achieving, upper-level student who has his/herself taken the course for which they are tutoring, as a rule costs \$120 (¥15,000) per course, although it is possible to obtain a waiver. The center's operating fees, which include salaries for the director and full-time staff, come from the university's budget, while the student use fees are used for the hourly pay of the approximately 20 tutors. According to the director, approximately 200 students receive supplementary tutoring through the center each year and an additional 200 - 300 students participate in workshops and counseling.

As is the case with the Student Development Center tutoring program, the University Writing Center relies on high-achieving students (usually junior and sophomore, but also graduate), in this case, to provide one-on-one tutoring to improve users' academic writing skills. One-on-one tutoring sessions are conducted by appointment in either the Center's offices in a central location on campus, or in any of the several satellite locations in the various university libraries and dormitories. Tutoring sessions usually consist of a user bringing a draft of his or her writing for a class assignment for which they receive feedback from the tutor. Rather than commenting on the content of the topic of writing (in most cases, they know little if anything about the specific topic), tutors focus on giving feedback on mostly global but also local mechanics of writing such as the user's presentation and organization of



ideas, sufficiency of explanation, use of examples, overall flow and transitions, clarity of language, etc., with the goal of having the user focus on improving their work to submit as a final draft of their assignment. At no time will the tutors actually do the work of the users, but will only offer advice. At the same time, tutors encourage students to make use of various writing strategies such as brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and editing.

According to its director, Michele Eodice, Ph.D., the Writing Center (in its offices and in satellite locations) receives approximately 5,000 appointment visits per semester. Users are most often first-year (freshman) students and international students (and foreign-born faculty members). No fees are charged to users and operating expenses are paid for out of the university budget. This clearly reflects the importance placed on developing students' academic writing at the University of Kansas and, most likely, in American higher education as well (the fact that most university-level writing assignments in the U.S. are intended to be smaller versions of the same academic writing that faculty engage in and the fact that grading can be quite severe also supports this). Lastly, in order to become a tutor at the writing center, applicants must first take and receive credit for a semester-long for-credit course on writing and tutoring taught by the center director.

As has already been noted, the common feature shared by both the Student Development Center and the University Writing Center is the use of high-achieving (upper-level) peer tutors to teach, advise, and guide their users in developing their academic skills. Also noted above, but worth emphasizing again, is the fact that as a closely followed rule, tutors will not complete users' assignments for them. Rather, as more experienced learners, they work to guide the less experienced ones in their charge so that they can develop to the point where they can study independently and autonomously.

Clearly, the University of Kansas student support services reflect the importance placed in American higher education and the wider society at large on grades in obtaining class credit, and often later, in obtaining employment, which presents a situation which is perhaps different from Japanese higher education and society.

### ***University of New Hampshire***

Like the University of Kansas, the University of New Hampshire (UNH) was founded as a public land-grant university in 1866. The approximately 10,000 undergraduate and 2,000 graduate students at the university have a wide variety of support options available to them to assist in their academic progress. The backbone of the support systems at UNH is the Center for Academic Resources (CFAR).

The Center for Academic Resources has existed at the University of New Hampshire in its current form since 1993. The university started its support services back in 1974 with a grant from the United States Department of Education. This first program was

called Student Support Services (SSS) and was initially created to specifically assist first generation college students from economically deprived backgrounds. In 1979 the university started a new program based on the success of SSS, but with a wider audience. The new program was called Training in Academic Skills (TASk), and provided study skills assistance to all students at the university regardless of financial background. In 1991 the SSS was absorbed into the TASk center, and it remained so until the program was updated to CFAR in 1993.

The changes over the last thirty years have encompassed far more than just the name of the program, although the names themselves tell a lot about the programs. Just by looking at the names, it is clear that the program has evolved from a remedial education model to one of a resource center. Whereas the initial focus was on teaching and training students study habits and skills, the current focus is on providing students with the resources and guidance they need to meet their goals. In addition to the name changes, the services provided have evolved over the years. In the beginning, the SSS was established to provide tutoring only to students who met the requirements of the federal grant, and provided this guidance mostly on a one-to-one basis. Although this service is still available at CFAR, the number of services offered now has increased greatly.

Features of and services offered by CFAR include the following:

- Study groups for most “barrier” courses (i.e., courses with high failure rates)
- Drop-in learning skills instruction (no appointment necessary), including
  - Time management
  - Note taking
  - Exam preparation
- Individual assessment: staff assist students in discovering their own strengths and weaknesses
- Drop-in tutoring for most courses
- Tutoring by appointment
- A mini computer cluster with both Macs and PCs
- Study lounges
- Peer support, for both academic and personal concerns
- Information resources, including
  - Course information provided by faculty
  - Student evaluations of university faculty members
  - Scholarship information and assistance

One of the most popular services at CFAR is the Study Group program. The Center has set up a number of study groups which meet on a weekly basis to study for specific “barrier” courses (required courses which have proven difficult for students in the past). Generally, these study groups are led by Peer Tutors, undergraduate student staff

members who have already successfully completed the course. These study groups require that the “client” students sign contracts committing themselves to attending the meetings, which helps to maintain strong groups.

In addition to the services provided at the CFAR building on campus, the center also does a lot of outreach to the university students in other locations. In the past few years, the center has started experimenting with satellite centers in the larger dormitories and other buildings on campus. They have found that these satellites are rather successful, as the students find them more comfortable and convenient. Although it has not proven practical to offer all services at all of these satellites, they have proven to work well with study groups for some of the larger courses and also for Peer support services. The existence of the satellites has also assisted in raising awareness of the center on campus, and helped to increase the popularity of the center as a whole.

The staff at CFAR includes only two full-time workers, four part-time workers, and about 50 undergraduate staff members. The undergraduate staff is comprised of 15 Academic Mentors, who work between eight to ten hours per week, and about 35 undergraduates who provide most of the student services, including tutoring and leading study groups. The six salaried staff members manage the center and provide training for the student staff, which is rather extensive. The student staff members all go through a six hour orientation program before they are allowed to provide services to “client” students, and they also are required to attend about 90 minutes of weekly meetings/training sessions. As there is a fair amount of staff turnover, training takes a lot of time and effort. The student staff members are paid for their work at the Center, and some also receive credits toward a national Tutor, or Master Tutor certification.

CFAR has had a rather successful existence at UNH, and a lot of that has been due to the goodwill of the university faculty. Although there is never a shortage of students who need the services, without the assistance of the UNH faculty, many of those students would never visit CFAR on their own. CFAR director, Len Lamberti, works hard to create strong relationships with the university faculty to raise awareness of the Center’s services. Faculty members, welcoming the aid that the Center provides them as teachers, are very good about recommending the Center to students who are in need of assistance, and also providing materials for the Center to use. Many of the faculty members provide the Center with course materials, and other information to assist them in their task. According to Mr. Lamberti, the Center could not exist without the goodwill and assistance of the faculty.

Do all universities need to provide student support centers? Can such support centers succeed at all schools? The simple answer to both questions is “no.” If students are not failing, then there is no real need for support, and any such support provided will go underused. In the case of UNH, the original program was established to support specific students, a group that statistically showed high rates of attrition due to failing grades. Later the program was opened to all students, as such attrition was not limited

to this one group. This is a simple example of a support system born out of need. The university was faced with a growing number of students who were not meeting the requirements for graduation, and rather than lowering the bar to meet these students they decided to provide them the support they needed to reach the bar. In this way, the university was able to maintain its own standards while also meeting the needs of its “customers,” the students. Following this model any university can help students to achieve higher standards, while also working to set higher standards for incoming students.

### ***Common features between American site visit schools***

The above descriptions of the select support services at the University of Kansas and University of New Hampshire reveal a number of common features between the two schools. These include tutoring services specifically for courses with high failure rates, use of exceptional upperclass and graduate student tutors who undergo pre-service training, general study skills counseling, and the mission goal of fostering learner development and independence.

### ***Hiroshima University***

The Student Study Support Office at Hiroshima University was established by its general education committee with the purpose of improving students’ study skills through supplementary instruction and support outside of regularly held classes. It was opened on a trial basis in the fall of 2001 and became a permanent fixture in April of 2003. The current system in place consists of university graduate students and full-time faculty members (English only) providing guidance in general study skills and helping students develop their own methods for dealing with various problems and difficulties in the course of their classroom studies. Course-specific guidance is offered for English, chemistry, mathematics, and physics, depending on the day of the week. The office is open for two hours each weekday, from 17:00 to 19:00 but is closed on weekends, holidays, and when classes are not in session. The office is located in a corner of the university library and includes 10 separate rooms for individual and peer-group support activities. In order to ensure privacy, the walls have been constructed with sound-proof materials. In the fall of 2002, 174 students made use of the office’s services, with first-year students representing the largest group of users at 89. During the spring of 2003, 104 students visited, of which 72 were first-year students. The graduate students working in the office are considered national university tutors and are paid out of the national higher education budget from a category set aside specifically for student tutoring. The hourly pay for master’s and first-half doctoral program students (i.e., pre-doctoral candidates) is 1,100 yen (\$10), and 1,300 yen (\$12) for second-half doctoral program students (i.e., doctoral candidates).

Based upon the above numbers obtained during the Hiroshima University Study

Support Office site visit, it is clear that the majority of users during its period of operation have been first-year students (82.4% in 2002; 69.2% in 2003). The likely reason for this is because as first-year students they are not yet acquainted with upper-class students in their academic divisions and majors who might provide guidance and advice when they encounter difficulties in their studies. Thus, during their first year they turn to the Study Support Office, the need for which likely lessens as they themselves become upperclassmen and become better acquainted with their seniors in their chosen academic fields. It must also be kept in mind that given that the University of Hiroshima has over 10,000 students, the number of people making use of the center is relatively small.

The expenses involved in opening and running the Study Support Office have not presented significant problems for the university. The money used for payment of tutors comes from the national budget. The largest expense for which the university has had to pay directly is the construction of the physical office space in the library, and this was reported to have not been an enormous sum. In addition to low startup and operating costs, another factor which has contributed to the Office's successful start has been that the university has a large pool of graduate students from which to attract tutors with sufficient discipline-specific knowledge. In summary, then, it appears that in order to provide study support services what is needed is essentially a knowledgeable tutoring staff, office space, and enough money to pay the tutors. This would not likely be a barrier to most schools in Japan in establishing their own support programs.

It should be clear that the Study Support Office at Hiroshima University resembles the two centers at the American site-visit universities described above (University of Kansas and University of New Hampshire), though it is run on a somewhat smaller scale and is still in its early stages of operation. Of note, however, is the fact that tutoring at Hiroshima University is done exclusively by graduate students and full-time faculty members (in the case of English tutoring), while tutoring at the University of Kansas and the University of New Hampshire also includes upper-class undergraduate tutors. It was noted that the proportion of students using the Office services is small relative to the total Hiroshima University population (between one and two percent). It does rise, however, if the number is considered with regard to the university's first-year student population (between four and seven percent). Undoubtedly, since the Office was only recently opened, lack of awareness among students might contribute to lower usage levels. As Mary Ann Raznak, director of the Student Development Center at the University of Kansas repeatedly underscored, much of her work involved meeting with faculty members and visiting classes at the beginning of the school year in an attempt to "get out the word" (publicize) the resources available to students at the center. It must also be kept in mind that the usage numbers at U.S. institutions are not likely large relative to overall student

bodies either if the University of Kansas figures are representative (like Hiroshima University, between one and two percent of the total student body uses University of Kansas Student Development Center services each semester, with higher numbers for Writing Center services). However, the same could easily be said of other university services such as psychological counseling. The best way to view support services might be, then, to consider them as an offering of important services to those students who actually need and are determined to use them and thus having an impact on the students that do use them. In so doing, they are fulfilling an important role in individual student development.

## **6. Discussion & Conclusion: Applicability of American Principles and Practices**

The breadth and focus of student support services offered at American colleges and universities reflects a strong conviction of the value and purpose of higher education. In a budgetary meeting of lower house of legislators in the state of Illinois, President Carter of Columbia College in Chicago (which has the highest rate of minority students among humanities institutions) was reported to have referred to education as the door to the American dream for the children of America's laborers, immigrants, and for the less economically fortunate minority groups. Such assertions make clear the widely held belief in the U.S. that higher education is the key to personal success. In today's American higher education system, which has come to embrace the idea of access for everyone, serious efforts are made to offer the chance to succeed even to those students who might not initially meet basic academic standards. It is this value regarding the American dream that provides the conceptual impetus for the extensive student support services found on American college and university campuses.

In comparison to the American situation, Japanese educational values do not appear to hold quite the same level of idealism and hope. This is likely because of the widely held beliefs regarding university entrance examinations and their purpose of ranking applicants in terms of their academic ability and selection for admissions. Because only the relatively more able students will gain admissions, even if they do not put much effort into their college-level education, it is believed that they will excel when forced to do so upon entering the workforce. Thus it has never been considered a problem that Japanese student life be a four-year respite from the social pressures of gaining college admissions and work-related stress experienced following graduation. However, with increasing acceptance rates and the popularization of college admissions in recent years due to population declines, the reality has become that many Japanese students have been able to "play" during their high school years without developing their academic skills, and they have continued to exert little effort during their college years as institutions have yet to change to address this reality (Kariya, 1997). The effects of the current system, which encourages a low regard for serious study among Japanese students, has the potential to jeopardize Japan's future knowledge base and the lack of

adequate guidance for unmotivated students is undoubtedly a contributing factor. It must also be kept in mind that it is the fundamental responsibility of educational institutions to support the personal development of the students it accepts for study.

Given perhaps a fundamental difference between the two educational systems, the question must be asked to what extent American style, centralized support services such as tutoring, development centers, writing and math centers, etc., may be successful when introduced in a Japanese context. Of course, several Japanese institutions have already begun to introduce such services, although it is too early to tell to what degree of success. The issue of implementing such programs in Japan must be considered in terms of both feasibility and appropriateness.

The feasibility of expanded academic and other support services is perhaps the less difficult issue to consider. That is, constructing office space, appointing administrative staff, particularly if it is among already employed faculty, and hiring graduate or other upper-level students as tutors (or TAs), etc., will not likely prove to be too great a hurdle. To be sure, additional financing would be necessary. The study support systems in place in the U.S. require significant support themselves (particularly financial), and in addition to public financing and donations, American tertiary institutions have higher enrollments which continue to increase annually, and, which bring in substantially more in tuition and fees. This has created a situation in which American institutions have had a comparatively rich financial base to draw from in implementing student support programs. Particularly smaller Japanese institutions (such as the one the authors are employed at), which have fewer resources available to them unlike the American and Japanese schools surveyed for this paper, may consider the task daunting. But establishing support programs in variously sized Japanese institutions would not likely be prohibitive, *given sufficient demand* among students, faculty, and the public (more on this below). Services need not be sweeping and could be modest in scale and focus on key needs such as tutoring for required introductory classes with high failure rates. Hiroshima University's Study Support Office discussed above is a good example of how services might be implemented.

The question of appropriateness of implementing academic support services is perhaps relatively more debatable. The fundamental issue of course is whether students would make use of such counseling services in "sufficient numbers" to justify expenditures of time and money were they to become available. Barriers to usage have already been touched on above and include most prominently low student motivation and comparatively relaxed requirements. In American higher education, students who fail to meet academic standards in terms of grades are forced to withdraw from school. As a result, motivation tends to be higher and students are more likely to make use of support services. In Japan, relatively lower student motivation highlights the potential difficulties in running support programs. Where there is little pressure to pass classes, students may not feel the need to turn to support services to develop their academic

skills. According to Mizogami's (2003) survey, however, approximately 2/3 of the students he surveyed were interested in their own academic development for either enrichment or professional purposes. What percentage of such students would make use of support services is of course open to question. To what extent the remaining 1/3 would be willing to make use of services without outside pressure is also open to question. If the goal is to address academic skill decline on a broad basis, it is likely curricular and pedagogical approaches would be more effective in terms of the broader population. This does not necessarily argue against implementing academic support programs as long as they are considered as being in the same realm as other counseling services which may not be used by the majority of the student population but serve as an invaluable resource to those that choose to do so. Ultimately then, strengthening educational (curricular and pedagogical) standards may have a larger effect in terms of addressing declining academic skills, while providing counseling and other academic support services may help the students most in need meet those standards.

Based upon the current discussion of student study support systems at American and Japanese higher education institutions, a number of areas present themselves for further investigation. First, it is necessary to piece together a better picture of the so-called breakdown of Japanese classrooms both quantitatively and qualitatively. Although it is clear that the characterization of Japanese college and universities as "leisurelands" is more or less apt (Kariya, 1997) and many classrooms run rampant with student chatter and napping during class, there is still little data with regard to students' so-called "school-refusal," or a chronic failure to attend classes. Foreign language classes, which are largely compulsory and meet on a daily basis, may serve as a good source of information regarding student school attendance and reasons for non-attendance.

Second, it is necessary to better survey the various formal and informal forms of support services at various Japanese institutions, national, public, and private, large and small. Although recent years have seen the introduction of counseling services, freshman seminars, teaching assistants, office hours, study advising, experiential classroom learning, etc., questions regarding how or whether such programs are effectively integrated, what if any educational impact they have, etc. remain unanswered. In terms of quantitative investigations, measures will need to be developed (for example, graduation rates are typically used in the U.S., but may be less revealing in a Japanese context), and in qualitative ones, both latitudinal and longitudinal descriptions will be needed in order to attempt to assess effectiveness. Much the same could be said of the U.S. situation, and further research in American higher education may shed light on issues and/or suggest future avenues of research in Japan as well.



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