

Eisaku Bun (Writing/Composition)

国際理解教育 / D. R. ボグダン

Course Overview:

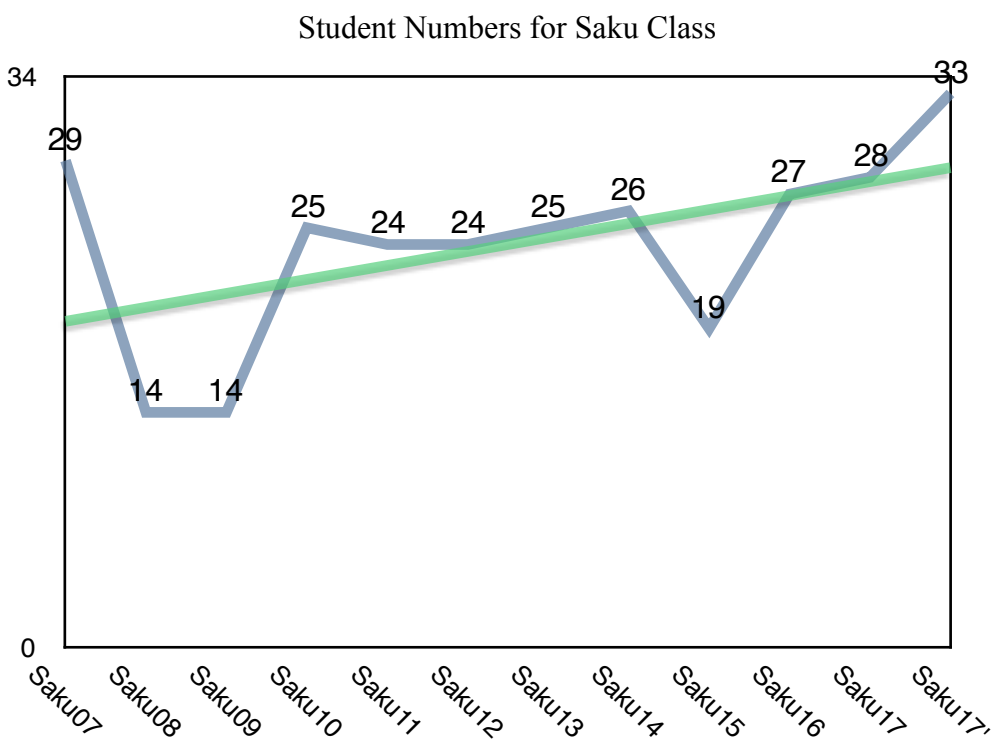
This class, in various incarnations, has been taught by the instructor each of the 12 years he has worked at the university. Until this year, it had been listed as being for 1st-term sophomores, but some seniors had also often joined the class.

Typically, a significant majority of the the students had been EFL and EIU (Education for International Understanding) majors, but, with the major curriculum change which ended the EIU Program, the student make-up in the most recent rendition has changed greatly this time around.

Class Size:

In her article on class size for writing classes, Horning (2007) states "The leading national organization on the teaching of college writing, then, clearly states that the maximum class size for writing classes should be twenty or fewer students for regular classes, and recommends an even smaller size for developmental courses, in which students need even more individual attention."

Other publications also tend to use the "optimal" 15 to a max of 20 limits for the size of writing classes. As can be seen from the chart below, however, this "writing" class size has shown a rise in numbers over the last 10 years from a recommended number of 14 to the most recent jump to 33 students. The 29 students for the 2007 class is an outlier which can be readily explained; the author's predecessor left rather suddenly and the class was not held the prior year, so that class was essentially a combination of two classes: both juniors and seniors. It is not clear whether the "33" for the most recent class is an outlier: probably not, because it reflects the recent curriculum change.



Providing Feedback:

Even earlier on, when the class size made giving more detailed feedback even feasible, the instructor had begun to have doubts about the effectiveness of providing such feedback in the form of grammatical corrections. And, in fact, studies have gone as far to have stated that "grammar correction has no place in writing courses." (Truscott, 1996)

This is not, however, a lecture class, and interaction between teacher and students—including feedback from the teacher—is required. In this case, the instructor determined that going over representative grammar problems, and doing it in a way that includes suggestions from peers, might prove to be helpful. Using Moodle, he chose representative errors from the students' compositions, assigned those problems to everyone, and then went over suggestions for changes in the class with everyone participating, first in groups and then with the class as a whole.

Students' Views Regarding the Correction Exercises:

In an informal, anonymously submitted, evaluation conducted by the instructor, the students gave the Correction assignment a 4.2 out of 5 on a Likert-scale rating item. Also, below are some of the comments they provided (very loosely translated from Japanese by the instructor) relating to that portion of the course.

It was nice to learn not only how to write English compositions, but also detailed ways of expressing oneself.

I think that the corrections made it possible to master practical grammatical skills.

In Corrections, I was able to listen to various opinions and it was a great learning experience. I could study natural English not written in the textbook.

I learned how to write correctly in English grammar and English composition.

I learned how the rules of English work

I was able to interact with other people in group work.

It was very useful for me to correct grammar.

All in all, this method of providing feedback to students in which all students play an active part along with the teacher seems to be working out relatively well, although it is somewhat time consuming.

References:

- Horning, Alice. 2007. "The Definitive Article of Class Size." WPA: *Writing Program Administration Volume 31*, Numbers 1-2, Fall/Winter 2007.
- Truscott, John. 1996. "The Case Against Grammar Correction in L2 Writing Classes". *Language Learning* 46:2. June 1996, pp. 327-369.