

Exploring American Culture:

Educational Resources and One Classroom Approach

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Abstract

The Spring 2001 semester marked the instructor's first opportunity to conduct the "American Culture" course for fourth-year students. This paper provides an overview of that course, ranging from textbook selection to course content and the final exam. Historical and geographical approaches to the subject matter were primarily employed, although current events were also incorporated. Supplemental materials included print and video resources from the Fukuoka American Center, Internet-generated audio resources from the Voice of America, and the multimedia Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia. The dominant influence of immigration, past and present, on the cultural diversity of the U.S. and the American character was a central course theme. The Ehime Maru incident, Hawaiian history and native culture, the Japanese American experience, and California's unique cultural milieu were among the other topical areas examined. The distinctive values, attitudes and beliefs that continue to shape American thinking and behavior were explored, along with the concept of the "American Dream" that underpins U.S. culture's enduring global appeal. At the same time, a focus on independent critical thinking encouraged students to actively make comparisons involving their own Japanese

culture and individual experiences, thereby providing a multicultural context. Based on instructor observation and student feedback (examples of which are provided), this course appeared to meet its objectives. Future improvements are being planned.

Introduction

“Culture” is a word with a wide range of connotations that are highly negotiable in meaning. When applied to a nation and society as sprawling and heterogeneous as the United States, as in the “American Culture” (英語圏の文化A) course during the Spring 2001 semester, the task of defining the subject matter became more unwieldy. Moreover, it was the American instructor’s first experience in conducting such a content-based course in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment. As the American Culture course syllabus noted, “Culture is a very broad concept that includes many aspects: history, religion, education, government, business, entertainment, customs and traditions. Several of these aspects will be explored using a geographical approach, by focusing on specific regions of the country and the key people and events associated with them. This course will provide an overview of the cultural values, attitudes and beliefs now shaping mainstream American society, while emphasizing the unsurpassed diversity of the United States. Active classroom discussion will encourage students to make cross-cultural comparisons involving American and Japanese ways of life, with the goal of making students’ own interactions with American culture more meaningful.”

The 67 fourth-year students enrolled in the course, required for graduation in the university’s teacher training (教職課程) program, possessed relatively high levels of motivation and academic ability. They proved generally receptive to a range of classroom strategies and activities designed to maximize student interaction with the teacher and each other. The main pedagogical challenge was to avoid

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Table 1:

Topical areas of focus for the American Culture course.

- * Ehime Maru incident and other current events
- * Hawaiian history and native culture
- * American immigration, past and present
- * Immigration to Hawaii and California from Japan
- * Japanese American internment and redress
- * California's diverse cultural milieu

content overload by narrowing down and focusing the subject matter, while integrating the several course themes into a coherent framework. This was accomplished in part by establishing the fundamental importance to American culture of immigration, and by proceeding as a class in the same direction as Japanese emigration to U.S.—that is, from Hawaii to California. The course began last April by considering the Ehime Maru incident and the high-profile controversy then straining U.S.-Japan relations. Hawaii's native culture and 19th-century historical experience were also covered. There followed an in-depth look at earlier immigration from Europe through Ellis Island, as well as modern-day immigration from Asia and Latin America. Immigration to Hawaii and California from Japan, during the late 1800s and early 1900s, was placed into the overall context of the Japanese American experience. This included the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and the successful redress movement of the 1980s. California's cultures and subcultures were addressed by looking at the cities of San Francisco and Los Angeles. Table 1 restates these topical areas of concentration, while weekly course content is described in greater detail below.

Textbook and Supplemental Materials

Following a review of some two dozen textbooks from foreign as well as Japanese publishers, *Spotlight on the USA* (Falk 1993) was selected as the required

course text. The book was written at an intermediate English level and divided the United States into nine geographical zones, which were further subdivided and arranged by various themes. The glossaries at the end of each section were especially helpful and the discreet, easily digestible readings did not appear to overwhelm students. Nearly every page of the text contained colorful maps, illustrations and photographs, while comprehension was checked by means of quizzes, puzzles and word games. Most significantly, each section also provided well-constructed discussion points that prompted students to consider their own culture and history, not only that of the U.S.

In the immigration section, for example, the textbook asked: “Over the years, did many people immigrate to your country? Are there many immigrants today? Where are the immigrants from? Why did they leave their countries? Did many people emigrate from your country to other countries? What are some of the countries they went to? Did many people go to the United States? (Falk 1993; 4). Such questions conform well to current trends in the field of multicultural education, wherein past tendencies toward “cultural imperialism” and unidirectional teaching have been criticized. (See, among others, Tomlinson 1991 and Zinn 2001.) In addition to the primary focus on American culture, therefore, the course also encouraged deeper appreciation of Japanese culture and greater cross-cultural awareness. “Hawaii’s culture is described as being a real mix of the cultures of the different people who settled there,” the text noted in another section. “Have you been to any places that you thought had a real mix of cultures? If so, describe them” (Falk 1993; 169). Students answered that Okinawa and Hokkaido both fit this bill. In short, this seemed like a book students might enjoy reading even after completion of the course.

Online at <http://usembassy.state.gov/fukuoka>, the American Center in downtown Fukuoka was formerly part of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), which merged with the U.S. State Department in 1999. The American Center is now

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administered by the local American Consulate and provides at no cost a wide range of educational materials, access to academic research databases, and information about travel and study in the U.S. The USIA-produced *Portrait of the USA* (Clack 1997), a full-color 96-page booklet available in English and Japanese versions, was a useful supplement to the course's main textbook. USIA's *Outline* series of books about American geography, government, history, literature and the economy would be most appropriate for students doing independent research or for teachers preparing courses in these culture-related fields. With their appealing color graphics and user-friendly layout, the following two encyclopedias among the center's several sets would be most suitable for such student and teacher needs: *America A to Z: People, Places, Customs and Culture* (Reader's Digest 1997); and *Atlas of the Baby Boom Generation: A Cultural History of Postwar America* (Hamilton 2000).

The local American Center, one of four such facilities in Japan, also makes available for classroom screening its collection of hundreds of documentary videotapes about the United States, most of which originally aired on American public or network television. One of two videos shown during the semester, the 24-minute "Portraits of Liberty" (NBC 1986) profiled female immigrants to the U.S. who achieved success in their careers and private lives. Lists of the Fukuoka American Center's print and video resource holdings can be found at its virtual library, <http://usembassy.state.gov/fukuoka/www2lib.html>. It may be easiest to view the full-text publications (including *Portrait of the USA*) and vast quantities of other educationally useful data at the State Department's "Information USA" website by starting at the site map, <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/sitemap.htm>. Students in last spring's class were provided with a printout of the Fukuoka American Center homepage, in English and Japanese, and informed that the facility is open to the public. Small-group tours of the center can be arranged, as can visits by center staff to area university classrooms.

The Encarta Encyclopedia (Microsoft Corporation 2000), often provided on CD-ROM with the purchase of new Windows-based personal computers, represented a resource with versatile applications. Straightforward features like searchable text articles with hypertext links helped the instructor flesh out certain topics during pre-class preparation. But the software's multimedia capabilities were fully utilized inside the classroom on two separate occasions using a laptop computer connected to a screen projector (液晶プロジェクター). This enabled the use of photographic images, audio-video clips, and interactive maps and charts that better illustrated specific course themes. Other Encarta functions were exhibited just for fun: video animations with sound and moving text (explaining such matters as eclipses, the structure of DNA and how airplanes can fly); audio and video of traditional music from around the world, famous speeches and historic events (such as the 1937 explosion of the Hindenburg, the 1969 moon walk and Martin Luther King speeches); and 360-degree views of world landmarks like Stonehenge, the Roman Forum and the Grand Canyon (in which moving the computer mouse caused the screen image to rotate panoramically). Even the Encarta content that related more tangentially to course topics possessed a definite cross-cultural appeal for the students, many of whom encountered this type of American-produced multimedia technology for the first time.

In addition, Internet-generated audio materials from the Voice of America (VOA) were employed on three occasions and are described below. (For more information on classroom applications of authentic materials and streaming audio, see Underwood 2000. Last November, the author also made a presentation entitled "VOA on the WWW: Resource for News and U.S. Culture" at the Third Pan-Asian Conference at Japan Association for Language Teaching 2001.) Another well-received supplemental resource was a videotaped program called "San Francisco City Guide" (Pilot Productions 1998), featuring a female presenter about the same age as the female students and focusing on that city's unique character and alternative

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cultures. Produced for Lonely Planet, a company known for its guidebooks promoting independent travel, the 45-minute video was in English with Japanese subtitles and aired on the Discovery Channel during the spring semester. OHP transparencies were used in class once.

Course Content

As a self-introduction activity on the first day of class, a mock quiz forced students to make guesses about the teacher's personal background. Answers were provided in the form of a "split text" personal information essay; students formed pairs and corrected the quiz together by asking and answering the questions. Next, during the "Who wrote what?" activity students independently composed five sentences about the United States, one sentence on each of five small slips of papers. (Example sentence patterns included: One thing I admire/dislike about America is _____; I want to visit _____ in the U.S. because _____; Americans are more/less _____ than Japanese; _____ is my favorite American _____.) In small groups, students then mixed their slips of paper together and tried to guess which student wrote which sentence. These ice-breaking communicative activities attempted to set a classroom tone of active student participation, to make clear that class sessions would not consist of one-way teacher monologs. For homework, students completed self-profile forms that also asked about the language they would prefer the course to be conducted in. Results indicated that students desired approximately 80 percent English and 20 Japanese, a proportion that was roughly maintained throughout the semester.

An early effort was made to chronologically place the founding of the United States into the historical context of the Renaissance, the Age of Exploration, and Enlightenment liberalism. According to *Portrait of the USA*: "In New England the Puritans hoped to build a 'city upon a hill'—an ideal community. Ever

since, Americans have viewed their country as a great experiment, a worthy model for other nations to follow” (Clack 1997; 21). It was suggested that constant striving for progress and improvement (at least in terms of liberal democracy and market capitalism) is central to the world’s oldest constitutional democracy, making “America” as much a utopian possibility as a geographical location. “America, to endure, must change ... change to preserve America’s ideals—life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. Though we march to the music of our time, our mission is timeless,” stated President Bill Clinton (Cincotta 1994; 364).

This guiding concept of an “American mission” served as convenient segue into current events and the Ehime Maru incident, in which a U.S. Navy submarine accidentally sank a Japanese fisheries training vessel near Hawaii in February 2001, killing nine Japanese. Downloaded from the Internet, the streaming audio recording and script of the VOA Special English news report from March 11 recapped the tragedy and ongoing court proceedings involving the submarine captain. A cloze exercise required students to fill in missing words and phrases while listening to the Special English report, narrated at about two-thirds normal speed using controlled vocabulary. Comprehension questions and group discussion followed. (Although VOA is federally funded, its existing reputation for objectivity was enhanced during the October 2001 U.S. military action in Afghanistan, when the news organization was criticized in some circles for being insufficiently patriotic.) Text-only reports from Internet sources such as Kyodo News covered the Ehime Maru issue up through the captain’s career-ending letter of reprimand on April 23. Whenever Internet materials were employed during this course, students were always provided with the relevant URLs and urged to access the websites independently.

Turning to Hawaii’s native culture, students learned how traditional hula dancing (distinct from the modern variety) was banned and nearly wiped out in the 1800s by American Christian missionaries who deemed it too erotic. But Kaleidoscope, a VOA News program separate from Special English, featured hula’s

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current comeback in its April 29 broadcast, archived online in text and streaming audio. Kaleidoscope covered the Merry Monarch Hula Festival in Hilo, Hawaii, a popular competition and cultural event that celebrates both the ancient and modern dance versions. Given the script in split-text format, students had to work together to answer questions and complete cloze sections while listening to the audio file, which contained narration, an interview with an elderly female “kuma hula” (or hula master), and music clips from the festival of both types of hula. Students were asked if they preferred the traditional or modern hula music, the former featuring somewhat martial-sounding drums and the latter lighter ukuleles.

Also posed was the discussion question, Does tourism have a positive or negative effect on traditional culture? It was suggested that the answer might be “both and” rather than “either or.” In the case of Hawaii, considering the arrival in 1778 of English explorer James Cook to be the islands’ first “tourist” contact, impacts were devastating for 200 years. However, tourism can play an important 21st-century role in preserving native culture through education and providing new audiences for traditional art forms. Hula groups from Texas and California also took part in the Merry Monarch Festival, for example, and the report noted that hula schools are opening in Japan. Students were then asked to choose one sentence from the Kaleidoscope script that they thought best summed up the report. The teacher’s choice was a quote from the kuma hula: “Because one thing with the Hawaiian culture, anybody can do it, as long as you have the heart for it, the aloha.” (The statement is also more generally representative of Hawaii, the most ethnically diverse of any U.S. state.) Students were finally asked to compare Hawaiian efforts to preserve their cultural heritage with similar efforts being made, or not being made, in Japan.

Past and present immigration, and the tremendous cultural diversity it has spawned, was the next topic considered. Poet Walt Whitman, the textbook pointed out, referred to the U.S. as “not merely a nation but a nation of nations” (Falk

1993; 1). Particular emphasis was placed on the connection between immigration and American cultural traits. “The steady stream of people coming to America’s shores has had a profound effect on the American character. It takes courage and flexibility to leave your homeland and come to a new country. The American people have been noted for their willingness to take risks and try new things, for their independence and optimism” (Clack 1997; 9). (Regarding this quintessential quality of optimism, it was pointed out that the last four letters of the word American are “I can.”) The Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia, used with a laptop computer and screen projector, illustrated via maps, graphs and photos the waves of immigration from Europe that passed through Ellis Island between 1892 and 1954. Students were given text captions, arranged at odd angles on an A3-size handout, for some of the many photographic images displayed and had to match the captions with the photos. Students then had to translate some of the captions into Japanese for homework; they could choose which ones.

Another VOA News program called New American Voices broadcast on April 30 the “Circus Citizenship” segment, describing how 75 children adopted from 14 countries became U.S. citizens at a swearing-in ceremony conducted at the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus. The segment’s streaming audio file and text script were downloaded from the program’s Internet archive and later employed in class. This time the script was provided to students in two separate sections, one containing the text of the narrator’s portion and the other containing the quoted text of numerous interview subjects. Prior to listening to the report, students had to decide based on context where the quotes should be inserted. Such activities proved challenging and necessitated cooperative learning. Another supplemental resource depicting present-day immigration was the “Portraits of Liberty” videotape (NBC 1986) mentioned in the previous section. During post-viewing discussion of the video, produced to commemorate the centennial of the Statue of Liberty, students told which of the female immigrant-entrepreneurs

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they most strongly identified with and gave reasons why.

The course continued forward with immigration from Japan to Hawaii and later California beginning in the late 19th century, considering the reasons of poverty and lack of opportunity that prompted thousands of agricultural laborers (often from western Japan) to leave their homeland, and focusing on their experience as American immigrants of hardship and racism. (As Student A72 later observed in her course comments, “I was wondering why so many Japanese were in America, Hawaii. But now I found the answer ... I think they had both time good and bad. I want them to keep our Japanese culture in the U.S.”) Anti-Japanese racism reached its peak in California following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and America’s entry into World War II. One full class period was devoted to the Japanese American internment and redress movement, explaining both the wartime evacuation and incarceration of 120,000 ethnic Japanese from the West Coast, as well as the national apology and monetary reparations awarded to surviving internees in 1988. This class session included dozens of OHP transparencies and was conducted entirely in Japanese to facilitate student understanding and participation. (The Japanese American redress movement was the author’s graduate thesis topic. See Underwood 1996, and also Underwood 1998.) It became apparent, however, that students were not enthusiastic about engaging in classroom discussion involving WWII-related matters.

California is a state equal in land area to Japan that is home to one out of eight Americans, and to the world’s sixth-largest economy. Ever since the Gold Rush, California has represented not only the geographical limit of the western frontier but also an idealized state of mind. “California is frequently described as being ‘like America, only more so.’ In California, America’s good points often seem even better and its problems even worse. Many people think of California as the state that symbolizes the American dream. There, individuals have the opportunity to succeed—to do and be what they want” (Falk 1993; 153). Yet

Table 2:

“What does the term ‘American Dream’ mean to you?” (Student responses, with student numbers in parentheses.)

- * 日本人の“イチロー”もアメリカで更に野球の力が上がっていつのまにか、アメリカのファン投票で1位になる程になった。アメリカとは人間に勇気や力を与えてくれるような不思議な力を持っているのではないかと思いました (A30)。
- * You can do whatever you want to achieve in wherever you want to be. It’s all up to you (A15).
- * Don’t depend on other people, to realize my dream. And to find my whereabouts (B3).
- * 性別の違い、学歴の差などに関係なく、すべての人々に平等に成功するチャンスがあるということ (A41)。
- * “American Dream” is a chance to start new things. People doesn’t need to think about risk and failure (B9).
- * I think there are some possibility of success. So it is not [a] present but one of process and by sheer dint of effort (B40).
- * American people are very optimistic and active. So they can obtain freedom (B63).
- * In my thought, “American Dream” means to be free nation for all people of the world without injustice or 偏見 (B31).
- * Not only success of business but also success of life (A72).

just as the same textbook passage stressed that “there are many Californias,” it was emphasized that the concept of the “American Dream” has no fixed definition. Individualism is the major component of the concept, which thus has a unique meaning for each individual. (Table 2 shows student responses to a final exam question about the meaning of “American Dream.”) Los Angeles and southern California were contrasted with San Francisco and northern California, giving good indication of the state’s cultural diversity. The “San Francisco City Guide” video (Pilot Productions 1998) further illustrated that city’s lively “micro-cultures.” San Francisco’s population is roughly one-quarter Hispanic and includes the largest

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number of ethnic Chinese outside of Asia; several students expressed surprise concerning the city's large, politically active gay community. Various multimedia features of the Encarta Encyclopedia were helpful for the classroom exploration of California.

A class session toward the end of semester was spent tying together various course themes and applying them to current events of the students' choice. Each student was required to bring in any U.S.-related article from a Japanese newspaper, magazine or Internet source. In small groups, students translated all of the Japanese headlines into English. Students in each group then chose one article and boiled it down into its essential points, which were then roughly translated into English and shared with the whole class. Among the July 2001 news stories they selected were a summit meeting between U.S. President George W. Bush and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, juvenile court cases involving underage drinking by Bush's twin daughters, an Okinawa rape case involving an American serviceman, controversial American government policies regarding missile defense and the Kyoto Protocol environmental accord, U.S.-Russia relations, and the new Hollywood movie "A.I." Key to this activity was the subsequent class discussion of how such media reports reflected American culture as studied in previous weeks. President Bush, for example, was described as behaving in an excessively individualistic or unilateralist manner, for acting like a cowboy on the western frontier.

"Numerous present-day American values and attitudes can be traced to the frontier past: self-reliance, resourcefulness, comradeship, a strong sense of equality" (Clack 1997; 18). But today, as globalization continues to unfold along U.S.-style lines of technologically driven capitalism and modern mass culture, the entire world has become in some sense the new American frontier. (Globalization is for this basic reason being opposed by many people worldwide, even by many Americans.) Political analyst Ben Wattenberg has called the U.S. the world's "first universal nation" because it represents "virtually every nationality and ethnic group

on the globe. It is also a nation where the pace and extent of change—economic, technological, cultural, demographic and social—is unceasing. The United States is often the harbinger of the modernization and change that inevitably sweep up other nations and societies in an increasingly interdependent, interconnected world” (quoted in Cincotti 1994; 388). In response to a final exam question about this idea of “universal nationhood,” students picked up the twin thread of America’s internal ethnic composition and its global cultural influence. Stated Student A1: “Because if you’re in a 7-11 store all day in the U.S. you will see many different races people. In Japan, you won’t.” According to Student B24: “I think U.S. technology, economy, movie, etc. は変化し続け, developing their knowledge rapidly.” The course’s comprehensive final examination consisted of multiple choice and open-ended questions, as well as a “Your Opinion” section (Table 3) that asked students about the course’s effect on their images of the United States.

Table 3:

“How has this course affected your image of the United States? What are some new things you learned about the U.S.?” (Student responses, with student numbers in parentheses.)

- *I didn’t know San Francisco has one of American’s largest gay communities. But gay が受け入れられている地域があるという事は, great (B44). ... In Japan, Japanese people hate gay people, so they can’t say they are gay. But in the U.S. they are 堂々としている. I think very good and カッコいい about them movement (B52). ... But if it in Japan, Japanese will make a deny of gay. It is sad. United States allows everything (A3).
- *カリフォルニア1つとっても, その地域地域で, 全く異なる特色を集まっていることを知りました。[アメリカは] ただ土地が広い, というだけではなく, あらゆるものを受け入れることのできる許容範囲の広い, 心の大きな国だということでした (A34)。
- *6年前にロサンゼルスに行ったのでとても身近な事でした。でも, ロサンゼルスに500ものギャングがいる事は知りませんでした。ビデオやVOAなど

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おもしろい教材が多くて楽しかった (B25)。

- * My U.S. image become “America is freedom and friendly and always developing and changing country.” Internet を取り入れた class was first time for me (B24).
- * In Japan, one culture spreads around Japan with changing forms. But, there are many different cultures like mosaic in U.S. (A29). ... Immigrants influenced the American history and culture. I want to learn about “melting pot” (サラダボール)。I think it is very interesting to mix (まざり合う) different people, cultures, etc. Because, then new history and cultures is born and they can influence many things (A61).
- * 私はアメリカ文化の多種多様性, それぞれ州ごとの特徴, アメリカという国がなぜこんなに, 多人種なのか。みんながアメリカにあこがれる理由。をざっとスピーディーに学びました (B64)。
- * I’ve known the U.S. is the immigration country. But most of the immigrants were subjected to great hardships more than I thought. The women that I saw [in the “Portraits of Liberty” video] had the frontier spirit. I moved their acts (A68).
- * 日系アメリカ人の人達が, 日本から新天地を探しにアメリカに来たが裕福になるには, かなりの時間がかかったが, 彼らなりの幸せがやっと手に入れたという話を read した時, 同じ日本人の血が流れているだけに胸にグッとくるものがありました。アメリカという国はそういう事ができる国なんだなあーと思いました (A30)。
- * I had a image of the U.S. that being always confident, right and winning. Maybe it’s true. But now I know that power’s origin came from all over the globe. Japanese was a part of it. That make me proud of being Japanese (A1).
- * 最近の事件では沖縄の軍人の問題があがっていたが, そういう topic を出し合ってアメリカ人である先生から生の言葉が (本音?) 聞けて本当にためになったし, なかなか経験できるものではないと思いました (B33)。
- * アメリカは実力主義の国だと感じました。アメリカでは男女, 国など関係なく, 力がある人が成功するのだと思いました。私もいつかアメリカで自分がどれだけやれるか自分を試してみたいと思いました (B55)。
- * I learned how the U.S. have good, but I want to know what kinds of problem they have, and how the people (一般の人, 若者など) think about it (B4). ... I want to know East Coast side. Because today there area is important spot of world economy. I don’t know why you didn’t do that (B66).
- * I learned the hula was traditional Hawaii’s dance and in ancient Hawaii were danced for spiritual ceremonies to honor the gods. And now Hawaii has school to teach the hula because of [younger generations] taking over. This is very good idea, I think. Japan has traditional dance (Kabuki, Nou, etc.) too. So Japan should

make the school like Hawaii (A23).

- * Before I take this class, I had a lot of “stereotypes” of America and American, such as the U.S. is dangerous, the U.S. likes new, the American is sometimes aggressive and so on. [Now] I wouldn’t say “stereotype” anymore. ... Japanese has lots of traditional but we don’t have too much feelings for them. But Hawaiian, they keep their traditions with a lot of energy. I learned the U.S. history and at the same time, I feel we should keep our Japanese culture (A73).

Conclusion

The American Culture course met most of its objectives and will be conducted using a similar approach during the upcoming academic year. Pre-class preparation required considerable imagination, as an effort was made to match the diversity of American culture with a variety of supplemental materials and a range of strategies for maximizing student participation. Flexibility and sensitivity to student affective response, including a willingness to veer off into promising new directions or to cut short ineffective activities, were necessary during the class sessions. For example, a lecture involving “America bashing” and “Japan bashing,” intended to highlight cultural traits prone to mutual misunderstanding, failed to yield satisfactory results and was quickly dropped in favor of a backup plan. The semester’s most frustrating aspect was that it was generally not possible to replicate (in either English or Japanese) the free-flow type classroom discussion or the vigorous give-and-take synergy that characterize fruitful university courses in the West. The “reflective teaching” component of the course, in which the teacher systematically evaluated actual educational outcomes in relation to desired outcomes, will be beneficial for future fine-tuning.

For instance, an assessment test at the beginning of the semester would specify the rather sizeable gaps in students’ existing knowledge of American history and society; an instructor can choose to fill in or work around such gaps only after

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he is aware of them. Regular quizzes proved necessary to ensure the completion of reading homework and will be continued. Because most of the teacher-training students fulfilled their two-week teaching practicum requirement at area public schools during the spring semester, there was a high rate of excused absenteeism. This meant that every week the instructor needed to bring to class the handouts from previous weeks, and that a better effort at reviewing past class content should be made. Reflective teaching also requires that student feedback, such as that garnered from the "Your Opinion" section of the final exam, be seriously considered. Most of these student self-reports described specific areas in which knowledge of American culture increased, as well as a positive overall learning experience. Several respondents said they wanted to visit the United States as a result of taking the course. According to Student B5 (perhaps somewhat fulsomely, considering that the information was provided on the final exam sheet): "I am made up my mind which I want to settle permanently in America by your class." Additional course comments are contained in Table 3. Due to the manner in which it was collected, this data is intended to be suggestive only.

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