

# Bridging the Gap between the Classroom and the Workplace : A Practical Approach to Career Planning

Junko Hirata

## Abstract

The Spring 2003 semester and Summer Field Trip marked the instructor's first opportunity to conduct the "Career Planning" course, which was forced to change its content due to the Iraq War. This paper provides an overview of the course. The instructor saw two major problems of students in job-searching : 1) students do not know about the real world ; and 2) students do not know about themselves, what they want to do and what they are fit for. The class spent three meetings in identifying students' individual interests, abilities, themselves, and four meetings in understanding the real-world job market. Nowadays, so-called "mismatching" in employment is a social phenomenon. In order to avoid getting trapped into the wrong job and to help students understand the real world, "Informational Interviewing" was introduced. The students conducted informational interviewing in Japan instead of in Seattle, the original pre-war plan, and made a presentation during summer vacation. The idea of informational interviewing is quite new in Japan, although it has been existed in the U.S. for many years and has been introduced in many job search publications. The students therefore en-

countered an unexpected obstacle in making appointments with female managers : Japanese companies' closed culture. Two guest speakers and three panelists were invited on three separate occasions to share their experiences. The students showed keen interest in these working professionals, and it was an excellent opportunity to bridge the gap between the classrooms and the real world. Students' feedback, examples of which are provided, confirmed the benefits and necessity of career planning.

## Introduction

In the 1980s, computers began changing the business world and private lives completely, beginning in the U.S. The instructor, having lived and worked in San Francisco and New York for more than 15 years, witnessed the dramatic changes in the international employment world before and after the "computer revolution." For example, hotels are now able to keep guests' histories very easily using computers ; hence, they are able to provide very individualized and consistent services such as firmness of the pillows and preference of the room, which were inconsistent before the computer age. Communication with international business partners by email and Internet became incredibly faster and the world has shrunk drastically. Meetings via satellite have decreased the number of business trips and yet the mutual understandings around the globe are enhanced. Computers have made it possible for producers to get in touch with end-users directly, a development that threatens middle persons such as travel agents or wholesalers. Thus computers have changed business practices in the world and a global job market has emerged.

As of 2002, Japan's national university attainment rate for females rose to 34.4 percent, as opposed to 12.3 percent in 1980 and 6.5 percent in 1970 (2003 Whitepaper of Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology).

The Equal Employment Opportunity Law was enacted in 1986. Nonetheless, Fukuoka Jo Gakuin University's student survey of 2003 asking, "What do you expect of the university?" shows that 42 percent of students belonging to the faculty of Humanities, out of which more than 70 percent are English majors, want to work in the airline industry, meaning jobs as stewardesses or ground hostesses. Even in the Internet age, Japanese women's "dream job" seems to have stayed unchanged for the past 30 years or more. There is certainly nothing wrong with the job of stewardess or ground hostess, but they are not professional capacity jobs. Increasingly, they are also short-term, contracted jobs. Why do female students limit their possibilities to these jobs?

One of the possible reasons is that the roles of women and job structures in the Japanese workplace have not changed, and most female workers remain locked in administrative positions. Consequently, there are not many role models for female students to look up to. Their role models are typically their mothers, who lived as young women in their 20's before the computer revolution. Yet students' mothers pass their same unrealized dreams on to their daughters who were born in the computer age.

In 2002, the instructor realized that many students of Fukuoka Jo Gakuin University (FJGU) were not motivated because they could not connect what they were learning at the university to the real world. Accordingly, they had little idea about their career. By showing students various career opportunities, the instructor thought that students could learn the real world and hence improve their motivation to study. Thus a program called "Career Planning" was developed with the Specialized Program International Outreach of the University of Washington (UW). A key component of the program was informational interviewing with American female managers. The interview would broaden students' views and the way of thinking toward their career. American female managers should be involved because they have won their current empowered status in the workplace.

“Women accounted for only 9.9 percent of management staff in Japan in 2003, compared with 45.9 percent in the United States and more than 30 percent in Britain, France, Germany and Sweden” (The Japan Times, 2004). Thus the United States offers more fairness and equality to women than probably any other country in the world.

The definition of Career Planning used here is “considering one’s strengths to think about and plan future careers of a professional capacity in the long-term, including but not limited to job-hunting upon graduation.”

### Original Version of Course Content for Career Planning 2003

The original Career Planning course consisted of three parts in a continuous full-year program, as shown below.

#### Spring Semester 2003 : Career Planning Workshop

- Concept of Career Planning
- Preparation for the lectures at the University of Washington (Study written materials from UW lecturers)
- Business English / Making appointments with female managers of Seattle-area companies using email and Internet

Listening to lectures by an American professor and a specialist would be very difficult for most Fukuoka Jo Gakuin University’s students in terms of English language ability. Yet if students studied the concepts and terminology beforehand, they would be able to understand the lectures. In order to make appointments with American managers, students must study “Business English.” For students who have never been exposed to real-world working conditions, this real-world contact

would be a challenging and rewarding experience.

### Summer : Field trip to the University of Washington-Seattle (12 days)

- English Language Class : English Communication in the Workplace
- Interview skills for site visit to corporations with UW Instructors
- Preparation for lectures with UW Instructors
- Lectures : Career Planning / Changing Roles of Women in the Workplace
- Informational interviewing with companies in Seattle with UW staff escorts
- Oral Presentation

Students would get enough preparation before the lectures and company visitations, and UW staff would escort students to companies. Students would home-stay and be exposed to real-life situations on a full-time, immersion basis.

### Fall Semester : Follow up of Field Trip

- Follow-up and thank you letters
- Writing reports
- Making presentations using Power Point
- Resume and cover letter writing

Resume preparation and follow-up letter writing is one of the most important parts of job searching and Business English. Interviewing American managers would help students understand the fundamental concepts of English resume and cover letter writing.

The course was originally designed for students who came back from overseas study and who hoped to work with English in the future. The course purposes were, therefore, to show students various kinds of industries and job oppor-

tunities in the world. Exposure to American managers' attitudes toward their jobs would help students think about their future career planning. Although extensive preparations for the program had been completed and successful results were anticipated, the program could not be implemented as scheduled.

#### Actual Revised Version, 2003 Spring Semester : Career Planning Workshop

Despite the unfortunate global political situation (namely The Iraq War beginning in March 2003), 25 students enrolled in the course. Most of them had very few ideas about career planning, yet they felt insecure about their future job search. Some might have hoped to get a job where they could utilize their English proficiency. As expected, seven out of 25 enrollees wanted to work in the airline industry. Although the course syllabus clearly stated that the course was designed for students who would seek jobs where they could use English, some students who were not in this category were among enrollees in the course. The course would have been taught in English, but students chose Japanese as the primary language of instruction. The goals were to help students understand themselves, enhance self-esteem, and broaden knowledge of the real world in order to discern a career path.

Table 1 : Main content modules for the "Career Planning" course

- How to decide on a Career Path
- Coping with employment phenomena of Mismatching
- Developing self-awareness
- Self-assessment and Action Plan
- English resume writing
- Informational Interviewing
- Guest speakers
- Panel discussion

## Textbook and Supplemental Materials

As a required textbook, *Working with English* by Atsuko Ogawa and Kayoko Otani (Macmillan Languagehouse) was selected. *The Pathfinder* by Nicholas Lore, *Rich Dad and Poor Dad* by Robert Kiyosaki, *The Complete Book of Contemporary Business Letters* by Round Lake Publishing, *Professional Secretary's Handbook, Third Edition* by Houghton Mifflin and various newspapers and other publications were among the numerous supplemental materials used.

### Module 1 : How to Decide on a Career Path

For most students who do not know what they want to do, deciding on a job is a difficult task. The Pathfinder illustrates how to choose a vocation by comparing it to buying a house. When one tries to buy a house, her mind is already filled to the brim with wishes, dreams, feelings, preferences, prejudices, and similar emotions (Lore, p. 22). The instructor adapted this exercise by replacing a house with a car, because students would not be interested in buying a house at their age.

Students listed their desires when they role-played buying a first car, most likely a used car : stereo, air-conditioning, sport type, car navigation, foreign car, and other preferences. The students were reminded that they were about to buy a “used car,” and then they realized a reliable engine and brakes would be most important. Subsequently, they reconsidered the purposes of buying a car, what would be really necessary and what their budgets could actually afford. Students understood that before they decided which car to buy, they had to visit many car dealers and inspect many cars to find the best deal, and that to avoid later regrets they must confirm many details in advance.

In a similar process of goal-setting and rational evaluation, students then

thought about what would be important for their first job : salary, number of days off per week, vacation, company's location, work hours, industry, commuting time and uniform. Retirement pensions are big social issues these days, and most students showed a strong interest in company pension plans, even though it will be some 45 years until they receive benefits. The budget for buying a used car was equivalent to their experience and skills for their job search. They are limited, so to find a good deal, they have to visit many companies and study company brochures in order to avoid later crying in remorse, "This is not what I wanted."

The importance of prioritizing their wants and wishes, and the importance of taking action, were emphasized. A job will not be offered unless one goes out and searches for it. (This idea was taken from Kiyosaki, p. 189, and modified to suit students.)

## Module 2 : Coping with the Employment Phenomena of Mismatching

"Mismatching" is a big social problem concerning employment, as a flood of newspaper or magazine articles has made clear. Students read such articles copies and discussed why mismatching problems occurred. From the previous exercise, they immediately blamed lack of company research. One student talked about her high school friend who had just quit a job due to "mismatching," meaning that friend's goal and abilities did not meet with the job's opportunities and requirements. And yet, the same student said that she would never suffer from mismatching. Indifference toward what is going on in the real world, or an "I am different" attitude, might be a characteristic of many modern Japanese students. The class agreed mismatching could happen to anyone, especially to job applicants who do not proactively do their homework. Students who look for jobs know only to ask about salary, work hours and benefits, all of which might be easily found on any company website. Such students may become future victims of mis-



matching.

Lack of experience, skills, urgency, knowledge about the real world and lack of research, might all be reasons on the job-hunter's end why mismatching happens. Yet employers could be responsible, too, for not fully explaining about jobs they offer. In the U.S., most of the time immediate bosses interview candidates for positions companies offer. This is because bosses know exactly what kind of jobs they are offering, what kind of experience, qualifications and personality they are looking for in an applicant. In Japan, by contrast, the personnel department plays a major role in the company information session, job fairs, and hiring process, not the immediate bosses. Recruiting personnel may know only the number of students they plan to hire, so the explanation of the job itself could be vague. It will be very rare for candidates to see their immediate bosses or actual work place before commencing employment. It seems that companies do not realize that a poor relationship between immediate bosses and employees might be the biggest cause of leaving the jobs later on. But then it is very difficult to ask companies to change their policies. In order to protect themselves from mismatching, students should do their research more carefully and thoroughly. "Research is the key to understanding the reality of potential future careers" (Lore, p. 29).

### Module 3 : Developing Self-awareness

Students were asked which category they belong to : people-oriented person, non-people-oriented person or research-oriented person. If one considered herself to be a people-oriented person, it means she would want to take care of elders' diapers or crying children. Many students first identified themselves as people-oriented, yet to such a scenario they responded, "No, I would not want to do it." Then the instructor asked if students had already knew what they would like to do professionally. Three students already had determined which industries they

would like to enter. Except for the stewardess or ground-hostess aspirants, most of them had very vague ideas about what they would like to do. One of the stewardess aspirants said that her mother kept telling her to be a stewardess. Then students listed up their strengths and weaknesses. Many students listed more weaknesses than strengths, and they were depressed. However, when they heard that weaknesses could be converted into strengths depending on the point of view, and vice versa, they felt relieved. This exercise revealed that most students have never thought about their goals and possibilities proactively before. The instructor told the students to take some time to think deeply about themselves, what made them happy, and what made them feel proud in the past, and what points could be improved in the future.

#### **Module 4 : Self-assessment and Action Plan**

It is very important to realize one's own ability. Many students often say things like, "I can't speak English, but I like English, so I want to work as a ..."; or "I will study hard about the job once I get hired." An applicant actually made these remarks at a job interview at The Ritz Carlton Hotel Company. Companies are not so generous. The regional director responded, "We do not have the luxury of letting employees study with pay. Please study elsewhere and come back when you are ready to work." Traditional Japanese companies might accept this applicant's vague employment intention. But even Japanese companies these days cannot afford to train new employees from scratch. More and more companies are looking for applicants who can contribute to the companies immediately. This is a quite difficult requirement for new graduates who do not have any work experience. In order to demonstrate English proficiency, it would be wise to take tests to show the score. To realize the current ability is always important to make an action plan, but students are often reluctant to take standardized tests because

they are afraid of finding out how weak their English ability truly is.

The action plan is to set a specific goal and deadline of achievement and to decide actions in order to achieve the goal by each phase. Each action has its own deadline and when the last action is completed, the goal will be achieved. Even though students do not know the term “Action Plan,” they are familiar with the idea, as they might have used it when they prepared for their university entrance examinations. It is very useful for monitoring one’s own progress and decline. The students were advised to make action plans for the next TOEIC or whatever they plan to do. Some declined immediately because from their previous experience they said that they could never fulfill the plan even before trying.

## Module 5 : English resume writing

English resume writing was eliminated from the course schedule when students chose to be taught in Japanese. After Nabeshima from UN Habitat delivered a lecture, she recruited some volunteers for UN’s fall event. Then students needed to write an English resume. This was an excellent practical opportunity for the students to write English resumes. Unlike a classroom exercise of “Business Writing” which often ends up as mere theory, the students really faced an urgent and real necessity to write an English resume.

There are three major differences between an English resume and a Japanese resume. First, a Japanese resume has a ready-made format which people can buy at stationery stores or bookstores, whereas an English resume must be prepared from scratch. For a Japanese resume one can simply fill in the blanks, repeating “entered into ABC school, graduated from ABC school” in chronological order. For the English resume one has to individually decide on the format, for example whether Education comes first or Work Experience comes first, whether Block style or Italic print. Almost all resume books recommend organizing the history

in reverse-chronological order, from most recent events to older ones. Second, for the Japanese resume, age, sex, and a photo are indispensable, whereas the English resume prohibits them because listing these items may cause discrimination. Third, one has to describe objectively and concisely what he or she has actually done when writing an English resume. Students were stunned by the samples of English resumes. Before they started writing English resumes, they studied classified ads in *The Japan Times* and a couple of ads from American newspapers. They learned what kind of skills or experiences were actually required for various jobs. They also learned terms and expressions they could use for their resumes. As homework, students had to write a resume in Japanese using the English resume format. One student listed "To find myself" as her job objective. The students seemed not to understand the difference between students and employees. As long as she does not miss many classes, submits the homework and takes examinations, most of which are adjusted to the students' level of knowledge, a Japanese student can earn credits just by sitting in the chair in the classroom without saying a word. Such students naturally think that once they are hired, they will be paid just for being in the office. The instructor emphasized that companies pay for employees' work performance, not for their physical existence, and they have to do self-exploration elsewhere, not in the office. This resume writing exercise helped students see their strengths or skills more objectively and realistically.

## Module 6 : Informational Interviewing

An informational interview is an informal talk with another person about his or her work experiences. It is not a job interview. It is a way to gain information about a specific industry, occupation, or employer (Lifeprint Organization Brochure). The sample questions are : what your responsibilities are, what skills you

use most, what personal satisfactions you realize from this work, what education/experience is required, what the salary range at my level is.

One of the two biggest weaknesses of students in job search/career planning is, as already stated, that they do not know about the real world at all. Unlike American students, most Japanese students are prohibited by school rules to work until they graduate from high school. Upon entering universities, they start working part-time for the first time. Yet the jobs are mostly waitresses and cashiers at convenience stores or supermarkets, and they are not really skill-related jobs. Hence, informational interviewing can be a useful tool for students to grasp the real world climate.

The concept of the informational interviewing, however, was new to both students and local companies, and students had difficulty in making appointments with female managers. The letter asking for an interview clearly stated the purpose of the interview to ask “female role models” about their jobs through questions like how they get their current positions and what skills are required to perform the job. Many companies’ personnel managers turned down the requests. The reasons might be that managers mistakenly thought students were requesting job interviews, or they were simply too busy to consider the requests or they were afraid of supplying any kind of information other than that officially published by companies. The companies’ closed culture may be a part of Japanese culture, and one of the biggest obstacles for students seriously seeking to develop their potentials.

After the actual informational interviewing was conducted during summer vacation, students found that an office visitation was the best way of seeing an actual work environment, and that excited them. Yet the manager being interviewed may not be comfortable talking about her true personal feelings toward the work. Through this activity, students learned that the best way of getting appointments of this nature is to ask friends, parents, or relatives for introductions to managers.

And having lunch together outside the company will be a better solution to get managers' true impressions about work.

Many students had never written a letter to companies, and they had no idea how to write a letter in Japanese. They tried hard and asked the school's Career Center for help. Through the introduction of the Career Center and friends, students successfully made appointments with companies they were interested in.

## Guest Speakers

The course invited two guest speakers and three panelists on three different occasions.

1) Police officer Kiyoshi Shiromizu of the Tenjin Police Station spoke about increasing international crimes in Fukuoka. Officer Shiromizu explained that the police department has been recruiting police officers with language proficiency, noting that there is a language-training program in the police department in Tokyo. The National Police Agency represents a good job opportunity for students who seek to work in English locally. Students first showed strong interest in the training program. Yet, when they found that they would have to take the civil-servant examination, their interest immediately faded away. "One of my classmates in high school studied so hard to take the examination, and it looked so difficult," one student said to her classmates. This showed a characteristic of some students: a tendency toward "instant gratification," meaning they desire the end result but want to avoid the necessary leg work.

2) Yumi Nabeshima from Fukuoka office of UN Habitat was asked to focus her speech to the class on how she got her current position, not on UN Habitat's various roles. She graduated from Seinan University and studied for a year in the U.S. She did her job search here in Fukuoka. She changed jobs three times before she got the present position at UN Habitat. Nabeshima got her first job at a

major bank through the school introduction, but she left the bank within a year because she felt that the job description did not suit her : so-called “mismatching.” Students could compare their probable future situations to that of Nabeshima. One student asked what Nabeshima’s next step in her career would be. Nabeshima responded that she had been almost seven years at the current position, and since there was no other position for her to promote into, she was thinking about a career change and working on a second master’s degree. Her career planning path obviously had an impact on students who had imagined staying at the same job until retiring for some typical reason such as marriage. Students learned a new attitude toward their future careers through Nabeshima’s speech.

Nabeshima requested some volunteers for an event which UN Habitat would host in the fall, and many students expressed interest. Students understood that volunteer work simply contributed to society and offered their physical labor. The instructor explained that they could gain important skills and experience, while developing valuable contact networks through volunteer work. When they learned that the experience of volunteer work would improve their resumes, their attitude toward the volunteer changed very proactively.

## Panel discussion

Three panelists whose experiences might be interesting and beneficial to students were invited : a former-Kids’ English teacher, a former-stewardess, and an administrative clerk at Fukuoka American Center. These are among the students’ most desired jobs.

Panelist 1 : Yoshiko Nagata taught English to kids at an English conversation school. She is currently an adult student at FJGU and continues teaching privately. She talked about the inside story of an English conversation school. Although she enjoyed teaching English to kids, she had a hard time accepting the

school's management policy, which considered students mainly revenue sources and its attitude of indifference about students' improvement.

She explained how instructors were paid in two different ways. One student pays 6,000-8,000 yen per month in tuition and an instructor will receive (1) a 5~6,000 yen fixed fee per class plus 100 yen per student ; or (2) 800~2,000 yen per student per month. Class sizes vary from a couple students to around 10 students. Contracted instructors are also involved in recruiting new students, and are paid 20,000~30,000 yen per new student upon registration. The merits of being a contracted instructor at an existing English conversation school are : (1) No need to recruit one's own students ; and (2) No need to develop original teaching material from scratch. Nagata said that once having gained confidence and established a good reputation, an individual instructor can open her own classes independently, and she is able to teach her own way. Now Nagata is working on her teaching credential in order to secure her future career, while teaching some small groups of children privately. When Nagata explained about the payment system, some students immediately took notes and started calculation.

Panelist 2 : Seiko Matsunaga used to be a stewardess of Japan Air Systems. She graduated from FJGU in 1994, and she became a stewardess after the second trial. She talked about the relations with colleagues both on and off the job. There is a clear hierarchy relation among stewardesses. This must be peculiar in the Japanese airlines, she said. Although she tried twice to become a stewardess, she did not enjoy the job after attaining it. Matsunaga left the company in two years and became a temporary employee. Currently she is a Yoga instructor as well as a student at FJGU majoring in Psychology. Her future goal is to be a counselor combining physical and spiritual health using Psychology and Yoga.

Some students were puzzled to hear Matsunaga left their "dream job" so easily and asked why she did. Matsunaga responded that being a stewardess was not a rewarding job. Filled with the glamorous images of stewardesses in TV pro-



grams, students would not understand what Matsunaga really meant until they actually stand on the same footing, or they are not willing to accept the reality of their dream job.

Panelist 3 : Asako Usage is administrative clerk of the American Center, Public Relations Section of the American Consulate in Fukuoka. Uesugi spent three years in the U.S. and completed a college degree. She talked about the difficulties for returnees from America in finding a job in Fukuoka. When she applied for Japanese companies, she tried to conceal American influences in her attitude, and for American companies she emphasized her American experience as much as possible. She first worked at an English school for a year and half. Then she got a receptionist position at the American Consulate through a security guard company. She was recently promoted to administrative clerk. She advised the students to talk to as many people as possible about the job search, so someone would give them a good piece of information. And she advised students to always be aware of information out there in the real world, and to set up information antenna. She now enjoys every minute at work.

Since the panelists' real world stories attracted students, students actively asked many questions even after the class. The class was filled with an air of excitement and sigh for adoration.

### Summer Field Work : Informational Interviewing

Ten students who took the "Career Planning" course in the Spring semester conducted informational interviewing. One student visited three cosmetic companies and interviewed four female managers. Having determined to work in the cosmetic/esthetic industry, she reported that these interviews were very informative and she was very impressed by the managers' success stories. Another student was fascinated by a female manager's ideal retirement plan to live in Thai and wear long dresses. She had to go back to the manager a second time to get in-

formation about the job itself, not the manager's personal retirement plan. The purpose of this informational interviewing was for students to learn about various industries and jobs in the real world.

According to students' reports, however, the managers' responses were a little too subjective. For example, many said "Do your best", or "Study hard while being a student", things which school teachers keep saying but are not appreciated at all. Interestingly enough, only one male interviewee mentioned the importance of communication skills; other managers did not mention anything about skills required to perform the job or to climb up the corporate ladder, not even computer skills. It is possible that the students were too fascinated by managers' success stories to ask objective questions. All of the managers and staff interviewed except for one, who worked for CHANEL, a cosmetics company, have stayed at the same company since they started. They have been transferred to different sections or positions internally. It seems that the length of service is the key to their success.

For example, the manager at Rainbow Plaza, a Fukuoka city-affiliated office, started as a public servant at a different city office right after the university graduation. She was transferred to various sections and promoted to her current position three years ago, after she had worked for 12 years. The various positions she experienced were not what she wanted but just what she was assigned to. The director of sales at Shiseido has worked for the company for 30 years and was promoted to the current position last year. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, most Americans change their jobs at least three times in their lifetime, and President Clinton stated in his "Presidential Radio Address on Jobs" on March 5, 1994, that average Americans would change work seven times in a lifetime. That implies that in the U.S., changing careers is still a big event in one's life but not so special like in Japan, and length of service is not the main factor to be promoted to managerial positions. The Japanese women in management staff positions account for only 9.9 percent in 2003, compared with 45.9 percent in the

United States (The Japan Times, 2004). The absolute number of female managers in Japan is nothing compared to that in the U.S., where female managers are not at all uncommon. This is why the instructor strongly believed that the American female managers' involvement in this program would have been indispensable.

Yet, several students seemed to have found their role models. They now know how to arrange and conduct the informational interview. They could be more objective and well prepared to obtain information about the job itself. And by continuing with this process, they will have a better idea about actual employment conditions and will be better prepared for the future career search.

Students revealed their lack of writing skills in Japanese, so supplemental after-class instruction became necessary. Although students struggled to write reports, inputting the information into the Power Point software program was rather smooth. After their presentations, students felt a great sense of achievement. Since the contents of the Fall semester were rescheduled for the Spring semester and summer, the entire "Career Planning" course was completed by the end of summer.

Table 2 shows the names of companies the students visited. Two students visited companies in Tokyo and rest of them conducted informational interviewing with companies in their area.

Table 2 : Informational Interviewing : companies that students visited

- Junkdo Book store
- ISA (Study Abroad Program Office)
- Coca Cola West Japan
- Rainbow Plaza (a fukuoka city-affiliated office)
- UN Habitat Fukuoka Office
- Thai Airlines (Tokyo)
- Entry Service Promotion Co.
- Video Station Q
- Singapore Airline
- CHANEL, Shisei-do Fukuoka, NIHON LOREAL (Tokyo)

## Conclusion

This course imparted a substantial body of diverse information about career planning. Highlighting how to develop self-awareness and understanding the real world proved to be an effective strategy for integrating content modules. Many newspaper or magazine articles were employed. The guest speakers and panelists who shared their experiences had enormous impact on students' vague ideas about their career. One student, who mentioned that she had had too many desires and ideas and had not known where to start, actually participated in volunteer work at UN Habitat office right after the guest speaker's classroom presentation. And she made further connection with people in the various industries, including the mass communication industry, which she was interested in. This student came to the "Career Planning" class of 2004, and described her volunteer experience to her juniors, enrollees of "Career Planning" 2004. Now the younger students have taken over the volunteer work at UN Habitat. The student recently reported that she got a post-graduation job at a local TV broadcasting company, which was exactly her dream job.

The instructor continued inviting various guest speakers from the real world in the academic year of 2004 on several occasions, including her "Introduction to World" course. Speakers included, a U.S. diplomat who spoke about dynamic roles of diplomats, a former Japan Overseas Cooperation member who worked in Uzbekistan and Nicaragua, a female director of a local broadcasting company who shared her experience working in the strongly male-dominated field, and the director of Ritz-Carlton Hotel LLC talked about the hospitality industry. The instructor believes that by inviting real world people on every available occasion, not limited to the "Career Planning" course, it is possible to bridge the gap between the classroom and the workplace. This is the most effective way of enhancing students' motivation and understanding of the real world.

For this course, developing self-awareness was indispensable. For example, the “buying a used car” exercise was simple but, as some students later commented, it helped students make priorities in job selection and their life in general. It was an unexpected byproduct that English resume writing helped students see their strengths clearly. English classified ads and English resumes also showed students what kinds of skills were actually expected in the real world. This course proved that once students learned how to develop self-awareness, they would have more confidence in their own abilities.

However, students’ lack of work experience, one of their biggest weaknesses, still remains. Students do not have much work experience, but that does not necessarily mean they lack skills or ability of performing tasks. They must have obtained various skills which are equivalent to work experience through students’ activities like organizing school festivals or volunteer work. Unfortunately, these skills are not shown in a Japanese resume.

The “Dependable Strengths” method shows how to present these valuable skills or strengths to potential employers. Dependable strengths are the strengths one can conduct well, can enjoy using and be proud of. If one can get a job where she can utilize her dependable strengths, she will be quite happy at the job and the likelihood of mismatching will decrease. This theory was developed by Bernard Haldane 50 years ago and has helped people who planned to change careers. After identifying one’s dependable strengths through the past work experience or volunteer experience, one writes a report which is similar to resume yet distinct. The report lists one’s dependable strengths and background information, but it does not have to have companies’ names or dates ; here students are at a disadvantage. Using this report, one develops contacts starting with nearby people : parents, relatives, teachers, friends and former bosses. As guest speaker Uesugi of the American Center mentioned, job hunters should tell as many people as possible about what they want. Some contact person would lead to a potential em-

ployer. For that purpose, this report could be a vital tool for students who do not have real or professional work experience to write in a resume.

The “Dependable Strengths” method has another benefit. Identifying one’s dependable strengths can be an enjoyable process. One can feel satisfaction, develop self-awareness and gain self-confidence, all of which most students desperately need. The instructor plans to introduce the Dependable Strengths method in Career Planning in 2005.

Ten students actually conducted “informational interviewing.” For most of the students, it was their first encounter of this sort with real-world professional people and they were overwhelmingly impressed by the female managers. Yet the instructor believes that if the informational interviewing had been conducted in Seattle, the result would have been even better: students would have been able to gain a lot more professional information and learn more professional attitudes. The sense of achievement would have been far greater than that in Japan. In addition, the students could have practiced Business English, including making an appointment and interviewing skills with real Americans in the U.S. It seemed the students spent far more energy to overcome the Japanese companies’ closed culture to make an appointment than actual informational interviewing. For these reasons, the instructor strongly believes the informational interviewing should ideally take place in the U.S.

Nancy Kassebaum Baker, wife of the current American Ambassador to Japan, stated the importance of career counseling in her speech delivered at Rikkyo University in March 2002. “Today more and more young women in Japan are also a part of the workforce.... Education really is what we’re all about as a country. ... Something that I think we don’t do very successfully in the United States and, perhaps here in Japan as well, is to offer greater career counseling... It’s starting in high school these days because you don’t have the luxury often to wait much until you’ve finished college.”

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MECSST) finally realized the importance of Career Education and designated 47 cities as Career Education Promoting areas (Nishi-Nippon Shinbun 2004). When the global job market is emerging, there is no need to limit students' potential to old-fashioned jobs. Students who are well prepared or armed for the global job market should be exposed to a greater potential. "Career Planning" will not solve today's "mismatching" and other employment issues immediately. But the instructor firmly believes that the course will help students prepare for future career plans, and enable students to enhance their motivation to study by linking the classroom subjects to the real world.

#### Table 2 : Student Feedback

At the end of the Spring semester, 17 students responded to five questions intended to gauge general effectiveness of the course. Although many students disappointed by the change of plan and they were not able to go to Seattle as it was scheduled at first, they got positive results at each module.

##### 1) *Why did you take this course?*

- I have two reasons. I've always thought about my future career, and I vaguely know which industry I want to enter. Yet I did not take any action. I took Intensive English IV from this instructor last fall. During the semester, the instructor briefly introduced the idea of career planning and she actually made us conduct informational interviewing. But it was in the middle of the semester, and I didn't spend much time for the interviewing. This time I could use the summer vacation for the interview, and I wanted to explore the industry as much as possible. And I wanted to make a better presentation.

(Four students took the instructor's Intensive English IV during the previous Fall semester, and stated the similar comments.)

- The only motivation was the Seattle trip, and when it was cancelled I was very

disappointed. But the instructor's alternative plan looked interesting. (3 students)

- I heard the term "career planning" at the course orientation at the beginning of the semester. The instructor's introduction of the course sounded quite exciting, especially when she mentioned how to improve a career instead of becoming a part-time cashier at a supermarket after couple job changes, or how to re-enter the job market after having a baby. (6 students)
- Interviewing American female managers seemed extremely difficult, yet it somehow excited me. I wanted to get courage to visit companies, and make some memorable experiences while I was in the university. (6 students)
- I like English and I wanted to attend American college class. (4 students)

2) *Did you take time to analyze yourself after the class?* -17 responded they actually took time and thought about themselves.

- Yes, during the semester I used a website of self-analysis and handout materials.
- I asked about myself to family members and friends.
- In addition to this course, I attended a Job Guidance seminar. I am in the middle of finding my strengths. I was happy to find my unexpected strength.
- I analyzed strengths and weaknesses, and recalled what I did successfully in the past. Through that exercise, I noticed that I did not understand myself so well. (2 students)
- Through my part-time jobs, I thought about what made me happy and what I could do better. Then the jobs which seemed unfit to me were crossed out. After that I went to vocational schools to experience some classes.
- My friend quit her job in a couple of months after graduation because it did not suit her. I realized that to know myself was very important, and I thought that being a librarian might not be good for me. I made charts to see my degree of satisfaction of my past experiences.



- English resume writing was helpful to see my strengths. I was glad to write about my skills which I gained through volunteer work.
- Following the “buying a first car” exercise, I wrote down what would be important for my job. I was able to see pretty clear ideas.

3) *Did you do some research on industries or jobs?* -13 said “Yes” and three said “No.”

- I time to time checked on jobs which I was interested in. And I actually met various people at work and inquired about the jobs which were not of interest to me before. I was very surprised at various kinds of jobs, and some opened my interest.
- While I was checking the jobs, I wondered why there were such big differences in salaries among the same kinds of jobs. I wanted to find out about the work conditions where women feel comfortable. I am looking forward to a company visit to find out about the conditions which are not stated in the company brochure.
- I was interested in only the airline industry, and read articles related to airlines. The reason why I wanted to be a stewardess was to be able to communicate with people all over the world. But I learned that hotel, police, UN, American Center and other jobs would offer the same opportunities. The course broadened the job opportunities, and I now pay attention to “want ads” the newspaper.
- I checked Tokyo Disney Resorts and its parent company, Oriental Land. I also checked the services of various airline industries. Since I was interested in the internet, I inquired about Sony.
- I did not have any clear idea about my future, but I was always interested in commercials. Recently, I have been paying more attention to advertising agencies.

4) *Did you make an action plan?* -12 said “Yes” and 5 said “No.”

- I am a sophomore. I would like to attend internship and do a lot of research on companies during this summer vacation. I am looking forward to conduct informational interviewing as field-work. I expect I can learn a lot from the interview.
- I would like to challenge various licensing examinations such as TOEIC and STEP. (4 students)
- I wrote how I wanted to be in 5 years and 10 years. Then, what I should do now became clear, and using EXCELL I wrote action plan of this year. But I found it was very difficult to execute plans. I realized the importance of prioritizing.
- I want to do some volunteer work in foreign companies during summer vacation, and I actually made phone calls and visited a company. At this time I am not sure if any company lets me do volunteer work, but I am glad that I at least took an action.
- I contacted 15 companies asking if I could conduct informational interviewing, and so far I received no answer. I would like to keep trying and I want to visit as many companies as possible.
- For the field-trip presentation, I have decided to interview managers in Tokyo, and made a rough itinerary. Managers in Tokyo seem different from those in Fukuoka, and the Tokyo managers did not take me seriously. It was very difficult to make appointments, and I have learned the reality at first hand.
- Since I am interested in organizing events, I applied to an internship with a related company.

5) *Do you see any difference in your attitude or way of thinking toward your career before and after the course?*

- Career issues became more focused after the course. I realized that there are so many interesting jobs.

- Lectures and guest speakers' talks enhanced my thought about my career, and I learned to see myself objectively. (2 students)
- I grew a lot. This course made me think about my future career. I was depressed when I realized that my friends had different values in their future. I regretted that I had not thought about career a little sooner. I became more realistic.
- I did not do so well with informational interviewing in the previous semester. I would like to do a better job.
- In April, I thought that I would visit a company and then I would practice interview skills for my job upon graduation. Now I think that in addition to that, I have to gain more work experience and skills. Before I did not realize volunteering was the best way to gain experience, skills, and develop a human-network, so I would like to find any volunteer opportunities. I learned that in order to get what I want, I have to take actions.
- So far I just dreamed about being a flight attendant without thinking why. I feel insecure because I have no work experience or skills. In order to be independent, I have started planning to study abroad.
- Before I took this course, I thought that once I got a job, I would stay on the job for life, because more I change jobs, the worse I get. I was amazed by the guest speakers who gained necessary skills while they were students, and so they were able to see opportunities most people overlook. Even after they got a job, they kept developing networks and paying attention to the world, while challenging new opportunities. I would like to be like them in the future.
- In order not to say afterward that I should have studied harder, I would like to find my goal and prepare for that. Although I could not go to Seattle, this course made me think, gave me courage, and enhanced motivation.
- The course increased my seriousness toward my career. Before April, job searching was somebody else's business. But now I imagine myself in 10 years

or 20 years.

- I realized that getting a job is not the ultimate goal of life ; it is the start. I have to do a lot of homework before I find a job. I was very ignorant about careers. As a start, I would like to participate in some volunteer work.

## References

### Books

- Josei Roudou Hakusho. 2004. Tokyo : Zaidanhoujin 21 Seiki Shokugyouzaidan
- Elliott, Stephen. 1989. The Complete Book of Contemporary Business Letters.
- Kiyosaki, Robert. 1998. Rich Dad and Poor Dad. New York : Warner Books, Inc.
- Lore, Nicholas. 1998. The Pathfinder. New York : Fireside
- Monbu Kagaku Hakusho. 2004. Tokyo :
- Ogawa, Atsuko and Otani, Kayoko. 2003. Working with English. Tokyo : Macmillan Language-house.
- Ridgefield : Round Lake Publishing,
- Uchidate, Makiko. 2003. Yumewo Kanaeru Yumewo Mita. Tokyo : Gentou-sha.
- Weston, Joyce. 1995. Professional Secretary's Handbook, Third Edition. Boston : Houghton Mifflin

### Newspapers

- Hanai, Kiroku. 2004. "Lifting women's job status" The Japan Times, July 27.
- Nishi Nihon Shinbun. (2003). Women in management in Fukuoka." Nov.11
- Nishi Nihon Shinbun. (2004). "Job leaver within 3 years" July 14
- Nishi Nihon Shinbun. (2004). "Women in management only 3 percent." July 14
- Nishi Nihon Shinbun. (2004). "Kakukenmo Career Education." October 3.
- Japan Times, The. (2004). "Working wives gaining in favor." June 12
- Japan Times, The. (2004). "A third of workers are part-timers, temp staff." July 24

### Web site

William J. Clinton Foundation...Presidential Radio Address on Jobs...

[www.clintonfoundaion.org/legacy/030594-presidential-radio-address-on-jobs.htm](http://www.clintonfoundaion.org/legacy/030594-presidential-radio-address-on-jobs.htm)