

Considering Their Viewpoint: Issues Raised by Shiga University Students

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present some of the issues that students have raised regarding their experiences at Shiga University. Their comments were taken from the results of an exploratory case study of student experiences carried out in December 1998 within the Faculty of Economics. The research was carried out by the author and Ryuta Ray Kato. Two hundred and seventy-one students participated in the research, 72.4% were first year students, 18.0% were second years and the remaining 9.5% were third to fifth years. In terms of gender, 73.5% were male and 26.5% were female.

The current reforms being carried out by universities in Japan will ultimately result in changing how students experience higher education. Therefore, it is important to assess the situation at present from the student perspective. It will be seen that the student-participants of the research have suggested that the areas of lecture presentations and teaching methods, courses and their content, and communications with faculty staff, are of most concern to them. The paper therefore, will be divided into those specific sections. In order for any educational reform to be successful, the experience of all of the stakeholders concerned must be represented.

The lectures at university are not interesting

For our first year students, the start of lectures was probably the moment that they realized they had truly entered a higher education institution. Their expectations of university education and the reality of it, most likely collided the moment the professor walked into the classroom. Attending lectures is a major part of the student academic experience. Therefore, student opinions on this issue and teaching methods play an important role in how well they enjoy or are satisfied with their university experience.

I was very disappointed at university. In fact, we have a lot of freedom at university, and we can play if we want or we can study if we want. However, even though I wanted to study when I entered university, I have completely lost my desire to study because lecturers started using technical terms from the beginning of the course. I hope that lecturers could start the course from more introductory levels. Student 97

I promised my friends to attend all the classes at university during my ronin period, and am still keeping it, but there are some classes at university, which I am only waiting for the bell ringing at the end of the period. In

almost all the classes like these, the lecturer checks the attendance. Since there are many students attending the class due to the reason that the lecturer usually checks the attendance, it seems that the lecturer lacks the incentive to increase the number of attendance by making the lecture interesting, although his/her checking the attendance is beneficial for me as I am always attending the class. I really hope that lecturers would do their best not only for their own research but also for students by making the lectures more interesting. Student 105

In 1991, Kitamura stated in *Windows on Japanese Education* (ed. Beauchamp, 1991), that in a survey of students at the University of Tokyo 37% of students expressed dissatisfaction with their classes, and more than 30% of students at private universities also voiced the same sentiment. It will be seen that there were a number of complaints about lectures and lecturers from Shiga University students. Although there is a tendency for students to make more criticisms than positive comments when given the opportunity to do so, the host of comments pertaining to uninteresting lectures was noteworthy.

I am not enjoying classes because I do not think I have got the fundamental knowledge or skills which could be obtained by reading the newspapers and books on the subjects taught in the classes. Student 42

I think we need classes which make us get interested, especially the classes in which we are forced to study. Student 70

There are fewer interesting lectures at

national universities than at private universities, because the lecturers employed by a private university will be fired if they give lectures which students are not interested in. On the other hand, lecturers at national university does not have such an incentive, so we can not expect lecturers at national university to give us interesting lectures. Even if they are giving an academically good lecture, it does not make sense since it is meaningful only when students are listening to the lecturer. I hope that the lectures should be more useful to society. Student 107

The lectures at university are not interesting. The lecturers should improve their courses by making them more interesting. If all lecturers check the attendance, then the number of attendance will increase in all the classes. It seems stupid to attend classes. Student 108

Lectures at university themselves are too ambiguous. They should give us lectures which we will be more interested in, and academic stuff should be like that. University makes it very hard to give credits. Student 164

I do not like xxxxx the lecture is not well-organized at all. Student 212 (specific course was named)

Some students specifically commented on teaching methods of professors. This was similar to the findings of a 1995 survey carried out by the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture (Mombusho). The results of that survey found 42.4% of students stating that they were most dissatisfied with teaching methods that included diction and the use of blackboard. 35.1% of

students were also dissatisfied with class content.

It is difficult to hear what a teacher is explaining and also to understand what the teacher is writing on the board. What I can obtain in the class is only the points from attendance as well as knowing what the teaching will give in the exam, and a 90 minutes class has absolutely been wasted. Student 18

....and also the courses in which it is very difficult to hear the lecturer and to read what he/she write on the blackboard. The courses at Shiga University are not satisfactory in total at all. S113

It is also interesting that some students made a distinction between teachers and professors. The university - lecturers' system is that lecturers give assignments, and the students who attend courses and submit the assignments given to them can only obtain high grades, and I realized through my experiences to attend the courses that lecturers are not so keen to care about students. A lecturer is not a teacher. I do not like teachers, but I hate lecturers. Student 191 They seemed to be inferring that they admired their high school teachers for encouraging them to study. However, they may not have realized that much of the encouragement given to students in high school was focused upon working towards and passing the university entrance exams which in turn may determine their life choices of employment.

University is about learning self-discipline and having independence of thought. Students are expected to plan and balance

their own academic and social life and they need to be aware of their responsibilities as students from the moment they enter the university. However, this does not excuse a professor's lack of responsibility to update his/her teaching skills. Furthermore, a number of students continuously referred to a lack of enthusiasm among teaching staff. Regardless of whether or not this is solely a student perception, this issue needs to be addressed by faculty members as how we are perceived by students does have some effect on student performance.

There is a lecture on economics where the lecturer, being proud of his professional knowledge, is only reading a textbook in the class. I have been doing my best to listen to the lecture seriously and also to read the textbook, but it does not make sense to have such an effort in his/her class. I am talking about xxxx, and I want the lecturer not only to talk, but also to consider how to teach, keeping in his mind what the students can understand. Student 34 (specific course was named)

It is said that students in Japan will become very lazy when they enter university, and all professors should be replaced with teachers in order to give students a strong desire to study. Professors are people who are doing their own research in their field, and there are very few professors who realize that they also have to teach. Student 81

Shiga university had high reputation before, but it does not now. I have really realized that the quality of the students of Shiga university is so low since I came to Shiga University. The students of Shiga University

have very little purpose for themselves, or very little their own thought about society. Faculty is not divided into small classes, which does not seem suitable for students who have no enthusiasm. Of course, the problem is not only on the students' side, but also on the lecturers' side, and it seems that there are a few lecturers who can explain their own thought in their own words. They only explain about general theories or the facts said by other people, so I think I should study by myself. Student 147

I feel that a lecturer is giving a lecture without thinking of any student, and students are also only listening to the lecturer. There are not many lectures which gives students any interest. Student 101

There are too few lecturers who give students a desire to study. Student 213

It is recently said that it is too easy to pass courses at university and also that students at university do not make an effort. Some teachers at university in fact give an assignment to students believing this without thinking of whether or not it is true. But I have doubts about the effect of giving an assignment. I do not think giving an assignment will make students study harder. Since teachers give students an assignment for this reason, it is important for students only to submit the assignment. If teachers want to reform university, they should change themselves first. I want to feel something like enthusiasm from the teachers side. Student 143

The Mombusho (1995) has stated that with the diversification of the student body and

the changing nature of university, teachers have to be aware of their changing responsibilities and continuously enhance their own abilities. There should be in-house research and development concerning teaching methods and skills, as well as individual counseling on teaching methods, faculty study groups and teachers observing other teachers' classes.

I can't understand the lectures

I want to study what I can only at university. I can't ask a lecturer any question in the big class where the lecturer has to use a microphone. Compared to the amount of the stuff taught in the class, the time spent for teaching it is too short, and there is too little homework to complement the shortage of time. It is obviously better to study the subject before attending the class. The reason why lecturers do not give students anything might be that lecturers do not care about how much students understand. Student 59

Perhaps one of the main reasons that students found lectures uninteresting and were critical about professors' teaching methods was that they understood very little of the material in their courses. One of the questions in the research asked students how much of course material, lectures and topics was understood after receiving the exam result. The results were interesting at the least. Only 0.4% and 10% stated they understood all of the course and 75% of the course, respectively. 36.9% of students stated that they understood about 50%. However, 52.8% stated they understood less than 50%, very little or did not understand anything at all.

Only one student made this positive comment. **Since I have not entered another university, I might be wrong, but I think the lectures on economics at Shiga University seem difficult to understand. Student 177** The majority of students expressed difficulty in understanding the information that they had studied.

Except language classes, I can't understand the stuff in almost all the classes without textbooks and references, and it does not make sense to attend the classes. Student 18

The classes at university are more difficult than I expected, and it seems that I will have problems in many classes when I have to take exams. Especially the classes in language will be most difficult. Student 80

There are in fact some courses which I definitely have to pass, but I can't understand almost all of them, and I feel that tests are like jobs or some kinds of obligation. It's not so interesting. Student 183

I feel that I have not completely understood what I learned in the class. I can feel in the class as if I could understand the materials at a certain level, but what I learned in the class has not caused any change of myself. Student 130

Since the lectures on economics are difficult and I can't understand them well, I don't like them. Student 190

Some students also indicated that their difficulties in understanding classes stemmed from the fact that they had little knowledge

of these subjects before entering university. **The lectures should be arranged more for the students who have little knowledge on the economy S215** The Mombusho survey (1995) also had similar findings among their student respondents. 32.4% of undergraduate students in their survey stated that they experienced difficulties with university classes because the subjects were not covered in high school. Further, 56.3% of students wanted 'easy to understand' classes and 53.1% wanted the classes to have useful content. The Mombusho has recommended that universities should ensure that classes take into account students' learning at the upper secondary level. They should then provide a foundation for students to acquire the basic academic ability that they need for specialized fields.

I can't understand anything in the classes on economics as I have no fundamental knowledge on economics. Since the books on economics are difficult to understand, it is difficult to understand economics by studying it by myself, but there is no teacher who I can frankly ask. S102

There are too many students without the fundamental knowledge on economics. Courses such as Microeconomics or Macroeconomics should not be compulsory. S220

Students do have a tendency to forget some material and information after they have taken a course, particularly one which is exam-based and where typical student behavior denotes that they study a week or even one night before an exam, then completely forget most of the material and move onto the next

course.

I want to ask a lecturer to give questions in an exam from all the subjects which the lecturer taught. Since lecturers are supposed to know that there are few serious students, they should not give any deep questions only from a certain subject. I want to ask lectures to give questions in an exam that the students, who studied only before the exam, could get some points. S27

However, most of these student participants are first years and they have stated that they do not fully understand the basic elements or fundamentals of a course that they are in the process of taking. This questionnaire was given in December and the exams they were referring to were in the previous September, their courses ended in January. If after the first seven months of their first courses, they had not grasped some fundamental elements and concepts relating to their major, they will certainly experience difficulty in the following year. The further implications this has for staff members, in terms of course structure, continuity and development, is an underlying issue with cause for concern.

I chose this course because....

The reasons why students chose the courses they did were important to consider as they would point to larger issues concerning course structure and teaching methods. Students at Shiga University are required to take a number of compulsory courses and option courses. Therefore, the first reason, for choosing courses, was that they compulsory, with 94.1% of students stating this. However, a

number of students criticized compulsory courses and it seemed clear from their comments that they had not understood the reason why many university degrees required students to take such courses. Perhaps this is simply a case of lack of communication regarding the degree course structure. Therefore, this needs to be pointed out more clearly to students, either at orientation or at the beginning of all compulsory courses. It was obviously an issue that students considered of relevance due to the amount of comments that it produced.

What I am definitely not satisfied at all with is that there are too many compulsory courses. It is impossible to have a desire to study the fields which will clearly not be useful in my future. More courses should be chosen without restriction and I hope that students can choose the courses according to their needs. Student 94

University should get rid of the difference of the number of compulsory courses among majors. It is generally said that Economics has the highest number of compulsory courses and that it is also difficult to pass the courses in Economics, so this difference should be improved. Student 182

It does not make sense to make compulsory courses, and university should increase the number of non-compulsory courses in order that students can take more courses which they are interested in. Student 164

I could also not take the compulsory courses which I was interested in, I hope that the rule could be more flexible. Student 155

It is difficult to take the courses which I want to due to the reason that there are too many compulsory courses. Student 116

There are too many compulsory courses only in Economics, and we can't graduate university by taking courses in another major although we are interested in the courses given in another courses such as Finance, or Accounting. Student 212

The second reason that students gave for choosing courses was that of intellectual enjoyment (54.6%).

Since there are six departments in Faculty of Economics, there are a lot of choices in the courses and I can choose the lectures I am interested in. Student 196

Since I had very little freedom to choose the subjects to study by myself at high school, it was very difficult to choose by myself the fields which I wanted to study when I just entered university, although I had expected that I had more freedom to choose the fields at university than at high school. However, I finally made almost the same timetable for myself as others do due to the reason that there are a lot of restrictions on choosing courses although we in fact have the freedom to choose the courses. I do not think we need such restrictions or compulsory courses. Student 75

I was so much disappointed to know that in this academic year there is no lecture on the subject that I was looking forward to taking even before I entered this university. Since I like economics, I want to study more.

Student 121

However, a more important response that needs further investigation was the 53.1% of students who indicated that they chose a course because it was 'easy to pass', that is a low or no failure rate. If a course is being labeled by students as 'easy to pass', faculty members need to explore this. It may just be a general student rumor with no premise whatsoever. However, 52.8% of students have stated that they understood less than 50% of all the courses they have taken, yet an equally substantial amount of them were declaring some courses 'easy to pass'. This would seem to point to a possible underlying flaw within course assessment and/or structure and would definitely need to be considered in any proposals for academic reform. **I do not think its good to take a course only for obtaining the credit, and also think a bit that the attitude of the teacher who easily gives the credit is not good. Student 119**

Among the other reasons for choosing courses, 17.3% of students chose a course which their friend had previously taken, 9.2% chose a course because it was connected in some way to an outside interest or hobby, and only 5.2% considered choosing a course because it may have been useful for a future job.

Syllabus information was the other area that students mentioned directly relating to their process of choosing courses. In the Mombusho survey (1995), 28.8% of the students stated that they were dissatisfied with the curriculum guidance. At Shiga university, all students receive a syllabus booklet at

the beginning of the year with descriptions and information about every course offered. It is normal for professors at times, to deviate from the syllabus throughout a course. Every class is different with varying levels of individual understanding, and elsewhere one whole class may learn at a different rate from another one. However, the following comments seemed to suggest that there was either an abnormal amount of straying from the syllabus on the part of professors or a large misunderstanding on the part of students as to what the course entailed from the information in the syllabus booklet.

Since I decided to take courses only with the information in Syllabus and regretted having taken some of them, I need more information on the courses. There are some courses in which what I imagine from the title of the course is different from what the lecturer is teaching, and lecturers should make a title of the course from which students can clearly understand what the lecturer will teach. It is good to learn specialized subjects taught by a professor in each field, but it is sometimes difficult for me to understand what a professor is teaching in the course due to the reason that the subject is too narrow as well as too deep. Student 57

There are some lectures which do not fit the students needs. There are also some teachers who are lecturing on their own research topics which are completing different from what they wrote in the syllabus. That is not right, is it? Student 133

The information in syllabus should be more in detail. Since I will spend 1 year out of my 4

years at university to study a certain subject, I want to decide very carefully which lecture I should take. Student 172

There is no interesting class except a tutorial class. Except a tutorial class, there are some courses in which the lecturer is teaching the stuff completely different from that explained in Syllabus. Student 113

I would to take a course in

One of the final questions in the research asked students to choose from a list of courses that they may be interested to take at university. It should be noted that many of the courses listed were not currently offered at Shiga University, and in fact, may be impractical to offer, given a number of factors such as lack of specialized staff, syllabus limitations and budget considerations. However, this course list was derived from comments made by students in class over the past two years as to what courses they wished were on offer.

The four most requested courses out of the twelve listed were as followed. 71.4% stated they would like to take courses related to a future job. 64.3% said they would like to take courses related to general computer skills such as how to use a word processor, make a spreadsheet or browse the internet. 57.6% stated that they would like to take courses related to specific skills of speaking and listening in English and/or another language related to a future job, and 47.6% stated that they wished to take a course in computer skills related to a future job.

Although I had an opinion that universities were necessary to let us have a better job, I now think that the society needs students who have the ability to do practical business just after their graduation. Thus, universities should give us job-related lectures, which would be useful when students have their job just after their graduation. Student 33

These results were also reflected in the Mombusho survey (1995), where students were asked to state up to three wishes concerning university classes and curriculum. One of the two categories that emerged, apart from 'easy to understand' classes, was the need for more specialized education and job preparation classes. About 36% of their students stated they wanted better specialized education, 35.3% stated that wished for courses that were useful for acquiring qualifications or in work, 26.6% wanted more specialized education in first and second years and 25.6% fewer credits required for graduation. Social science students were the largest number of students who wanted a curriculum that would help them gain qualifications or be useful in their work.

I also hope that Shiga University could give us more classes to support us to obtain certificates. Student 22

University should offer the courses to support students to obtain a certificate. Student 181

The contents of lectures should be improved more. I want more courses in which I can learn the job-related stuff such as computer knowledge or a qualification-related course.

Student 150

The results of both of these studies further showed that even first year students were already concerned about the relationship to what they were learning in class and their future employment. These student results seemed to be reflecting the current trends in education circles throughout industrialized countries that suggest academic courses need to have more of a practical, skill-based core.

I can't understand clearly what a lecturer wants to say in his lecture, and I think there are too many lectures. I often think that what I am learning in the course would not be useful. Since I was thinking before entering university that what we would learn at university could be more practical, I now feel something different, I think language classes would be useful though. Student 132

I am wondering whether there are some courses in which I can learn anything useful for my future. Economics is different from what I was expecting, and I often think that I should quit university. However, I do not have any job which I want to take. Student 157

I think all lectures at university should be more practical, and useful in society. I think I can get more from a part-time job than from university. Student 189

I want lectures to teach not only theory, but also the practical problems in society after graduation. Student 69

Since all students had been studying very hard to enter university, universities should try to

do their best to make attractive classes and courses. It seems that the study at university, especially the study of specialized subjects at more advanced level, would not be so useful in practice although the theoretical frameworks are well-built. I want to study something related to reality. There are many lectures which are not interesting. Student 26

I want to have professional qualification and ability. In fact I have started schooling. Schooling is more important for me now than the classes at university, because schooling is clearly more useful for my future. Student 61

Although I am attending the lectures in philosophy and economics in order to obtain the credits, I think nothing is useful in the future. It is stupid to study until we are 22 years old. If we are 18 years old, then we should gradually start working. Student 100

The other type of course that students made specific reference to, and was not on the list, were courses on general knowledge. The Mombusho (1995) has emphasized that new courses that cross traditional boundaries should be established. Such interdisciplinary courses should include modern themes of culture, the environment and people or human education - courses which are easily compatible with the social sciences, and in particular economics. Such courses would enhance the students' capabilities when studying specialized subjects, encouraging them to think independently, foster judgment ability and give them a broad range of knowledge.

University should emphasize on more education about general knowledge. It is limited to

broaden our general knowledge when we are studying for 12 years at elementary school, junior high school, and high school due to the reason that we have to study very hard to prepare for an entrance exam of university. Specialized subjects should be given to students at graduate level or at more advanced level for the third or the fourth year students. University should give us opportunities to study broader academic fields. Student 38

There are too few courses in the general knowledge apart from the courses related to economics although I might have to admire the fact that my major is Economics. Student 127

Shiga university should give us more classes in general knowledge. Student 36

Students were then asked if they felt that this university was providing the courses they wished to take. It was expected that a majority of students would say no. Most first and second years had not yet taken the range of courses the university had to offer, as many were still working on taking their compulsory courses. It was interesting that only 18.5% said the university was definitely not providing the courses they wished to take, while a further 28.8% said they were probably not providing the courses. 21.8% said they were probably providing the courses they wished to take and 0.4% said they were definitely providing them. However, 29.9% said they didn't know if the university was providing the courses they wished to take, and this was probably a more realistic response, particularly for first year students.

Classes are too noisy, too big and not evaluated

There were three other areas that students mentioned concerning courses and lectures. The issue of noise level during a lecture seemed almost insignificant at first, but it actually fell within the wider remit of teaching methods and teaching staff attitudes towards students. This issue was also raised by Ellington (1991) where he observed that there was a constant low buzz of conversation as students quietly but continually talked to each other. The professor in turn, carried on with the lecture and did not seem to mind the ceaseless chatting. Of course, this is unacceptable behavior but unfortunately points to a lack of concern and indifference on the part of some students and staff regarding their responsibilities as members of a higher education institution.

The teachers should not continue their lectures if the students are whispering in the classroom. I hope the teachers could make a counter plan. Student 136

The classes are too noisy, especially in the big class room - classroom 5 and 6. Although there are good students listening to the lecture, there are some students speaking loudly behind. The teachers should tell off them more, and the faculty should let them not come to the class. Student 226

Comment to professors: Please use a microphone. I think there is a bad circle like: no microphone - cannot hear -no idea what they are teaching - result - have a chat with friends. The professors with a very small

voice, have they got any will to teach, or do not want to teach us? Student 230

Smaller classes is always an issue for both staff and students alike. However, resources and finance are the two factors that are most likely to dictate the class size. The Mombusho (1995) survey found many students wanted classes small enough so that teachers were aware of their individual needs. However, it should be noted that in "Quality Education: Does Class Size Matter?" (1995) Gilbert argued that although there was a connection between small classes and improved learning, class size was much less important than the characteristics of the instructor, the way a course was organized and how it was taught.

I can't understand why the students are not divided into a small class at this university. It is better for me to be divided into each small class. Student 174

If a lecture is given in a big classroom, the class easily gets noisy, so I hope that the lecture could be divided into small classes. Student 87

I hope that university increases the number of tutorial class, where I can easily assert my opinion, and also listen to others. Through the experiences to give talks on my opinion, I can check how much I have really understood the materials, and then I can deeply study further through the feedback. Student 172

Student evaluation is carried out in most courses in universities in the United States or Great Britain. The goal of evaluations

however, are not simply to identify teaching problems but to correct them. As Felder (1993) stated in “What do they know anyway? II. Making Evaluations Work”, it was one thing to be told that some students considered you a bad teacher and thought your tests are unfair, it was another thing to know what to do about it. The Mombusho (1995) is supportive of such evaluations taking place stating that it was important to have student evaluation and to apply the results to course development. This would help in the revision and improvement of course content and materials as well as teaching methods. Shiga University has yet to introduce a university-wide evaluation process, although some professors on an individual basis do carry out some form of class evaluation.

I also want university to give students a questionnaire to ask the course at the end of each term, and to fire lecturers who are not good at teaching. Student 36

There is a gap between students and professors. Student 213

Staff-student relationships are an important aspect of the educational environment and play a fundamental role in the learning process of students. The students were asked a number of general questions concerning how much contact they currently had with faculty members. The first point of interest is that unlike in previous questions, the response rate for these questions was 100%. In other questions, many students exercised their right of choice not to answer a question by leaving it blank. Therefore, it can be assumed that this section was of specific interest to them.

The first question asked about contact with a faculty member outside of the classroom setting. Eight per cent of students stated they ‘very often’ or ‘often’ talked with staff outside of class, 36.0% said they ‘occasionally’ talked and 55.5% said they ‘never’ talked with staff outside of class. How the students interpreted talked with a faculty member is unclear. It could span the range of regularly saying ‘hello, how are you?’ to more detailed conversations.

There is no atmosphere at university so that students and lecturers can talk to each other friendly. I hope the atmosphere could be more friendly and we can talk frankly to lecturers. Student 79

A further 12.9% of students stated that they ‘very often’ or ‘often’ asked for information related to a course they were taking, 50.0% said they ‘occasionally’ did and 37.1% stated they ‘never’ did. Again, from personal teaching experience, I would suggest that particularly before the examination period or when assignments are given out, many students ask questions after a class to ensure that they have the correct information. This is common behavior everywhere. Students tend to become very communicative with staff when important assignments are due or final grades/exam results are the focus of whether they move to a higher year or whether they graduate or not. First year students tend to show more concern for getting information about courses as they are new to the university system. Given this, it is surprising to see that 37.1% have never asked for information from staff, the figure would have been presumed to be less.

Other results found that 82.4% of students stated that they had 'never' made an appointment to see a faculty member in his/her office while 15.1% said they had 'occasionally' did, and 2.2% said 'often' or 'very often'. This high 'never' figure could be for a number of reasons. Students' main queries may have been sorted out in the class itself, or queries may have been dealt with after class in an informal way. It should be considered that some students are simply not comfortable making appointments to see staff because of some kind of trepidation or anxiety about talking to a staff member on a one to one basis. Many students coming from a high school setting are unaware as to how to communicate with staff members. This is an issue that needs to be addressed. Faculty members hold some responsibility to ensure that all new students feel able to approach them for information pertaining to their courses, and that students are welcome to make appointments to see staff members during office hours if there is a specific academic/course issue or problem that needs be discussed.

I have not had so many opportunities to talk to teachers, but frankly I do not know how to talk to them. S130

With respect to asking for extra help on a course, 88.6% of students declared that they 'never' asked for extra help, while 11.1% said they 'occasionally' or 'often' asked for extra help. This 88.6% figure is not consistent with the 89.7% of students who declared earlier that on finishing a course, they understood 50% or less of it. Again, no firm conclusions can be made, but the issue of 'asking' for help

seems to be pointing to problems of staff-student communication and/or that students felt they did not need to ask for help as they were confident that due to the structure of course assessment, they were more still more likely to pass even when they did not fully understand the material.

When I questioned a teacher on the part which I could not understand in the class in the first year, I was treated unkindly by the teacher saying to me, Here is the part that explains it in the textbook and I never asked the teacher again. However, there are also teachers who are explaining very kindly even after the class, and I had such an experience before, so much that I was getting interested in the subject in such a class. S197

Faculty members arrange a number of open seminars throughout the year, however, 87.9% of students stated that they had 'never' attended any. Attendance of at least one seminar should be actively encouraged throughout all student year groups, as this enables students to have an opportunity to hear about specific issues in their field and to understand the importance of research, writing papers and having open discussions within an academic context. This would also be an opportunity for students to participate in another form of information-gathering as opposed to hearing a general lecture or attending a small group 'zemi' discussion. The experience of taking part or simply listening to discussions among faculty members and guest speakers is important for students to fully understand the nature of higher education and the environment in which they are participating.

The conclusion to the relationship that seemed to currently exist between faculty members and students at Shiga University cannot be ignored. Kuh's (1998) comments on the American faculty-student situation puts it as one of a "you leave me alone and I'll leave you alone," type of relationship (Kuh, 1998, pg.7). He further noted that the faculty side did not seem require much from students in terms of reading and writing in exchange for a decent grade, provided that students don't ask much from them such as too many meetings outside of class and comments on their written work. Quoting the words of Kulge (1993) as corroboration for his standpoint, "faculty have been encouraged to remove themselves, to disengage somewhat from a full, complete, intense commitment to students... we're teaching less, there's less emphasis on keeping office hours and attending meetings, more celebration of publication and other accomplishments. Students are aware of that, aware of it when you go from asking for four papers to asking for one, aware of it when you from ten office hours a week to two. That suggests disengagement." (Kuh, 1998, pg.7)

There are office hours, but I do not think there is an atmosphere to let students easily visit professors. I would like to ask lecturers to make the lecture more understandable without teaching the stuff only in their own world. I want to have more contact with teachers. S177

There are many lecturers who are not in their office. I can't talk to lecturers even when I visit them in their office hours. S87

It should be recognized that many new students are not completely equipped to deal with the university world that they have recently entered. They have not necessarily grasped that university and the four year course they have undertaken, is not an extension of their high school life but an admission into higher adult learning. They are not always sure of their responsibilities as young adult students, instead often behaving as older high school students. These issues must be constantly addressed by faculty members together with students, ensuring that our role as staff members is understood. Although these discussions can take place in a formal setting during orientation week, they can also be done within the classroom setting and in informal ways, by faculty members being generally accessible to students and encouraging them to ask for information when needed.

Conclusion

The results of the research showed many of Shiga University students able to critically assess their current education environment. They further demonstrated that the stereotype of the passive, indifferent Japanese university student should to some extent be dispelled. Often given a low priority, the student perspective is nevertheless an important component of the current reform process being carried out within the Japanese university system.

The issues on which students seemed to be most outspoken, are in line with current reform ideology. Arimoto (1997) has stated that the evaluation of teaching quality has been underdeveloped in Japan and consumers

have equally paid little attention to it. He argued that a teaching revolution was necessary because the traditional teaching styles and methods could not longer adequately respond to the needs of an increasingly diversified student body. He further made reference to Shimemura's (1996) suggestion of a shift towards smaller class sizes, having more tutorial systems, and providing adequate office hours. (Arimoto, 1997)

The quality of education is becoming increasingly important for a university's survival. With the government introducing the market principle into education - deregulation, competition, individualism and self-evaluation, every university will have to engage in building its own identity while achieving a high quality of teaching and research. It is within this process that students may come to realize the power of being consumers. If their experience is not adequately represented in the current reform procedures, the future may see university administrators and faculty staff being placed in the awkward position of having to meet unrealistic demands made by young people. Representation of all bodies involved in higher education must therefore be given due respect and consideration for any successful reform to occur.

I get angry with the lecturers who are saying that the students at Shiga University do not study. How can they say that, they do not know the students at Shiga university well. The fee of national university is not as high as that of private university, but it's still expensive. There are very few lectures which are worth this expense. Shiga University should recognize the fact that there are many

students of Shiga university who are seriously thinking of changing university. There are some teachers, who cancel the class so many times and obviously look as if they do not want to teach. This is not right. I definitely hope there are some reforms. Student 133

Since students are spending a lot of money as well as time, I hope that teachers should try improving their skills in teaching. I think there are many teachers without the enthusiasm in making an effort to improve the way to teach although they are spending time on their own research. Do teachers have opportunities to talk about how to improve the way to teach? It might be true that the quality of students has been reduced than before, and that the number of students who are studying with their own motivation has been decreasing. However, I do not think this means that teachers do not need reflect, and this aspect would be more the case in national universities. Since national universities are supported by tax, teachers at national university should re-consider how they should improve themselves in order to properly educate any student with a positive motive. The quality of services given at Gakumu-gakari and Kousei-gakari is too bad. Students should be customers. The library is also too bad in this aspect. They lack a viewpoint that they should satisfy students, who are paying money to university. Student 53

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