

Change, Conflict and Conant: ELP Reform and ICU's Liberal Arts Heritage

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Abstract

Recent reform efforts in the English Language Program (ELP) have been complicated by the fact that many involved in the reform process are unaware not only of ICU's liberal arts experiment, but also of the basic tenets of the liberal arts model of education in general. Without this common understanding of the context within which we are expected to assume our roles as "reformers," it is unlikely that the product of our efforts will respect and reflect the values of the educational philosophy ICU bravely adopted half a century ago. In an effort to create this critical context, this paper explores the history of ICU and the debt it owes to the liberal arts colleges in the United States, and to one man in particular, Harvard president James B. Conant. It then offers suggestions for ways in which we can reform the ELP while retaining and strengthening the core values of its liberal arts heritage.

As with universities in general, and liberal arts colleges in particular, reform and change come slowly, if at all (Parsons, 2005). The English Language Program (ELP), the semi-intensive freshman component required of nearly all Japanese nationals at ICU, has been embroiled in reform efforts for the past several years, and work on these reforms must be completed by the start of 2011 in order to take effect by April 2012. Among the proposed reforms are increasing the English proficiency levels (called "programs") from three to four, and the ability to break from the current model of presenting the same curricular content to all students regardless of their program. In effect, the proposals under consideration would make each program separate from one another, allowing content to be tailored to each program level individually and, should any common content elements remain, there is a possibility of having them taught asynchronously in relation to other programs. The rationale for this orientation is quite basic and persuasive in applied linguistic pedagogy (Krashen, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978) in that students studying a language should receive instruction commensurate with their language proficiency.

In ELP structural reform meetings and through informal talks with my colleagues, it became apparent that many would-be reformers (including myself) were unaware not only of the history of ICU's liberal arts experiment, but of liberal arts as an educational philosophy in general. Yet without this basic understanding of the historical operational context of the larger university within which the ELP resides, it is unlikely that the reform process can be meaningful and productive. This lack of knowledge is in no way the fault of the instructors, for the vast majority of them have spent less than six years in the ELP (a result of the transient nature of the professoriate

in the ELP, due to administrative constraints requiring limited and non-renewable instructor contracts), and there has been very little mention of the term “liberal arts” in any reform-related committee meetings. It is my sincere hope that this paper will prove informative to my colleagues and offer the requisite historical background necessary to perform our duties as reformers of a program the complexities of which many of us have only just begun to understand. This paper will examine the background of ICU from its founding and its curricular challenges as the first true liberal arts university in Japan, as well as its debt to the liberal arts models in the United States, particularly those of Harvard, Columbia and Yale. Finally I will suggest ways to reorganize the ELP (within the proposed structure) while retaining and strengthening the core elements that make it such an integral part of the university.

Founding of ICU: A Conglomeration of Contradictions

A Christian graduate university in Japan had long been the dream of American and Japanese missionaries, and the idea was initially proposed as early as 1910 by Japanese representatives at the first World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (Takeda, 2003). However, two World Wars forced the missionaries to put their dreams of a Christian university on hold – yet it was Japan’s utter devastation following the Second World War that actually paved the way for the university’s eventual formation.

Prior to the official founding of ICU in 1949, and its first freshman class taking their seats four years later, there had never been a university in Japan dedicated to teaching liberal arts in the western tradition. Universities were puppets to the emperor and the curriculum emphasized conformity and compliance. One condition of Japan’s surrender was to disavow the emperor of any meaningful significance in society – essentially a man thought to be divine was made human overnight (Dower, 2000). This provided the founders of ICU the impetus to finally get the charter approved (Takeda, 2003). But it was not the charter they were hoping for.

The original founders had envisioned a Christian graduate school, one that would act as a research institute for graduates of the various undergraduate universities with Christian charters already in Japan. When this original plan was rejected by the Ministry of Education, which stated that no university may be solely a graduate school without first having an undergraduate program, the vision needed to be altered somewhat. Thus, first a Christian-influenced liberal arts undergraduate university would be established and within four years the dream of a graduate school could be realized.

The founders were entering uncharted waters, and looked to the American Christian community for guidance. While they inserted an internationally and liberally minded Japanese president, Yuasa Hachiro, a man thought sufficiently westernized for having spent the war years in the US and thought “too liberal” in his native Japan, they recruited two American Mennonites to design the liberal arts curriculum, Maurice Troyer and Carl Kreider. What resulted from the efforts of these three men was a university that, when surveyed on paper, never should have existed. ICU is a collection of contradictions: A Christian university in a non-Christian, some might even argue agnostic country; a liberal arts curriculum in a country with a tradition of practical, specialized education; a professorate and student body (originally called for, though not fully a reality even today) consisting of half Japanese, half foreign born; an institution dedicated to instilling in students a desire to

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seek truth and independent thought, yet forcing all entering freshman to sign the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Despite these anomalies, ICU managed to celebrate its 50th year, and looks poised to celebrate at least another 50. But such paradoxes have never existed in harmony, and consensus at ICU has always been extremely difficult to reach, particularly among Japanese education traditionalists who feel ICU needs to provide a more “practical” and “vocation-based” liberal arts education (“Program Self-Study Report,” 2005), and purists who view the idea of anything practical anathema to true liberal arts. However, this conflict may be a result of never having had a common understanding of what “Liberal Arts” actually means. Forming such an understanding is imperative, though, as ICU, and in particular the ELP, grapple with reforms that could either embrace that tradition, or sharply break from it. But before one can understand what it means to learn in a liberal arts tradition, particularly in Japan, where no tradition even existed before ICU, it is perhaps instructive to examine the development of liberal arts education in the United States so that one might better understand the models upon which ICU’s brand of education is based.

Liberal Arts in the US: ICU’s Inspiration

Liberal arts education has had a tumultuous tenure as the premier educational model in the United States. It has gone through numerous incarnations and reforms, led primarily by the quintessential models, Columbia, Yale and Harvard. Starting in the early 19th century, there was a growing movement away from prescribed curricula taught to all students, largely consisting of critical examination of the classics. This core model was the basis for liberal arts education for nearly 2000 years and it was believed that all learned men should be exposed to the same fundamental texts that defined western civilization (Winter, McClelland, & Stewart, 1981). But this model was increasingly seen as overly prescriptivist, and detrimental to the universities’ bottom line, that is, students paying tuition wanted choice, so universities felt obliged to give it to them. There was one stalwart hold-out to offering students more elective choice, however, and in 1829, the faculty at Yale put their grievances into what has famously been referred to as “The Yale Report.” The authors of the report were Yale faculty who stood against the growing trend to give students choice in selecting courses they would find more appealing or practical to their future careers. The faculty authoring this report was supported by the president of the university, Noah Porter, a leading opponent to university reform, who insisted that there needed to be a core curriculum in which all students should be proficient. This curriculum, naturally, emphasized the classics, with courses in classical languages at its center (or “dead” languages as the reformers called them) – for only the classics “could provide the necessary disciplines and furniture of the mind” (“The Yale Report,” 1828, p. 4) necessary for all educated men to adequately reason:

Analyzing a subject proposed for investigation; following, with accurate discrimination, the course of argument; balancing nicely the evidence presented to the judgment; awakening, elevating, and controlling the imagination; arranging, with skill, the treasures which memory gathers; rousing and guiding the powers of genius. All this is not to be effected by a light and hasty course of study; by reading a few

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books, hearing a few lectures, and spending some months at a literary institution. (p.4)

The faculty regarded an education steeped in the classics preferable to one focusing on a vocation – a trend gaining momentum at other universities. At the time of the report, Yale was seen as the pinnacle of American liberal arts education, outshining even Harvard as the model university (Menand, 2010). With this notoriety, the faculty felt emboldened to lash out at the very notion that a college education should provide students with anything remotely resembling vocational training:

The course of instruction which is given to the undergraduates in the college, is not designed to include *professional* studies. Our object is not to teach that which is peculiar to any one of the professions; but to lay the foundation which is common to them all. There are separate schools for medicine, law, and theology, connected with the college, as well as in various parts of the country; which are open for the reception of all who are prepared to enter upon the appropriate studies of their several professions. With these, the academical course is not intended to interfere. (“The Yale Report,” 1828, p. 9)

Ironically, the reform movement was heavily supported by the younger faculty at Yale, who were bolting in large numbers to other more “progressive-minded” universities. Yale continued to resist reform, only grudgingly accepting some form of electives 50 years later, while their fellow Ivies moved full ahead on the choice-bandwagon. In fact, what Yale was trying to preserve was not a curriculum of classics, per se, but a foundation of material upon which the greater task of learning to argue and discern truth for oneself was built. The classics were the perfect mode for instructing young undergraduates *how to learn* in the liberal arts tradition because they offered no other meaningful purpose; their most important attribute was simply that they were not a springboard to a vocation. The problem for Yale was its insistence on a set curriculum that few saw the value in. Other colleges, like Columbia and St. John’s, were also prescribing a core set of courses designed around a canon of “Great Books,” but the difference was that these universities remained open to experimenting with what that core canon of readings comprised. To Columbia, it did not matter so much what texts its liberal arts curriculum consisted of, rather, like Yale, only that the end result was a student body proficient in the powers of debate, reason and critical thinking (Bell, 1966). Harvard’s reaction under president Charles Eliot, as will be explored later, was simply to throw all requirements out and replace them with electives.

Higher Education in Japan and the US

In order to examine ICU as a liberal arts university in Japan, and the imminent reforms the ELP now faces, it is important to first take a look at the educational landscape within which ICU was born, and which largely remains unchanged to this day. Higher education in Japan from the Meiji Restoration (1868) onward, has been characterized by an emphasis on vocational and specialist training, so much so that undergraduates are considered more advanced in a subject than graduate students of the same subject in the United States (“Report of the United States Education Mission

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to Japan,” 1946). In Japanese universities there is no place for “wide, shallow and boring” general education courses that have no bearing on one’s future career aspirations (Takeda, 2003, p. 126). The entire concept of humanities-based general education was completely foreign to Japan prior to 1949. The primary function of the Japanese university has been to produce specialists who could take their posts in a rigidly hierarchical professional environment, primarily as public servants, and, until Japan’s defeat in World War II, promote the agenda of the fascist wartime government.

The actual education in a Japanese university is regarded largely as an after thought to the very admissions process itself, governed by examinations so rigorous that whole industries exist whose primary function is to help would-be college students pass the examination of their first-choice university. Once accepted, graduation is virtually assured, as class attendance is usually not required and students are encouraged to conduct research for their majors on their own (McVeigh, 2002). This is mainly a result of class sizes exceeding manageable levels (100 students or more is common). Students attend universities in order to enhance their future employment opportunities so, as Inglehart (1964) observes, “in a matter of the curriculum, they are sometimes impatient and even contemptuous of the courses in general education, wanting from the start to specialize in their major field of research” (p. 244). In such an academic environment, it is easy to understand why general education courses designed to form “well rounded” individuals would lack any cachet.

This emphasis on specialization was not unique to Japan for even the US was seeing a shift towards “purposeful” education in the form of the Morrill Act of 1862, which served as another catalyst pushing university reform, and against which Yale was waging its losing battle. The Morrill Act was presented as a way to equalize the educational divide in the US, where elite universities churned-out elite graduates. The graduates were small in number compared to the overall population and, not surprisingly, these graduates filled posts within the US elite class. The Act proposed the creation of state schools that would teach farmers and others not normally thought to be “college bound” a useful profession: what use or interest would farmers have for a liberal arts education like those offered at the classic American colleges? That is, even if those institutions offered to enroll them. Interestingly, the creation of state universities focusing on practical, skills-based education motivated the push by reformers at Columbia, Harvard and elsewhere to offer students more elective courses designed to appeal to their practical interests, that is, their future careers. In a way, the Morrill Act moved to professionalize the undergraduate degree, just as Japan had always done, at a time when liberal arts universities were struggling to keep the graduate degree the sole domain of the professional. The key point to remember here is that while the US was moving towards state-sponsored vocational education, Japan had always had such a focus.

The push for elective courses at liberal arts colleges had no greater champion than the president of Harvard, Charles William Eliot. By 1900, Eliot had done away with all required courses, replacing them with a series of electives (though keeping them largely within the liberal arts purview). Eliot was a realist, and he knew that in order to compete with the choice being offered at the emerging state schools, he would need to offer some choice of his own. This move followed similar reforms at Cornell and Brown, and was expressly designed to protect the liberal arts college from the growing wave of professionalization in higher education. By making these changes, Eliot was able to create a wall around his liberal arts college, and offer Harvard’s graduate schools as the domain of the professional instead (Menand, 2010).

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What the authors of the Yale Report were fighting to preserve was a humanities-based, prescriptive “general education,” and while a prescriptive curriculum might seem the antithesis to liberal education, focus on the classics lacked a requisite *purposefulness* and could never be confused with meaningful, narrow “vocationalism” (Winter et al., 1981, p. 2). There are few universities that do not offer some form of general education today, though there is now a merging of the two forms, that is, *electives* which are taken to satisfy *general education* requirements, thus bringing the philosophies of Eliot and the authors of the Yale Report together. Ironically, at Harvard under then president James Conant, the pendulum swung back to the prescriptivist general education approach following World War II.

James Conant and ICU

Conant, like Eliot, was a reformer as well as a champion of the liberal arts, but unlike his predecessor, Conant believed a more prescriptivist approach was needed in general education so that students could develop “a common awareness of the importance of ideals and objectives, in a common understanding of the heritage which is the possession of his generation” (Conant, 1945). Through a common curriculum, students would share a basic frame of reference from which they could discuss and debate the most pressing issues of the day. While the University of Chicago and Columbia had had successful general education programs for years, with Columbia credited with offering the first humanities course ever taught at an American university, called General Honors, in 1920 (Bell, 1966), Conant actually put into writing why liberal arts mattered, and the resulting book has had a profound influence on liberal arts colleges, including ICU, to this day. *General Education in a Free Society* (sometimes referred to as the “Harvard Report” or “Conant Report”) was first published in 1945, right at the time the founders of ICU were drawing up plans for the new university. In it, Conant uses the terms “liberal education” and “general education” interchangeably; however, the intention of using the term *general education* was to focus on the changing face of education in America, and to place an emphasis on what *every* student should know, not just what students at elite universities should know. To Conant, there should be some “general” core elements to education, which included a handful of prescribed general education courses. Additionally, he stressed the importance of regular student-faculty interaction through a tutorial system, which has been an integral feature of liberal arts education since Plato. Most pertinent to ICU’s fledgling founders, however, was the proposal for a reformed general education curriculum at Harvard consisting of three divisions: the humanities (focusing on great books, literary criticism and art), social science (evolution of free societies and democracy studies), and natural sciences (mathematics, physics and biology) (Conant, 1945). What should not be overlooked here is the timing of *General Education in a Free Society*. It is, with its emphasis on democracy and freedom, a document written in reaction to the growing chill of the coming cold war, and, in the words of Conant himself, “the Russian hordes” (Hershberg, 1995); likewise, ICU is a university established in that same uncertain era and it is no coincidence that the Pervasive Aim of ICU bears a striking resemblance to language found in Conant’s cold war education manifesto:

Succinctly, the aim of ICU is to create an academic tradition of freedom and reverence under girded by truth and to educate men and women to

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acquire international culture and discernment befitting the members of a democratic society in service to God and humanity. (*International Christian University Bulletin*, 2002, p. 14)

Not only the university's "Aim," but also its original curricular organization owes much to Conant. ICU's general education model consisted of the same three divisions outlined in the report: Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences, in which 12 units from each division served as the student's "general education" portion of their education. But at Harvard the report was not followed to the letter, and the required courses element was dropped, falling victim to the wave of elective choice flowing across US higher education: "While Harvard's faculty voted in principle to follow [Conant's] recommendations, it never implemented rigorous, cohesive required courses in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences; instead, it allowed students to select from several alternatives in each field" ("Columbia College, Chapter 4," n.d.). It is this limited distribution model that ICU also instituted, and in ICU's 50-year history, this organization has seen little alteration (in fact, there is only a single common, required general education course at ICU: Introduction to Christianity). It is worth noting here that while Harvard, and by default ICU, was ultimately unsuccessful in implementing a set core of required general education courses, Columbia had been offering such courses since the 1920's to undergraduates in a program called, not coincidentally, *The Core*. However, Columbia was not immune to the trend of colleges succumbing to the demands of professionally-minded students, and as early as 1905 began allowing third-year students to attend courses at Columbia's professional schools.

A True Liberal Arts University in Japan

As noted earlier, ICU was initially envisioned as a graduate school, and once that charter was rejected by the Ministry of Education, the founders scrambled to form an undergraduate program, lest they lose momentum and sanction from supportive and generous benefactors in Japan and North America. Being that "liberal arts" as a philosophy of education had no antecedent in Japan, there were really no Japanese educators qualified to design a curriculum. In order to create a "general education" model in a country without even a term for the concept in its language, two Americans with strong liberal arts pedigrees were enlisted. Maurice Troyer was a professor at Syracuse University and involved with the American Council on Education and a former head of the Educational Evaluation Research Center (Takeda, 2003). A devout Christian, Troyer enthusiastically supported the idea that a liberal arts university in Japan would serve as a model for other post-war educational reforms in the country. As he went about making plans for the new university, including the forming of a first-rate international faculty, he came up against resistance from the Japanese Christian benefactors and academics who largely wanted the new university to mirror the existing elite institutions patterned on the former imperial model, that is, they wanted the education to be as it always had been: top-down, narrow and *purposeful* (Takeda, 2003). In order to convince the Japanese side that a liberal arts model was not only preferable but imperative to the vision of a democratic, international-minded Japan, Troyer turned to Carl Kreider, a Princeton educated academic and policy maker whose liberal arts pedigree was well known from his work as dean of Goshen College in Indiana.

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Together these men set about forging the course of study at the university and staffing it with like-minded academics, both from outside Japan and within. With the Conant Report as their guide (they even instructed students and faculty to read the report), the basic formation of the university divisions was rather straightforward. And it was believed that the best way to ensure that the unique, western education philosophies be respected and promoted by the faculty was to hire only Christians to teach at ICU. This proved problematic in a non-Christian nation for a number of reasons; most significantly they realized that in order to attract quality academics from abroad, they would need to pay them considerably more than the local Japanese professors. This caused friction in the early days, and brought charges that Troyer and Kreider were promoting “colonialism” at ICU (Takeda, 2003). Yet despite these early controversies, a faculty was assembled and the first freshman class matriculated in 1953.

As the university was intended to be “bilingual,” that is, half the courses were to be taught in English, a language program would be needed where entering freshman could bring their language abilities up to a standard where they could realistically “communicate in the English language at a level adequate for scholarly research and intelligent discussion with educated English speaking people” (*Bulletin of the International Christian University*, 1953, p. 18). The original Language Institute, what is now the English Language Program (ELP), was a one year program required of all entering freshman that would, it was believed, prepare them for the linguistic rigors of courses taught in English by both non-Japanese and Japanese professors alike.

Professors outside the ELP and within it, however, have historically viewed this role differently. There has long been a dichotomist view that the ELP is either a pure language program with content supporting this aim, or it is a precursor to a liberal arts education, which simultaneously improves language skills (see Enochs, 2009). The reforms that the ELP now face are complicated by this overly simplistic paradigm, and threaten to derail years of reform efforts.

ELP Potential and Possibility

ICU’s ELP has been largely absent from any of the above discussion of ICU’s founding and liberal arts mission. This has not been an oversight, but a mere reflection of the precarious place the ELP has always found itself at ICU. While administratively a part of the College of Liberal Arts, it has a tendency to be regarded as a completely separate entity whose sole purpose is to give students “intensive training in English” (“Program Self-Study Report,” 2005, p. 4) before they embark on their liberal arts education which is administered, admittedly far from the original goal, only partially in English at the university (Ueno & Riney, 2009). When students enter the ELP they are placed into one of three program levels, A, B or C, with Program C students considered, effectively, native speakers of English (mainly a result of their having lived abroad extensively) and because of this, spend only two, rather than three terms in the ELP their freshman year.

Program levels are largely meaningless in terms of content, as all programs study the same base material, while programs B and C are often given extended readings and assignments to supplement the base material. Paradoxically, despite these three program divisions, the English Language Program is not a true language program at all, at least not in the way an applied linguist might expect. This author has

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been on faculty at and toured numerous English language programs around the world, with their emphasis on grammatical forms, sentence structure, and practical *training*, and the ELP resembles them very little. Overlap occurs in the numerous “academic skills” courses, such as academic speaking, listening, and pronunciation, which are offered both as required and elective courses within the ELP for programs A and B. The core courses taught in the ELP, that is, *required* courses spanning the full three terms in the first year for Programs A and B (condensed to two terms for program C) are Academic Reading and Writing (ARW) and Reading and Content Analysis (RCA). These are, without a doubt, crash courses in learning in a liberal arts tradition. Students are introduced to texts in such diverse fields as educational values, bioethics, ethnicity, race and gender issues. They may sample Plato and Aristotle and read classic novels from American or world literature. These readings and topics are then reinforced through inter-program academic lectures, called Narrative Presentations (NP). All of this material is presented so as to enhance the students’ critical thinking and argumentation skills – skills that they, coming from the Japanese educational model of presenting truth as discrete, discernable facts, have never had the occasion to develop (Gorsuch, 1998; Hale, Pekkain, & Carlson, 2008).

To say the ELP is purely a language program is to misrepresent the majority of instruction that takes place there. If the ELP wishes to become more integrated into the university as a whole, it might serve the instructors who teach there to reframe the education they are providing to reflect what it really is: *an introduction to learning in the liberal arts*. This education is unique and imperative because there are no other courses at the university that serve this purpose. Without this type of instruction in their first year, students would find themselves in general education and foundation courses in which they would be expected to think critically from the start.

There are other problems with what is happening in the ELP, though not for the instructors and students so much as for the university itself. If we take Conant’s original vision of a limited prescriptive model, or Columbia’s actual prescriptive Core general education program and hold them up to ICU for comparison, we see that the only common, required curriculum students experience in four years at ICU (save for the single Introduction to Christianity course), are those courses taken in the ELP (RCA, ARW and NP). In effect, with its focus on how to learn and think critically, its common content taught synchronously to all students regardless of program level, extensive student-teacher interaction outside of class in the form of required tutorials, and small class sizes of around 20 students (compared to the average 104 in ICU’s general education elective courses), the ELP is offering the only true liberal arts-style education at the entire university.

It needs to be stated here that *liberal education*, where students are exposed to countless courses to choose from as electives (Eliot’s legacy), should not be confused with *liberal arts education*, as is the common trend. The authors of the Yale Report had it right almost 200 years ago when they argued against the “mile wide and an inch deep” educational model: “The ground work of a thorough education, must be broad, and deep, and solid. For a partial or superficial education, the support may be of looser materials, and more hastily laid” (“The Yale Report,” 1828, p. 4). With all students, regardless of English “proficiency,” engaging the same common materials critically and thoughtfully, *program wide*, they are developing a common “furniture of the mind” that will serve them well not only in their general education courses or majors in the College of Liberal Arts, but “long after college, in the pursuit and the fulfillment of meaningful lives” (“Columbia College, Chapter 4,” n.d.). This is what the ELP provides – pedagogy designed to train students how to learn and think

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critically about their world – and it is precious. The ELP is, for all intents and purposes, ICU’s *Core*:

The Core Curriculum is the set of common courses required of all undergraduates and considered the necessary general education for students, irrespective of their choice in major. The communal learning--with all students encountering the same texts and issues at the same time--and the critical dialogue experienced in small seminars are the distinctive features of the Core...Not only academically rigorous but also personally transformative for students, the Core seminar thrives on oral debate of the most difficult questions about human experience... The habits of mind developed in the Core cultivate a critical and creative intellectual. (“Columbia College, Chapter 4,” n.d.)

In the early days of the university, the ELP’s function was to provide language training to students with little prior authentic exposure to the language. However, because of its having the luxury of selectivity, today a majority of ICU’s freshman enter with TOEFL scores (Test of English as a Foreign Language) qualifying them for entrance into many undergraduate (and some *graduate*) programs at North American universities. The students have changed, and so too has the mission of the ELP. As momentum for reform increases, it is important not to look to the distant past for inspiration, but to retain those elements that make the ELP such an integral part of this liberal arts university (whether the university is aware of this importance or not). In no way do I wish to suggest that language “training” should be de-emphasized (indeed students come to ICU never having written a simple five paragraph essay in English, or sat through and taken notes in an academic lecture in English), only that such training should remain consistent with the key functions of the ELP within a liberal arts framework: providing common, core content (taught to all programs *synchronously*) designed to enhance critical thought and analysis. Some have called for more writing to be included into a new ELP curriculum, which can encourage these goals (see Kleindl, 2005a, 2005b), and to which I agree. However, it should not be overlooked that writing can only be enhanced if students have something meaningful to say, and this must not come at the expense of extensive critical reading and discussion of that content in depth – which students must be able to do before they can be expected to produce any writing of value.

Conclusion

ICU almost didn’t happen, and given its fledgling beginnings and pervasive resistance to reform, it is quite remarkable that it has managed to thrive for over 50 years. There are some who foresee ICU’s precipitous demise as a given, considering its aversion to reform despite a demographic shift that will see the pool of Japanese applicants decrease sharply in the coming years, and which will require fundamental changes in ICU’s acceptance policies and curriculum (Shafer, 2004). It has been my intention in this brief paper to provide background and context for the instructors grappling with reform in the ELP. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into these reform proposals in greater depth, but it is my hope now that we can discuss these proposals with a common understanding of the liberal arts tradition from which ICU was born,

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and that we can let this be the critical background against which we measure our reform efforts.

While the initial founders of ICU's liberal arts curriculum borrowed heavily from the models presented by James Conant and Harvard (in that students roam the various departments taking general education electives), in the ELP, all freshmen follow the same core general education model, reminiscent of Conant's actual vision, and Columbia's practice. If through the reform process the ELP dislodges itself from this important place in ICU's liberal arts structure, students could find themselves ill prepared for the education they will encounter elsewhere in the university, and promote the pervasive cries that a general education that does not provide a bridge to the professions is without merit. Were this to happen, ICU would, in effect, be no different from the common Japanese university structure it labored so intently half a century ago to break from, and the ELP, no different from a common adjunct ESL program in North America. As our efforts turn now from structure to content and curriculum, we will soon have the opportunity to shape the ELP experience for years to come. Let us not forget the traditions that have been in place for half a century, but let them inform and guide us now as we get to work.

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