# Building an Online Community at Asia University's English Tutorial Meetings Program During COVID-19: An International Cultural Exchange Project

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## Abstract

This paper looks at the Tutorial Committee (TC) at Asia University (AU) and how the challenges of moving online for the Spring and Fall semester in 2020 were met. Due to COVID-19, students lost the opportunity to participate in study-abroad exchange programs at American universities for one year. This unique situation essentially required teachers to quickly reassess their teaching approaches, carry out a time-constrained needs analysis and build the first international online community using pen pal exchanges at AU's English Tutorial Meetings (ETM). We collaborated with two of AU's sister universities, Eastern Washington University (EWU) and Central Washington University (CWU), using readily accessible third-party platforms in order to create a peer-informed online community. The needs and aspirations of students and subsequent move to an online learning environment that resulted in an international cultural exchange project are discussed. We also evaluate the semester-long sessions, including student feedback and questionnaires and possible directions for future online cultural exchanges.

## Introduction

The Tutorial Committee (TC) at Asia University (AU) is responsible for promoting the use of English outside of the classroom in more informal and authentic learning environments and situations. Setting standards for these achievements outside the classroom is a key motivational tool for both faculty and students (Steinberg, Epstein & Owen, 1998). At AU, this occurs mainly through the provision of sessions held three times a week during lunchtime where students can practice their English and develop their communication skills with the help of alternate committee members. The 30-minute duration is less than those of a standard pedagogic lesson taking into consideration the needs of students and indeed instructors with similar academic and social requirements.

A significant percentage of attendees are 帰国生 or *kikokusei*: literally returned-to-the-nation students whose extended expatriate experiences have confirmed them as special Japanese (Willis et al, n.d.) and are thus familiar with overseas cultures and teaching styles. As well as the goal of enhancing students' critical-thinking skills (Takemae, 1998) and consolidating English speaking ability, these sessions also explore ways to provide extra learning opportunities and support for students who have studied abroad in the past or may wish to study abroad in the future. From an international perspective, AU has currently reached an academic exchange agreement with 67 universities and institutions overseas, ranking at the top in the nation in terms of the ratio between the total number of students and the number of international students. One of the various study abroad programs facilitated by AU is the Asia University America Program (AUAP). Established in 1988, the program sends students to one of seven universities located in the states of Washington, Arizona, California, Utah and New York.

With the onset of the COVID-19 situation and the move to university-wide online learning in the first semester of 2020, a departure from the norm was observed, the result of which was to re-think the model for the 2020-2021 academic year. Through mutual agreement, the TC worked with Eastern Washington University (EWU) and Central Washington University (CWU) in different aspects in building an online community which resulted in an international cultural exchange project in December 2020.

## Literature Review

There has been substantial research on the initial design and delivery of the AUAP program in order to develop intercultural awareness as well as its subsequent efficacy and

success rates according to various metrics. This research acknowledges the syntactical, morphological and phonological changes observed in students' abilities from their time spent overseas and exposure to an English-speaking culture (Anderson & Wright, 1996; Byrd et al., 1999; Hartshorn, 2000; Hartshorn, 2006; Reid, 1999; Takemae, 1998).

## Extracurricular Activities

Student participation in extracurricular activities has linked activity participation with school engagement and academic success with social-ecological theory, suggesting that the social contexts of different types of extracurricular activities may differentially affect student outcomes (Martinez et al., 2016). A recent collaborative online exchange initiative (Kansai University's Collaborative Online International Learning Plus and 'Multilateral COIL') has at its core 'global perspectives', encouraging direct student-to-student interactions. Video conferencing and subsequent follow-up visits to respective academic institutions are envisaged. The initiatives are designed to increase student global learning experiences and also nurture students to prepare for the global workforce of the 21st century. The potential for successfully motivating students to engage with the initiative is such that it is funded by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Under MEXT's Important Matters of Educational Policies for Society in and after 2030 (n.d., Living Well in a Period Where People Live 100 Years , para. 2), one of the recommendations is that individuals should acquire "competencies at the stage of youth, including knowledge and skills, abilities to think, make judgement and express oneself and motivation to learn".

## Promotion of Cultural Understanding

The building of an international online community based on authentic interactions may also encourage social learning, cultural understanding and global empathy which align with Jing's (2013) 'global awareness framework' for English teachers. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) also recognizes the importance of social interactions in both cognitive functioning and in the formation of self-identity. In addition, Intercultural Competence (IC) which Bennett and Bennett (2003) define as an ability to effectively communicate in intercultural situations may occur through authentic intercultural relations. According to Bennett and Bennett, language learning alone is insufficient for Intercultural Competence (IC). Instead, deliberate and well-developed programs along with scaffolded intercultural support leads to IC.

## Developing Skills through Networked Learning

Hawisher et al, (2006) have come to recognize that computer networks increasingly serve as sites within which people from around the world design and redesign their lives through literary practices. Raffaghelli and Richieri (2012) compare virtual learning spaces to *agoras* in ancient Greek society—symbolic spaces where people exchange ideas and learn from each other. Networked learning, according to Hodgson, McConnell & Dirckinck-Holmfeld (2012), is also an appropriate venue for promoting intercultural understanding. Dillmann and Stantcheva (2014) assert that the skills learners acquire through networked connections with other classes around the world are 1) increased self-reflection, 2) empathy, 3) respect for another's values, 4) digital etiquette and proficiency, and 5) self-efficacy and self-confidence in speaking a second language. All of these are important 21st century skills and needed by students preparing for foreign exchange programs.

## Challenges in Forming an Online Community

After a scoping review, five potential challenges were outlined in the formation of an online community.

1. Cross-cultural issues

Although many of the students are familiar with North American culture, how to organise the pairs or small groups was especially of concern. As noted by Hyland (2006), Atkinson (1999) and Clifford (1992) have suggested using the term 'identity' for culture to avoid accusations of stereotyping. Avoiding discomfort was key (Allaei & Connor, 1990). Furthermore, politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and group consensus (Nelson & Carson, 1998) were also important concerns.

2. Synchronous vs Asynchronous

There were two factors at play here. One was the time difference (Japan is 17 hours ahead of Seattle, WA,) and the other was that both sets of students were enrolled with full-time academic schedules. In addition, public holidays fall on different days, the beginning and end of term are different, and almost all AU students are in part-time employment (アルバイト or *arubaito*). As with Pullen and Snow (2007), we concluded that synergistic combination of the two modes with in-person instruction provides optimum flexibility and support. We decided that flexibility in scheduling student interactions was key with both

synchronous and asynchronous options available. However, clearly-defined goals were made explicit to ensure students were on task with the end goal of completing a cultural exchange project with their partner(s).

3. Autonomous learning

How students could peer review their work and complete projects was decided along the lines of an autonomous learning (Holec, 1981) role with TC members as facilitators (Warschauer, 2002).

4. Mixed level/ability

Mixed levels were another concern. The advertising for the ETM is done across all of the Center for English Education (CELE) at AU. Some of the students who attend have never worked with the TC members before. Mixed levels are a fact of the sessions often necessitating a buddy system (Espitia Cruz & Kwinta, 2013) for pair and group work. A heuristic level assessment was carried out in the first weeks of the sessions and TOEIC scores were submitted to EWU.
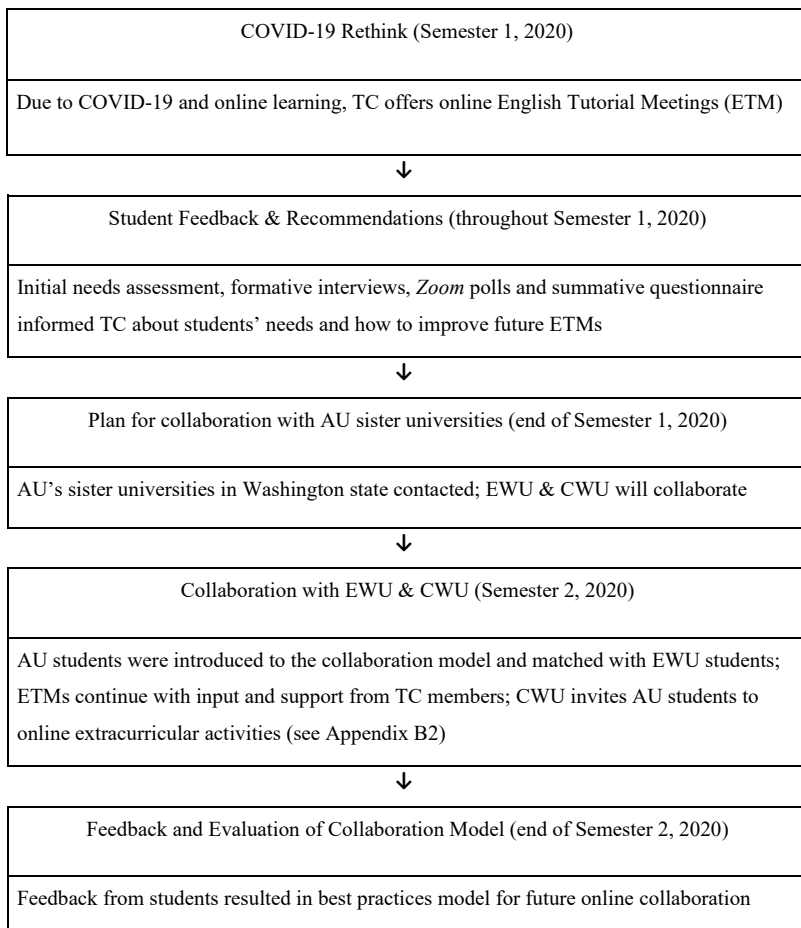
5. Technology

Evans (2009) asks an interesting question related to our project goals and also relative to the move to online lessons in general: whether technology produces new language learning processes or only facilitates and supports processes that already exist in conventional learning contexts. For our students and those of EWU and CWU, after carrying out an informal, in-class needs analysis, we were assured that each had the required hardware, software and Wi-Fi access.

## Implementation of the Working Online Model

As classes were restricted to an online model in semester 1, 2020, the TC had to reassess how best to serve the needs of students, so ETMs were also established online with a view to 1) support students in developing their English-speaking skills and 2) gauge student interest in building an online community with overseas universities. These meetings quickly developed into a domestic online community especially for first-year students who had previously not met any of their peers. Through ongoing interviews, polling and an end-of-semester 1, 2020 questionnaire, feedback on the structure and theme of future meetings was gathered and analyzed. Mindful of the needs of students who were due to study abroad in

2020 and by the uncertain international travel situation, an idea was proposed to liaise with universities in Washington state. Two universities, Eastern Washington University (EWU) and Central Washington University (CWU) responded favourably. Once the online community had begun, assessment of learning and an evaluation of the program through an end-of-term survey was conducted. A timeline of the entire process beginning with online ETMs to an evaluation of the final collaboration is included in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Timeline of Collaboration Plan with EWU & CWU

| COVID-19 Rethink (Semester 1, 2020) |
| :--- |
| Due to COVID-19 and online learning, TC offers online English Tutorial Meetings (ETM) |

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| Student Feedback & Recommendations (throughout Semester 1, 2020) |
| :--- |
| Initial needs assessment, formative interviews, *Zoom* polls and summative questionnaire informed TC about students' needs and how to improve future ETMs |

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| Plan for collaboration with AU sister universities (end of Semester 1, 2020) |
| :--- |
| AU's sister universities in Washington state contacted; EWU & CWU will collaborate |

↓

| Collaboration with EWU & CWU (Semester 2, 2020) |
| :--- |
| AU students were introduced to the collaboration model and matched with EWU students; ETMs continue with input and support from TC members; CWU invites AU students to online extracurricular activities (see Appendix B2) |

↓

| Feedback and Evaluation of Collaboration Model (end of Semester 2, 2020) |
| :--- |
| Feedback from students resulted in best practices model for future online collaboration |

<center>**Methods**</center>

In order to ascertain the effectiveness of ETMs, Google Forms was used to distribute three questionnaires to students by email. One needs Assessment Questionnaire (First Semester 2020) was used to gauge student interest in online ETMs and possible interest in an international pen pal exchange. One Summative Questionnaire (end of First Semester 2020) in July 2020 was used to assess online ETM satisfaction overall as well as attitudes going forward to the project-based international pen-pal exchange. Finally, one summative Feedback Questionnaire (end of Second Semester 2020) was used to evaluate the collaboration model with EWU and CWU. We felt assurance of anonymity was important to gain honest answers in the thematic-analysis of our responses, that is to say we wished to encourage students who had dropped out to provide answers as to why they had done so. As a result, the questionnaires were a mixture of open, closed, and dichotomous questions, with rating scales including Frequency and Likert, for example, to determine that frequency of attendance would indicate a positive attitude towards the sessions (see Appendix A for the full questionnaire).

<center>**Results of Questionnaires and Feedback**</center>

In this section, the results of each questionnaire are reviewed followed by a brief analysis.

**Needs Assessment Questionnaire (First Semester 2020)**

Before the start of the first semester, the TC carried out a needs assessment questionnaire and collected 10 responses from across different faculties and disciplines.

Q.1 How often would you like to attend the weekly English meetings at lunchtime with instructors?

**Table 1.** Frequency of attendance

| Frequency | Once a week is okay | Twice a week | Three times a week | Total # of Responses |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| # of Responses | 6 | 4 | 0 | 10 |

Each student was willing to meet at least once or twice a week but no more than three times a week. This question showed that students could take some time out of their schedule to meet with instructors.

Q.2 How often would you like to chat with your international pen pal?

**Table 2.** Frequency of chat

| Frequency | Once a week is okay | Twice a week | Three times a week | Total # of Responses |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| # of Responses | 3 | 7 | 0 | 10 |

Seventy percent of the students are interested in chatting with their pen pal twice a week and 30% once a week. This indicated that more than half of the students wanted to talk with their pen pal more.

Q.3 Do you have a part-time job or club activity?

**Table 3.** Part-time job or club activity attendance

| Total # of Responses | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| 10 | 9 | 1 |

Ninety percent of students are busy with a part-time job or club activity.

Q.4 Can you attend the meetings with your pen pal at the same time every week?

**Table 4.** Ability to attend meetings

| Total # of Responses | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| 10 | 5 | 5 |

Fifty percent responded "Yes" and fifty percent responded "No". This question informed us that students may not be able to attend due to their part-time jobs in Q.4.

Q.5 I would like my pen pal to be male, female or I don't mind, either is okay.

**Table 5.** Preference in partners

| Total # of Responses | Male | Female | Either is okay |
|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | 0 | 1 | 9 |

Ninety percent of the students did not mind working with either gender. However, one student really minded and stated that she would drop out of the project if we couldn't find a female pen pal for her.

Q.6 I would like to work on a group project as well as speaking with my pen pal.

**Table 6.** Preference for group project

| Total # of Responses | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| 10 | 7 | 3 |

Seventy percent responded they would like to work on a group project and talk to a pen pal while thirty percent could not do both. This shows students were quite interested in communicating with a pen pal.

Q. 7 What are some topics that you would like to work on in a group project?
Responses included culture, food, holiday events, music, hobbies, travel and movies.

**Feedback Questionnaire (First Semester 2020)**

For the first semester, questionnaires were sent to students after the last English Meeting in July 2020 with a request to submit the questionnaires by mid-September. Although only 3 out of 18 responses were collected, these comments gave us insight and

guided us towards the preliminary steps in shaping the future of the TC for the second semester.

The first question was on a Likert Scale from 1 (=did not enjoy at all) to 5 (=really enjoyed), it asked whether students enjoyed talking with a native speaker. All three students responded with a "5", which indicates there was a high level of interest in joining the sessions.

The second question which was multiple choice, asked why students decided to attend these sessions. Again, all three students reported they wanted to practice their speaking skills with a native speaker.

The third question asked what prevented students from attending the sessions. All three students reported schedule conflicts as the main reason. This question informed the TC that a change in the days of the week that the sessions were held was necessary.

The fourth question asked whether students would like to attend the sessions again in the future. All three students replied with a "Yes". This indicates students were eager to join the sessions again.

The fifth question was on a Likert scale from 1 (=very useful) to 5 (=not useful). It asked whether it would be useful to correspond with students of similar English ability from foreign universities. Two responded with a "3" and one with a "5", which told us that students did not mind communicating with foreign students of a different language level.

The sixth question asked what topics students would be interested in learning about with a pen pal. The answers included learning about culture and hobbies such as dancing and sports.

The seventh question asked about students' overall experience with the sessions on a Likert Scale and everyone indicated a "5", which means "Excellent".

The eighth question inquired about the best or worst thing about the sessions. The best thing included communicating with others, speaking practice and discussion on many kinds of topics. The worst thing included quizzes and the short length of time of sessions.

The ninth question asked students if they had any ideas about improving the advertising of the sessions. One student answered that he/she was always busy so he/she wanted the sessions to be longer and another student commented other students did not know English Meetings even existed. This question informed the TC that we had to improve the way we advertised our sessions online.

The tenth question asked whether students would recommend these sessions to others and everyone replied with a "Yes". This indicates the TC was headed in a positive direction as students would like to cooperate by spreading the word for these sessions.

**Feedback Questionnaire (Second Semester 2020)**

For the second semester, questionnaires were sent again near the end of December 2020 using Google forms to evaluate the collaboration with EWU and CWU. Seven students were sent the questionnaire and every one of them responded.

Q.1 Did you use any of these apps (Skype, LINE, WhatsApp, Facebook, email, Zoom, Instagram, etc.) to meet or chat with your American partners?

**Table 7.** App preference

| Types of Applications | Zoom | Epals | Flipgrid | GridPals | LINE | Whatsapp |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| # of Responses | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| Types of Applications | Facebook | Instagram | Skype | Emails | Total # of Responses |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| # of Responses | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 7 |

Zoom, Instagram and emails seemed to be the main methods of online communication.

Q.2 If you selected one of the apps above, please say why you kept using that app.

**Table 8.** Reason for app selection

| Reasons | Simple to use | Familiarity with the app | American partner preferred that app | App was selected together after discussion | Total # of Responses |
|---------|---------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| # of Responses | 5 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 7 |

Seventy one percent said the ease of use seemed to be the main reason for using the same app.

Q.3 How often did you meet your partners?

**Table 9.** Frequency of meeting

| Meeting Frequency | Once a week | More than once a week | Less than once a week | Total # of Responses |
|-------------------|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| # of Responses | 4 | 2 | 1 | 7 |

Eighty-six percent of the students met with their partners at least once a week which indicates students communicated regularly with their pen pal.

Q.4 Did you learn something about American culture?

**Table 10.** Gained cultural awareness

| Total # of Responses | Yes | No |
|----------------------|-----|-----|
| 10 | 7 | 0 |

Every student felt he/she learned something about American culture.

Q.5 How do you feel about the experience of meeting your American partner?
-It was good experience to learn American cultures.

-We really enjoy the time.

-I could learn American cultures. I wanted to go to America more and more.

-It was fun. I'm glad I have experienced it.

-It was difficult.

-It was difficult to take communication, but I was able to learn about overseas fashion.

-We had more than 50 exchanges on E-mail, I could know many difference between Japan and America. That was so interesting for me.

Almost all of the responses were positive as students said the pen pal project was a good experience that taught them something new.

Q.6 What kinds of topics are you interested in discussing with American students next semester?

Students responded with interest in culture, movies, American food, TV dramas, baseball and tourist spots.

Q.7 If you had a virtual conversation partner/group, how often would you want to meet?

**Table 11.** Frequency of virtual conversation

| Meeting Frequency | Once a week | More than once a week | Total # of Responses |
|---|---|---|---|
| # of Responses | 6 | 1 | 7 |

Only one student wanted to meet their partner more than once a week whereas the others only once a week.

Q.8 Would you be interested in joining virtual events with American students? If yes, check those that sound interesting to you:

**Table 12.** Interest in joining virtual events

| Virtual Events | Cooking class | Trivia games | Discussion | Free talk | Anything | Total # of Responses |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| # of Responses | 4 | 2 | 1 | | | 7 |

The top three choices for students were cooking class, trivia games and discussion.

Q.9 Next semester would you like to change partners or stay with the same partners?

**Table 13.** Partner change preference

| Total # of Responses | Change | Stay |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | 4 | 3 |

Fifty-seven percent indicated they wanted to change partners while 43% did not mind staying with the same partner.

Q.10 Were there any difficulties in communicating with your partner? For example, different English levels, cultural differences, etc.

**Table 14.** Communication difficulties

| Total # of Responses | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | 2 | 5 |

Seventy-two percent stated that they had no difficulty communicating with their partner while 29% had difficulties.

## Discussion

All three questionnaires and on-going interviews with students informed the TC of  the needs and interests of students with respect to building an international online community. Although the sample size of students and their responses to questionnaires collected was modest (ten for needs assessment, three in the first semester and seven in the second semester), it provided a much clearer direction for subsequent ETMs. In addition, face-to-face interviews with students during TC sessions was invaluable in providing guidance in the move to online collaboration with EWU and CWU. As such, the TC met the needs of the students as reflected in the comments of the questionnaires. Students are keenly interested in connecting with pen pals at AU's sister universities and are satisfied with the program overall. However, in order to facilitate future online collaboration, the TC identified some challenges that must be met including 1) advertisements for the ETMs, 2) establishing project goals and 3) the logistics of collaboration with sister universities.

### Advertising ETMs

One of the first challenges which was evident in the post-design phase was how to advertise the ETMs. Before COVID-19, the TC displayed posters in classrooms, and monthly reminders to colleagues ensured that the posters promoting the ETMs inviting student participation were visible campus-wide. In addition, an incentive system was in place where students could forgo an absence from one of their university classes if they attended an ETM, which ensured a large number of students in attendance of ETMs. Due to the nature of the online learning situation, expected and accepted increased online communications between faculty and students meant that students received the posters in PDF format promoting 'How to Join' (see Appendix B1) and 'Goals of the International Project' (see Appendix B2) directly to their inboxes as a one-off email or as reinforced notifications on a weekly or monthly basis. Colleagues kindly agreed to display the posters on a permanent basis on their Learning Management System (LMS) landing pages. The LMS currently in use at AU is Manaba. This department-wide promotion ensured a high visibility rate; however, this did not translate into a large number of students attending the ETMs. In addition, an Instagram account entitled 'AU Meets the World' was set up with information about how to join ETMs and the goals of the international project.

Future ETMs using the online community international exchange project model need to take advantage of social media including Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and other third-

party applications. With the return of in-person classes expected in the second semester of 2021, posters promoting the ETMs will need to be displayed around campus.

**Time Zone Differences and Technology Issues**

The TC's project goal, which was established during the first semester ETMs, was to create a cultural exchange between the two universities, one in Japan and the other in America, thereby promoting a deeper understanding of Japanese and American culture. The preferred exchange consisted of real-world, authentic interactions with the end goal being the co-creation of an artifact such as an oral presentation, blog posting, FlipGrid video posting, etc. about American university life or American culture. The results of the questionnaires indicated that students used Instagram and email most often and Zoom and Skype less frequently. This can most likely be attributed to the time difference between Washington universities and Japan which favoured asynchronous communication as well as the ease of use. The responsibility of the TC was to encourage students to communicate with their partners at EWU through third-party platforms resulting in a cultural exchange class project, and this is indeed what occurred. In the final ETMs, students made an oral presentation about what they had learned about American culture from their pen pal. Ideally, a joint presentation with both parties, the AU student and CWU student were envisioned, but because of the time difference and the time of ETMs, it was deemed unfeasible.

Future collaborations could follow this model where students initially make a presentation about themselves using PowerPoint or write a self-introduction and then be matched with an EWU student. Student interactions can begin with an email exchange with their partner, and after several weeks of this type of exchange, students would feel comfortable with each other to do a group project on topics of their choosing such as comparing and contrasting university life, seasonal holidays or everyday life between Japan and America. In order for the interactions to be successful, students need to be familiar with the technology, and TC members need to provide support using the technology itself, and support in difficulties with the student-to-student interactions. The building of an artifact i.e., presentation, blog posting, wiki is an important factor in the success of these exchanges.

**Collaboration with EWU and CWU**

According to Dillmann and Stantcheva (2014), developing an online community requires finding appropriate educators/classes to interact with that share the same goals and values. Contact was, therefore, made regarding a possible collaboration with three of the

partner universities on the AUAP Program: Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, and Western Washington University. We proposed three initial ideas for sessions which were largely made up of students who wished to go or had already been abroad, and whose spoken English and cultural awareness was relatively high. EWU replied and organised an interest questionnaire which was shared with the EWU students to fill out. CWU, while not providing any students for project work, provided a PDF with links for AU students to join events being held via Zoom. These events included among others Game Night, Karaoke Night, Cooking Class, and Holiday Movie with discussion afterwards (see Appendix B2). Links to social media pages were also provided to which students could navigate and organise their own schedules.

As discussed, there were challenges for the TC in setting up a collaboration with AU's sister universities. The collaboration with EWU and CWU is a work in progress, and its continuation is contingent on the successful online communications between staff, which in turn is largely dependent on the online structures in place at our respective universities for the second semester. Having key stakeholders at each university responsible for future collaboration is absolutely essential. In addition, research such as this project will give credibility to future collaboration success.

## Conclusion

Although the field of building and organising an online community is relatively new to the Tutorial Committee at AU and has been expedited by the COVID-19 situation, international online projects such as this can be used in the future for Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) or to enhance existing English-language programs to bring in authentic learning experiences. The TC implemented a proposed working online model for the English Tutorial Meetings, and the five challenges of forming an online community (including cross-cultural issues, synchronous vs. asynchronous learning, autonomous learning, mixed-level abilities and technology) were met. This project helped us understand how the challenges can be solved by organising the platform for students and supplying them with the tools to work independently at their own pace. The results show that students responded positively and were able to accomplish their study and project goals. As well as these major challenges, advertising for the meetings, time zone differences and collaboration with CWU and EWU were also managed. By conducting a needs assessment questionnaire and two feedback questionnaires, the TC gained informative and valuable insights which were used to improve each semester's sessions.

Overall, this class project helped students' speaking skills and allowed them to engage in authentic tasks with overseas students, something not possible in Japan during COVID-19. It demonstrated that launching an online community benefited students in the crucial field of motivation. It also consolidated their approach to self-directed learning and networked learning should the need for ERT rise again.

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Appendix A (Questionnaires)

**A1: Needs Assessment Questionnaire (Beginning of First Semester, April 2020)**

1. How often would you like to attend the weekly English meetings at lunchtime with instructors?
Once a week is okay
Twice a week
Three times a week

2. How often would you like to chat with your international pen pal?
Once a week is okay
Twice a week
Three times a week

3. Do you have a part-time job or club activity?
Yes
No

4. Can you attend the meetings with your pen pal at the same time every week?
Yes
No, my availability changes every week because of my part-time job or club activity.

5. I would like my pen pal to be
Female
Male
I don't mind, either is okay

6. I would like to work on a group project as well as speaking with my pen pal.
Yes
No

7. What are some topics that you would like to work on in a group project?

**A2: Feedback Questionnaire (End of First Semester, July 2020)**

1. I enjoyed speaking with a native speaker.
Did not enjoy at all  1   2   3   4   5   Really enjoyed

2. Why did you decide to attend these sessions? (choose all that apply)
It suited my timetable.
I thought it would be easy to attend in a remote capacity (i.e., using Zoom).
I wanted to practise my speaking with a native speaker.
I wanted to learn new things.
I was curious.
I wanted to meet other students
I thought it was mandatory.

3. If you stopped attending the sessions, what was your reason for doing so? (choose all that apply)
It is no longer possible because of my timetable
I wasn't interested in the content.
I wanted to work on skills other than speaking.
The sessions were too easy for me.
The sessions were too difficult.
I felt it was difficult to use Zoom for the sessions.
I wanted more time to ask questions and speak with the instructor.

4. Would you like to attend the sessions again in the future?
Yes (If yes, please tell us how you would improve the sessions.)
No

5. Would it be useful to correspond with students of similar English ability from foreign universities?
Not useful 1   2   3   4   5 Very Useful

6. What are some topics you would be interested in learning about with a pen pal?

7. Overall, how do you rate your experience with the sessions?
Poor 1   2   3   4   5 Excellent

8. What was the best/worst thing about the sessions?

9. Do you have any ideas about how we could improve the advertising of the sessions?

10. Would you recommend these sessions to others?
Yes
No

**A3: Feedback Questionnaire (End of Second Semester, December 2020)**

1. Did you use any of these apps to meet or chat with your American partners?
Zoom
Epals
Flipgrid
GridPals
LINE
WhatsApp
Facebook
Instagram
Skype
other

2. If you selected one of the apps above, please say why you kept using that app.
Simple to use
Already familiar with the app
My American partner preferred that app
We discussed it together and selected that app

3. How often did you meet your partners?
Once a week
More than once a week
More than once a week

4. Did you learn something about American culture?
Yes
No

5. How do you feel about the experience of meeting your American partner?

6. What kinds of topics are you interested in discussing with American students next semester?

7. If you had a virtual conversation partner/group, how often would you want to meet?
Once a week
More than once a week

8. Would you be interested in joining virtual events with American students? If yes, check those that sound interesting to you:
Cooking class
Trivia Game
Discussion
Other

9. Next semester would you like to change partners or stay with the same partners?
Change
Stay

10. Were there any difficulties in communicating with your partner? For example, different English levels, cultural differences, etc.
Yes (Please write your comments below.)
No

Appendix B: Posters

**Figure B1.** International Project Flyer

**Figure B2.** Winter Break Programs Flyer (CWU)