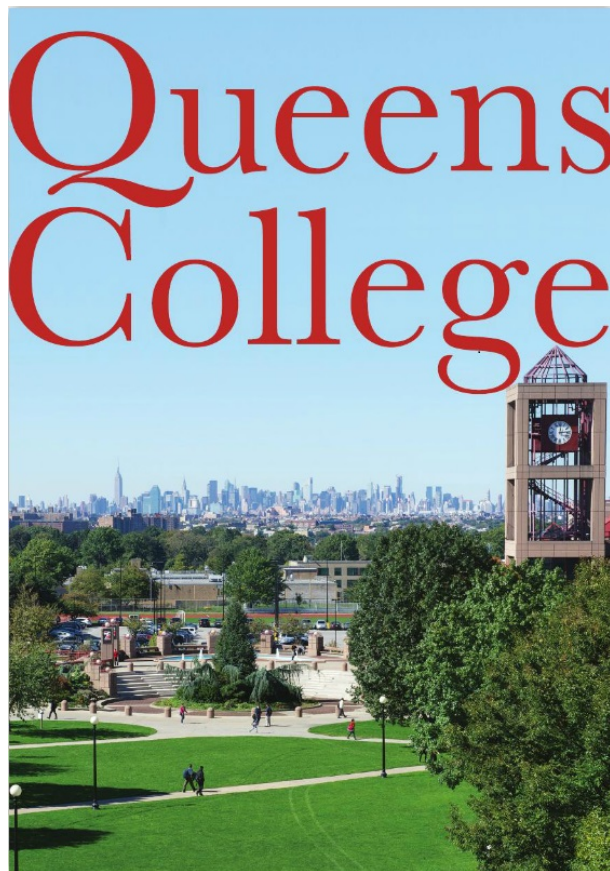


**Toyohashi University of Technology,  
Institute for Global Network Innovation in  
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**News from QC**

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## ■ Reports

### Queens College, New York, and My Unexpected Experiences

Tomoyoshi Akiba, Toyohashi University of Technology

Let me look back shortly on the days in our ELI class during this summer. A teacher gave us weekend homework assignments of writing an essay on a given theme, such as "gay rights", "pro and con for social media", and "how to develop creativity for children". For the last theme above, the thesis of my essay was something like this: "Though over-control is certainly a creativity killer for children, no-control is also a bad idea. Instead, giving an appropriate restriction on what they do should be the best way to develop children's creativity." When I'm looking back on myself, I am feeling that the same goes for our global FD program.

As the fall semester of Queens College began from the end of August, we started to attend several courses either for earning a credit or just for auditing. However, I found I could not take some subjects that were most related to me, because they were not given in this semester or were given on Friday when we had to attend the two other English classes provided just for us, the GFD teachers. I had to select my classes from the restricted time table available for us, so I decided to take only one course from my major, computer science (CS), and four from those other than CS. Nevertheless, this turned out very well for me. The most impressive course I'm taking now is about linguistics given by Prof. Eva Fernandez, who is one of the coordinators of our program. I found linguistics as a subject is really relevant for second language learners like us, since it provides us an objective insight into our learning target, i.e. language. Not only that, but also her method of teaching is

thought-provoking. She makes full use of the learning management system (LMS), such as Blackboard and Moodle, and seems to always try to introduce new technologies into her lectures. For example, all of her lectures are recorded by using a video-sharing website so that students can review past lessons. I would miss such a lecture, if I took the most appropriate courses.

Speaking of the only CS course I'm taking, the teacher often give students a group work assignment, in which three or four students make a team to make up a report. As you know, I am a teacher, so I always worry about how closely I should participate in it, i.e. it would not be good for the other students in my team if I did all the work by myself. So I decided to do it a little passively by trying to give them only useful comments but not an answer. Indeed, they often did not work as I expected, which annoyed me very much. Therefore, motivating them to do their work became another role of mine. This might be a kind of lesson we would never have experienced other than in this program.

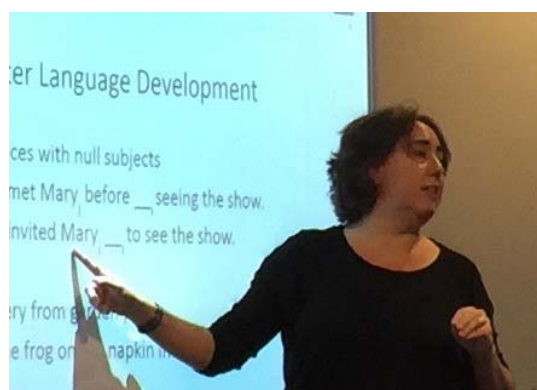
From the fall semester, the research project with my mentor, Prof. Bon Sy, also became in earnest. His research area, knowledge-based systems for medical diagnosis, is a little different from mine, spoken language processing. Therefore, I had expected that our research collaboration would be limited. However, he kindly proposed an attractive research topic related to both of us. He, his Ph.D. student and I are now having weekly research meetings every Sunday morning because we cannot find any sharable time slot

on weekdays. In the meeting, I always struggled with not only communication in English but also the differences in our backgrounds. I am always feeling as if we are talking with different languages. Nevertheless, I think that it is really fruitful, because I can often learn a new way of thinking from their approaches, and I can also provide our methods and resources that are new for them. I hope it will bring us further collaboration in the future. This is also a kind of experience I would have never had if we were from the same research field.

Talking about our daily lives in New York, we were suffering from a low exchange rate of the yen. For example, when I have a seat at a restaurant for my supper, it costs a minimum of around \$20 (2,500 yen) including tax and tip. Therefore, I decided to cook meals everyday for myself. Food at a super-market is still expensive and a one way bus fare in New York is \$2.75 (about 330 yen), so I always have a walk to a cheaper supermarket. Walking, shopping, cooking and washing-up also take up quite a lot of my free time. Nevertheless, I have found myself enjoying them so much. While I am walking, I can discover various fragments of life everywhere, such as passing people, those talking on their cellphones, houses and gardens on the street, nature at a park, playing and exercising in it, traffic signs, dustbins, noise, smells, etc. Now it is one of my favorite things to seek a cheap and easy-to-make recipe while I am shopping around in a supermarket. Among others, they give me a feeling of reality about life in New York.

As I mentioned so far, we have faced a lot of restrictions in our programs. At the same

time, I believe we have enjoyed a lot of unexpected but irreplaceable experiences. Last of all, I would like to quote the final sentences taken from my essay to which I referred at the beginning: "Put them in a playground surrounded by a fence. They will come up with a good way to play there by themselves. And, sometimes, they may find out a way to go beyond the fence in order to enjoy more lively games. Such activity is only possible when the fence is there."



A scene taken from the psycholinguistic course given by Prof. Frenandez



A snapshot with my lab members, Ayman who is a PhD student, Prof. Sy, me, and John who is an ex-member, from left to right

## Classes in the Fall Semester

Yuko Ichikawa, National Institute of Technology, Tokyo College

I am already in the fourth month of my New York life. Living in New York has been my dream since I was a high school student and read a girl's comic "California Story."<sup>3</sup> I got used to the life here and I don't get on the wrong bus now. I feel I'm not a traveler but an inhabitant. We are now students of Queens College and are attending courses during the fall semester. It started at the end of August and I am also getting used to them. Here I introduce the courses that I'm taking to you.

The courses in Queens College usually have two 75minute classes a week: Monday and Wednesday or Tuesday and Thursday. Beyond that there are several types of classes, 50minute long, 110minute long, 150minute long, 170minute long or one time a week, two times a week and so on. There is no lunch break time.<sup>4</sup>

We are required to take one credit course. I'm attending eight courses including the credit course. Four of them are mathematics: Linear Differentiation, Linear Algebra II, Probability and Statistics. The styles of these classes are usually lectures. Differentiation is a course for freshmen who will become high school teachers. They have just started studying calculus. The other math courses are for junior or older. The biggest difference from a Japanese math class is that the instructors recommend using a calculator: to calculate a

determinant of a matrix or to predict a limit. Instructors explain how to use it. I've just started attending the courses "Differential Equation" instead of Differentials.

"Psychology of Development and Learning of Student of Mathematics at the Secondary School Level" is the course for freshmen learning education. Most of the students in this class are the same as those who are in the Differentiation class I took. They are studying about what is learning, what is cognition and the mechanism of memory. This class is conducted in the style of active learning. Students do the homework, discuss about the questions and state their opinion. Students also do the fieldworks in the middle school near here. They observe a class there. Before and after the observation they discuss what they should focus, on that day, and what they actually saw.

In the course "Modern Japanese Fiction in Translation" students read 20 century Japanese novels. The classes are taught by the discussion of the instructor and students.

In "Music History II" students learn about the history of western music of 17th or 18th centuries. They study the style of the music of the era and experience it by listening to the real music. They are required to read the facsimile of the composer and play the old music.

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<sup>3</sup> Written by Akimi Yoshida, published in 1975 by Shogakkan. More than half of the locale is Manhattan.

<sup>4</sup> Some students have lunch during the class. Instructors don't pay attention of that.

On top of that, on Friday there are two courses provided for us, Global FD teachers; “Teaching in English” and “Academic Language Support”.

Because I’m attending such a lot of courses, it is really hard even though I am just listening to them. In every course, students have to do a lot of homework and it makes them spend a great deal of time, so they usually enroll in five courses or less in every semester. I can do only homework for math classes and classes on Friday and reading Japanese novels. To my regret, I have no spare time to do the other homework. The math classes are very understandable for me because my special field of study is mathematics and it can be described in simple English. In math classes I’ve learned many useful things: the questions that the instructors deal with or how they explain theories. These will help me when I will go back Japan.

Psychology, Literature and Music History are the challenging classes for me. I have little background in them, so the English is much harder. But little by little I’m getting better at catching the details of them. I believe it makes my English better to attend many courses.

While I have been taking part in these courses, I realized something. Firstly I can communicate in English if the person tries to understand me. In the classes, the biggest reason that I can’t catch what people say is due to my lack of vocabulary. All English spoken by instructors is clear, grammatically correct and easy to understand. Once they start small

talk I can hardly understand what they say. The discussions among students is the most difficult to understand. They speak in an ungrammatical way. Thinking of how we talk in Japanese, it is quite natural. My goal is to join their informal conversation. I have only slightly more than two months left. I wonder how I can get my goal, but I will try to do my best.

Finally, I would like to write my thoughts about New York. First of all, New York is full of cultures. There are a great number of cultural things: arts, music, sport and so on. I can’t experience all of them. I don’t have enough time (actually and money): Jazz, Classic, Rock, The Metropolitan Museum, The Natural History Museum, U.S. open, Major League, NBA... I really appreciate having me such a chance to study in this amazing place. During my stay here, I would like to experience as many various things as I can. Secondly, New York has enormous diversity: many races of people are living here and they speak various dialects of English. That makes native speakers understand any kind of English such as our Katakana English. That sometimes helps us but I tend not to pay attention to pronunciation. But it is only because of NEW YORK!



Student’s performance in the music history course



Group work in the educational psychology course

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