



Redesigning the FYE Course at Yamagata University: Our Challenging Journey

Takao Hashizume
Katsumi Senyo
Shigeru Asano
Koji Fujiwara

February 12, 2018

37th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience

Agenda

1. About Yamagata University (YU)
Higher Education in Japan
 2. FYE Program at YU in the Past
 3. Redesigning the FYE
 4. Assessment Results
 5. Conclusion and Future Plans
- } Koji Fujiwara
- } Takao Hashizume

**Yamagata University
&
Higher Education in Japan**

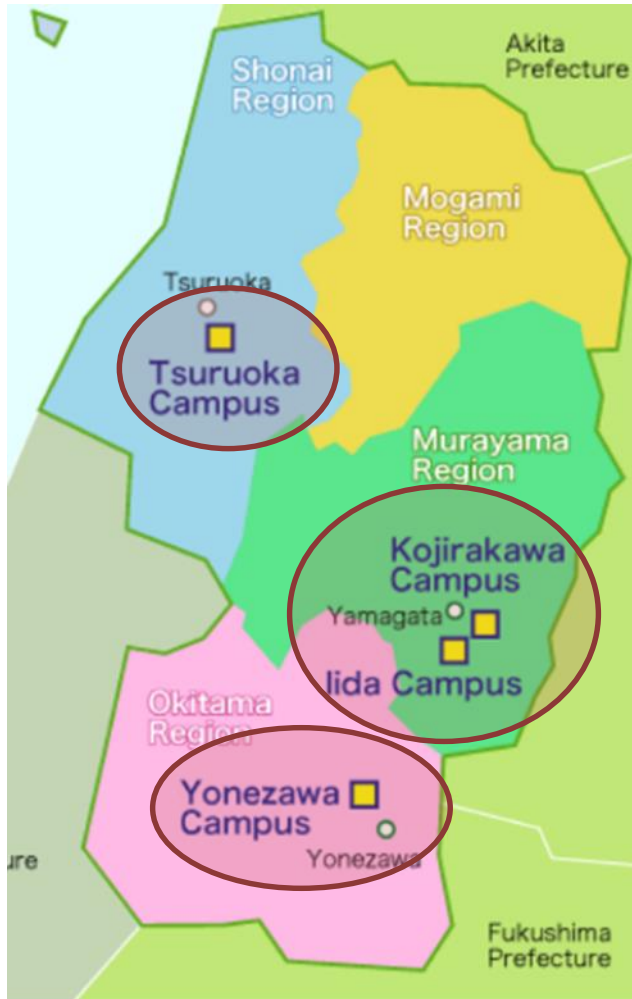


Where is Yamagata Prefecture?



- 2.5 hours by bullet train
- 70 min by airplane

Yamagata University (YU)



- **Type:** National University
 - multi-campus (4 campuses)

- **Students:** 8,800
 - 7,500 undergraduates
 - 1,700 new freshman/year
 - 1,300 graduates

- **FT Faculty:** 900

- **Six Colleges:**
 - Agriculture
 - Education, Arts and Science
 - Engineering
 - Literature and Social Science
 - Medicine
 - Sciences

- Yamagata Campus – Tsuruoka Campus: 60 miles
- Yamagata Campus – Yonezawa Campus: 30 miles

Key Characteristic of Higher Education in Japan

- Students **must decide on their major** when they apply for **admission**.
 - **Can't change the major after enrollment**
 - No double majors
 - No pre- program (e.g., Pre-Med, Pre-Vet, etc.)
 - Almost **impossible** to
 - **Transfer** to another university
 - Have **flexible study plan**
- High expectation to graduate in **four years**

FYE Program at Yamagata University

2010-2016



FYE Program at YU: 2010-2016

■ Objective

To help and assist new first-year students in transitioning to the university life more smoothly

■ Characteristics

- Began in 2010
- 2 semester credits (meet 15 times, 100 min./class)
- **Mandatory** for ALL new first-year students
- University's original textbook
- Each department/faculty offered **"their own FYE course"** to the students.

Problems Need to be Improved

■ Within the same FYE course,

① Wide Variation in Class Size

- Smallest: 13 per class
- Largest: 125 per class

② Different Learning Outcomes

- It depended on the “person” who taught the course.

③ Different Evaluation Criteria

- Absolute vs. Relative
- Hard vs. Easy-A
 - Range of FYE Section Ave. GPA: **2.2 – 4.0**

Redesigning the FYE



Redesigning the FYE

■ Mission

- Same objective
- Same credits
- Same mandatory requirement
- Offered by the “university”, not individual dept.
- Same textbook, but different teaching manuals
- Target Course Grade: B or above

■ New Course Goals

- To promote further development of student success skills
- To help students gain confidence at new environment (learn from experience)

How We Fix the Problems

Problem ①: Wide Variation in Class Size

➤ What we did?

- **35** students/class (2017)
 - Plan to have **25** students/class (2018)
- Assigned by the university
(**Mixed-gender and Mixed-major**)

of FYE Sections and Instructors

	Sections	Instructors
2016	54	54
2017	48	43
2018*	67	?

* The course will start in April 2018.

How We Fix the Problems (contd.)

Problem ②: Different Learning Outcomes

➤ What we did?

- Common Course Outlines
- Shared Learning Outcomes & Objectives

Students will develop four core learning skills:

1. Basic Research
 2. Group Work & Collaborative Learning
 3. Presentation
 4. Report Writing
- Providing the detailed teaching manuals and slides
 - Completely full description of what to do

Course Outlines (1st Half, Weeks 1-7)

- Students learned and experienced the **four core basic learning skills** through the class activities.
- Students were assigned to each **working group**, and tackled the topic for discussion.
- Topic: A cashier gave you an **extra 30 cents** back in change. What do you do?
 - i.e., Pocket the change vs. Return the change
- Each group drew a conclusion and spent **6 weeks** to prepare the presentation.

Course Calendar

Week	Agenda/Topic
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introductions• Syllabus Review
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group Work• Basic Research
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group Discussion• Logical/Critical Thinking
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation Part 1
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation Part 2
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group Presentation
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Report Writing

Reinforcement: 2nd Half (Weeks 8-15)

The group worked on the another topic given by a faculty.

- i.e., What is your future occupation?

How We Fix the Problems (contd.)

Problem ③: Different Evaluation Criteria

➤ What we did?

- Same homework across all sections and homework grading rubric

➤ Use of a LMS

- Require **ALL** FYE faculty to use a LMS

- Reasons:

- Organize FYE course materials in one location
 - Keep FYE course up-to-date
 - Consistency of learning
 - Easy tracking & reporting
- } **Assessment**

Redesigning the FYE: Biggest Changes

■ Biggest Changes

1. No course differentiation between instructors
2. Class is now **not** lecture-based.
3. Requires students' **active participation**:
 - Self-Study Realization Skills Improvement
 - Peer-Review / Peer-Learning
4. 30-min. minimum assignment given **every class**
 - **Assignment must be completed that day.**

How Far We've Come

1. Class Size : 95%

- 35 students/class (2017)
- 25 students/class (2018)

2. Teaching of Common Course Contents : 85%

- **Change takes time!!**

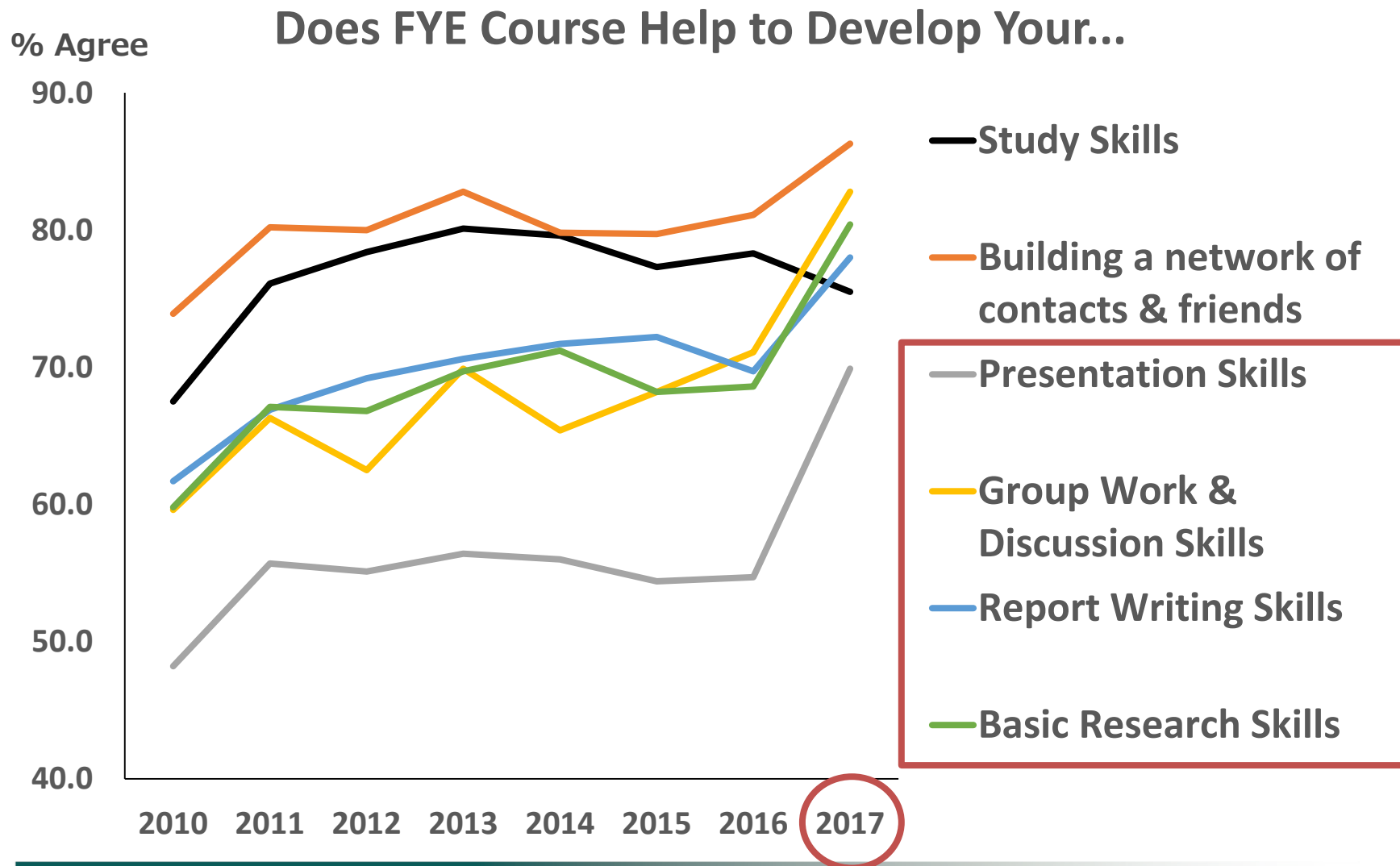
3. Common Evaluation Criteria : 80%

- Need to improve the FYE grading rubric

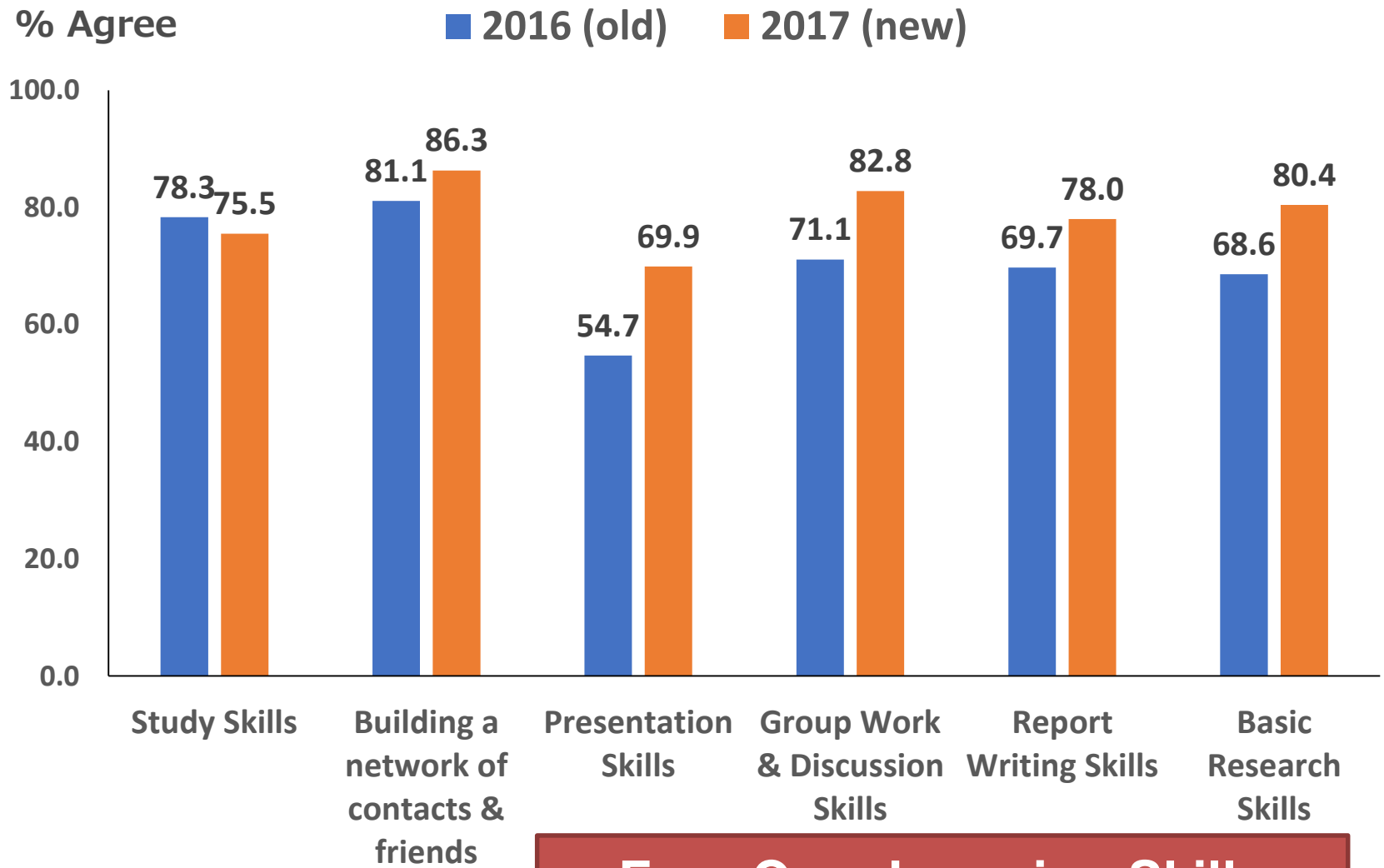
Assessment Results



FYE Student Survey: Previous vs. New



Survey Results: 2016 vs. 2017



Four Core Learning Skills

FYE Faculty Response

- Asked **12** FYE instructors for their impressions about the new-rebuilt FYE course

■ Positive Responses

- More Engaged in Learning
- Active Students' Participations
- Communication Among Students with Different Backgrounds
- FYE helped students with other classes.

■ Negative Responses

- Resistance to Change
- Poor Internal Communication
- Mismatch between Expectations vs. Actual Reality

Improvement: Writing Skills

■ Compared essay assignment: Week 1 vs. Week 15



Readability Score	Week 1		Week 15	
3+	81	8%	96	9%
2 – 3	428	41%	560	53%
1 – 2	415	40%	344	33%
0 – 1	94	9%	45	4%
< 0	30	3%	3	0%
Total	1,048		1,048	

Notes:

- Higher readability score means better readability.
- Readability Score (2+)
 - Week 1: 49%
 - Week 15: **62%**



Big Five Personality Traits

■ Big Five Personality Tests※

- 70 Yes-No Questions

■ The Five Factors

- Openness to Experience
- Conscientiousness
- Extraversion
- Agreeableness
- Emotional Stability

Are they related to
FYE **class grade**
and/or
attendance?

■ Results

- Conscientiousness & Grade (+)
- Conscientiousness & Attendance (+)
- Emotional Stability & Grade (-)

**Early Alert
System**

Conclusion and Future Plans



Conclusion and Future Plans

- 1. Japan's first university to conduct unified outcomes with standardized FYE educational materials to a student body of over 1,700**
- 2. Program for freshman students promoting educational improvement in all faculties systematically, effectively and efficiently with FYE as standard**
- 3. Future improvements to address shortcomings of initial design by working more closely with individual faculties to raise the significance of FYE across the campuses**

Acknowledgements



大学教育再生加速プログラム

This project is supported by MEXT※, Japan.

Special Thanks (in alphabetical order) to:

- Douglas Gloag
- Nobuhiro Matsuzaka
- Hiroyuki Shimodaira
- Tatsuya Suzuki
- Tadashi Takizawa

&

**All Students, FYE Faculty,
Staff at Yamagata University**

Please remember to submit your
evaluation on Guidebook!

<https://guidebook.com/g/fye18/>

#FYE18