

# Global Understanding in the 21st Century: Making Our Students “Global Ready”

Harry Meyer

*Gunma Prefectural Women’s University*

Contact: [frigpwu@gmail.com](mailto:frigpwu@gmail.com)

As Japan moves forward into the 21st century, its workers will need to be “global ready.” What is “global ready?” A minimalist definition of being global ready might include the following:

- Having foreign language skills.
- Being culturally aware (understanding the role of culture and how it can affect interactions between individuals and groups).
- Being aware of the global situation.

In my presentation, I proposed how a course might be designed to meet the above goals.

## Sample Syllabus

### **Aims:**

By the end of the course students would:

- 1) Become more aware of the similarities and differences between other cultures and their own, and how these differences affect the thinking of one culture’s people and their relations with people of other cultures.
- 2) Examine international issues affecting the world today and how these problems might be solved.
- 3) Improve creative writing skills through preparation for presentations.
- 4) Improve presentation skills by giving presentations.
- 5) Improve English skills by utilizing English as a medium for discourse throughout the course.

Table 1 shows a possible syllabus to achieve the course aims. The syllabus could be modified, possibly omitting some topics due to time constraints.

*Table 1*

Week	Class Content (90-min Lessons)
1	Greetings; Explanation of syllabus Class-building/Get to know you activity Introduction to presentation
2	What is culture? The cultural iceberg; The culture tree
3	Personal space and body language
4	Culture shock; cultural misunderstandings
5	Appearance and stereotypes Nationality vs. ethnicity
6	What makes a person Japanese?
7	Population growth and decline
8	Migration and immigration
9	Mid-term exam
10	Climate Change
11	Climate Change continued / Formation of groups for final presentation
12	Challenges for Japan in the 21st Century
13	Challenges for the World in the 21st Century
14	Group presentations
15	Group presentations/review
16	Group presentations or Final exam

In Week 1, class building is emphasized, with an introduction to presentation skills. In Week 2, the concept of culture is introduced through culture models like the “cultural iceberg” and the “culture tree” with students learning about “surface culture” and “deep culture.”

Week 3 introduces personal space and body language with the aim of making students aware of different cultural perspectives regarding personal space and body language. Foreigners are not a homogeneous group, but are diverse. A member of one cultural group may make a member of another uncomfortable through violating their personal space or making a gesture that has a different meaning in the other’s cultural group. Both personal space and body language are used to introduce the concepts of culture shock and cultural misunderstandings which are the topics for Week 4.

Week 5 deals with stereotypes about ethnicity and nationality, and looks at multicultural societies. Week 6 asks the students the questions:

“What is it that makes a Japanese person Japanese?”

“Is the word コーラ (kohra) a Japanese word? What about エスカレーター (escalator)? Where do these words come from?”

“What about 南 (minami)? Is this Japanese? What country does this come from?”

“Is it possible for something to be both foreign and Japanese?”

“Could a foreigner become Japanese?”

Students are introduced to the concept that many “Japanese” things have their origins in other countries and that it is possible to be both foreign and Japanese at the same time.

Weeks 7 and 8 look at population decline in Japan and other industrialized countries, population growth in developing countries, the problems that arise from both of these trends and how they might be mitigated by migration and/or immigration.

After the mid-term in Week 9, Week 10 introduces climate change. Students work in groups and discuss what they know about climate change and its consequences and share their insights with the class. Groups are then asked about the sources of greenhouse gases and what percentage they think each source is responsible for. For homework groups research ideas for climate change mitigation for the following class.

In Week 11, groups present their ideas for climate change mitigation and are introduced to something they may not have thought about – the political dimensions of climate change. Groups are asked about the political and economic impacts of moving away from fossil fuels and the effects on stability in countries dependent on revenue from fossil fuels. Questions for the students are:

“Will countries collapse? What will be the effect of tens of millions of migrants attempting to gain access to developed countries? Is there something that can be done to mitigate the economic impact on such countries?”

“What will happen to oil companies? What will they do? What of their extreme political influence? Is there some way to mitigate things for them, so they will drop their opposition to reform?”

Weeks 12 and 13 act as a review to sum up the challenges faced by Japan and the world. Weeks 14 and 15 are dedicated to final group presentations. Week 16 can be used either for more presentations or a final exam.

## Conclusion

Given that curricula are crowded, a course such as this could be used to integrate content and language into learning. It would allow students to increase their cultural sensitivity and become more aware of current issues that affect them and the world they live in. It also would give them the opportunity to improve their writing and presentation skills, while practicing input and output in the target language.