

A Writing Center at Kwansai Gakuin University:

A Proposal

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This document proposes a writing center for a Japanese university, Kwansai Gakuin University (KGU). The literature review shows various uses to which writing centers in other Japanese universities are being put to use. Also, there is a short discussion of writing center philosophy. The bulk of the article describes the author's idealized version of a writing center for Kwansai Gakuin, showing limitations and considerations for assets in place at the university.

Writing centers have been in academic discussion and context since 1984. Writing centers started out as a place for students to improve their writing, but have become mired in discussion and cross-purposes since their inception. Students would like a place where they drop off their papers to be “fixed,” with no concept of learning how to become better writers. Teachers would like a place where students, particularly those who have trouble expressing themselves in writing, can go to have written assignments “fixed,” but the responsibility of teaching students how to write remains with the teacher. Writing center directors and tutors would like a place where a writer's work can be discussed *with* the writer, and that the writer has the opportunity to become better able to express his/her thoughts. These philosophies appear doomed to be in conflict.

LITERATURE REVIEW

LaClare and Franz (2013) note in their planning document from Sojo University in Kumamoto that the purposes of their writing center included:

- 1 Provide English writing support for students
- 2 Support the publication of faculty research in English

- 3 Provide an opportunity to build closer ties between the [Writing Center] and the rest of the university
- 4 Provide an avenue of research for the [Writing Center] faculty
- 5 Be a unique service available at few Japanese universities, one which increases the inherent and perceived value of the English language program (p. 7).

LaClare and Franz continue to describe how the writing center at their institution (Sojo University) developed. Problems included lack of awareness of the service, and lack of understanding of what the service included. The writing center tutors at Sojo found themselves mostly dealing with editing scholarly research papers being prepared for publication. LaClare and Franz state that most Japanese students have not been taught to express their own voices in their native language, so their ability to express themselves coherently in a foreign language is much diminished. Furthermore, English-language education in Japan has historically focused on grammar correction. LaClare and Franz found that their clients were primarily concerned with the correct English form of any written work, not whether the ideas in the work were being conveyed in the most efficient or expressive way possible for that writer.

Moussu (2013) comes from the perspective of a writing center located in Canada, with a number of ESL clients referred to the center by Canadian faculty who wanted the ESL students' grammar corrected. According to Moussu, the professors viewed writing centers as "grammar repair shops" (p. 56). The problem lies in the differences of philosophy: "[Writing center] tutors, who usually work one-on-one with students, are often instructed to look at texts globally and to verify that students understand the broader components of their assignments *before* [emphasis mine] repairing grammatical errors" (p. 56). Moussu notes, as did LaClare and Franz, that the ESL writer-clients of her writing center were primarily concerned with the correcting of their grammar. Moussu quotes Gillespie and Lerner from their 2000 publication: "[writing center] tutors 'don't fix texts; we teach writers how to fix texts. We don't tell writers what to write; we ask questions about and react as readers to what writers have already written or are

thinking of writing” (2013, p. 59). Moussu provides suggestions for ESL clients to be aware of in using a writing center, including keeping a list of their own most common writing errors [e.g. grammar errors vs. organization errors] and being aware that writing centers will provide more feedback on content rather than form.

Tan (2011) compares and contrasts writing centers in Asia and Europe. Points made in her paper which are germane to this publication include:

- Hong Kong students “felt pressurized when they were asked to edit their own writing because they expected the consultants to proofread their work. In overcoming this problem, the [writing center] has to reiterate that the consultants do not function as editors but resource persons who help them edit their work and solve their own learning problems” (p. 406).
- A director of a writing center in Korea commented that “a non-directive peer model of conferencing was more difficult to implement in an Asian context” (p. 408).
- “Both the Hong Kong and Korean WCs reported the problem of students asking for proofreading help, which is in practice against the WC founding principle of improving the writer not the writing” (p. 411).
- Writing center directors in Korea and Japan feel that: “[a] collaborative, facilitative and non-directive tutoring strategy is not likely to work with their EFL clients who not only have to learn the art of writing but also English. Hence, they expect WC tutors to play the role of experts in telling them exactly what is wrong with their writing” (Tan, 2011, p. 410-11).

These writers provide useful background for the step being contemplated by Kwansai Gakuin beginning in 2015: establishing its own writing center. Writing centers can provide any university community help in establishing and fine-tuning critical thinking skills, improving writing skills in general, assisting writers throughout the community in preparing their documents for publication, and

aligning the university with its institutional goals.

For further guidance, this author visited and interviewed Dr. Georganne Nordstrom of the University of Hawaii Writing Center. Dr. Nordstrom has been involved with writing centers since the middle 1970s. The University of Hawaii has a student population of many languages; Dr. Nordstrom estimated that perhaps half of the clients of the writing center were non-native speakers of English. She was completely accepting of writing-center tutoring in the writer's native language, even though the writer was writing in English. Dr. Nordstrom agreed with the literature that writing centers do not merely edit or proofread, but help writers become better at expressing themselves. This author watched several tutoring sessions, and was able to understand much more deeply how a writing center session turned a writer's attention from product to process. (personal communication, 2014)

KWANSEI GAKUIN UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER PROPOSAL

I propose the establishment of a Writing Center for Kwansai Gakuin University. The most common mission for a writing center is to be a place where writers can get tutorial help with written assignments, theses, dissertations and other academic written work. What a writing center is NOT is a place for students to get assignments written for them. Such "help" does not promote a student's academic development (LaClare & Franz, 2013; Moussu, 2013; Pantelides & Bartesaghi, 2012; Tan, 2011). A writing center should not replace writing/composition classes. Classrooms should continue to be the places where assignments are made, peer editing and discussion takes place, and grades received:

- Writing centers would be staffed by tutors who work with individual clients or in a small group in a 15- or 30-minute session, focused on a specific point.
- Writing center faculty generally would focus on the individual student's development of cognitive ability, and how to express that cognition in writing.
- The tutors and faculty in the writing center would act as coaches

and collaborators *with* the student writer. The mission of a writing center is to *complement* classroom instruction, not supplement or replace classroom instruction.

What does a typical tutoring session entail? Typically, a writer and her tutor sit together for a talk. One of them reads the passage (from a paragraph to a page) that the writer wants help with. The tutor listens to the passage, and asks the writer questions about how she is expressing her thoughts. The tutor is not prescribing how to complete the assignment, but asking the writer to reflect on the logic, quality and specific phrases and words that she is using. Alternatively, if the writer is stuck at the beginning of the assignment, the writer and her tutor discuss the assignment and find a path for the student to get started on her writing.

Other writing centers at Japanese universities

Other writing centers exist in Japan. Johnston, Cornwell and Yoshida (2008) note the following writing centers in their article (a list of URLs is in Appendix C):

- The Writing Center at Waseda University near Tokyo was established in 2004. Waseda offers tutors and small group sessions in either English or Japanese. Students come to scheduled sessions or sign up on the spot for the session that is ongoing at that moment.
- The University of Tokyo in Tokyo offers the Komaba Writing Center for 1st and 2nd year students specializing in the arts or in science courses.
- The National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies in Tokyo has an Academic Writing Center which offers courses, workshops and individual consultation in either English or Japanese.
- Osaka Jogakuin College has had a Writing Center on campus since 2004. The center has limited hours, mostly from 16:00 to 19:00. Students can drop in for an individual 15-minute consultation. “The writing center is part of the Self-Access & Study Support Center (SASSC) which includes Japanese tutors, a Grammar Exam Workshop and a Phonetics Exam Workshop” (Johnston, Cornwell & Yoshida, 2008, p. 183).
- Nagoya University has an extensive tutoring system for a variety of

subjects. Writing tutors can be hired through this system, but no writing center seems to be specifically identified at Nagoya University.

- Sophia University (Jochi Daigaku) started their writing center in 2004 for the Faculty of Liberal Arts. Tutors are graduate students or postgraduate students currently enrolled at Sophia. This center offers both workshops and individual conferencing.

Not mentioned in Johnston, Cornwell and Yoshida (2008) was the following, discovered online by this author: The Writing Centers Association of Japan (WCAJ). The URL is also in Appendix C.

PHILOSOPHY OF A KGU WRITING CENTER

In planning a writing center, KGU administrators need to ask themselves what basic philosophy will drive the writing center, *remedial* or *developmental*. Paoli (2006) describes a remedial center as assuming that the client is deficient in some area, such as grammar. After an initial diagnostic test to determine what the focus should be, the student does drills and exercises on that focus, and learns through sheer repetition. Staff and faculty involved in the instruction at this type of writing center are proficient at providing grammar explanations and correct answers to specific questions. Experimentation and free-thinking is discouraged in favor of one single correct answer. A developmental center, according to Paoli, combines writing skills with critical thinking, acquiring skills of expression by means of using the student's creativity, imagination and other cognitive processes. "Tutors will engage the student writers as thinkers, ask questions and foster thought, and address grammar and mechanics when they impede or subvert meaning" (2006, p. 166). Experimentation and free thinking is encouraged in a developmental writing center. A sample writing center mission statement and statement of values is in appendix B.

The recommendation of this author is for a remedial center at first, since other components (staff, perceived student needs, and Japanese educational background among others) exist in the KGU context. However, a developmental center appears to be more in line with KGU's evolving institutional philosophy of

creating global leaders, as well as the philosophy of writing centers in the West.

Other components for a KGU writing center

Other components for a writing center, including funding, staffing, training, location and physical resources, are discussed at International Writing Centers, a website hosting a collection of links and useful information for writing centers and writing center directors. Basic questions are shown in Appendix A. The International Writing Centers Association [IWCA] website is a useful resource for anyone starting a writing center. The final section of this essay gives this writer's idealized version of a writing center at KGU.

IDEALIZED KGU WRITING CENTER

Location

Where will the writing center "live"? The developmental writing center could be housed in or near the Intensive English Program (IEP) offices for the convenience of the faculty-tutors in the first few semesters. Then the center should move to the library or another central location when a writing center director is hired and student tutors are trained and in place.

Staffing

Who will be the staff of the writing center? Faculty-tutors would initially staff the writing center, with student-tutors being gradually trained by the IEP faculty member-coordinator. Faculty-tutors from IE could use their Office Hour time in the writing center. Other sources of faculty-tutors could be from the International Studies division or any other area of the university. Because student clients of the writing center could come from any school of KGU, all divisions of KGU benefit from this service; hence, the request for staffing could be filled by any faculty member at KGU. Students would make 30-minute appointments for the writing center online, or could drop in for 15-minute sessions. At the end of each session, the student client fills out a five-question evaluation form. These evaluation forms are the basis for tutor training and for faculty-tutor professional development.

In most U.S.-based writing centers, tutors are not professionals with pension

plans and mortgages, but other students. The philosophy for this hiring choice is that student tutors will understand the writing center's primary clients—other students—better (Chang, 2013). Faculty are more distanced from student concerns simply because of age and life experience. In this idealized KGU writing center, these student tutors would be paid a minimum wage [suggested wage is the hourly rate of a cram school (*juku*) teacher]. One possible source of paid student tutors would be the international exchange students at KGU¹. Such students could apply for tutoring jobs as they would for any other jobs, and would be selected based on an interview and a required writing sample.

In the interview with Dr. Nordstrom of the University of Hawaii writing center, six of her 20 tutors were graduate teaching assistants from the Department of English. Their teaching assignment was tutoring in the writing center; they taught 8.5 hours per week. The balance of her tutors were undergraduates who had taken her Comp 405 course, which was a training course for writing center tutors. The undergraduates taught 3.5 hours per week at slightly above minimum wage. All tutors attended a mandatory weekly meeting in the writing center, in which they discussed problems and concerns. Dr. Nordstrom declared definitively that a writing center is only as good as its team of tutors. The weekly meetings were a core component of the team's support for each other and for the center. (personal communication, 2014)

Alternatively, online services could be purchased. Smarthinking is one company, and NetTutor (<http://nettutor.com/>) is another. Both of these are East-Coast US-based. However, with the time difference between Japan and the East Coast of the US, it seems less than likely that such an online service would be available when clients need help. There are several other online, Asia-based tutoring options, though issues of payment, security and quality control need to be taken into account.

¹ If visa regulations permit, being a writing center tutor would allow those students to earn a little money while at KGU. In addition, the international student tutors would get to meet other KGU students, and vice versa. There may be, in fact, international exchange students at KGU who are writing center tutors in their home country.

Hours

When would the writing center be open? Hours for the writing center, once full staffing is achieved, would perhaps be: Monday through Friday from 5pm to 9pm, and Saturday & Sunday afternoons from 2pm to 7pm. This would give the center 30 hours of operations per week. The later hours would be staffed primarily by student tutors; therefore, the need for student tutors would be high. Dr. Nordstrom's writing center at the University of Hawaii had regular business hours of 9am to 5pm, Monday through Friday. However, the University of Hawaii students mostly live near campus and can easily meet a morning appointment. KGU students do not have such an advantage; many students live over an hour away by train. Therefore, in the opinion of this author, having afternoon-evening and weekend hours is better suited to a KGU student schedule.

Language

What would be the language used in the writing center? This would be an issue to be discussed. If a basic notion of the writing center is to improve writing skills in English, then the natural language of the writing center would be English. However, if a basic notion of the writing center is to improve overall writing skills, then certainly Japanese and possibly English could be used. As noted earlier, Dr. Nordstrom at the University of Hawaii approved bilingual tutoring.

Training for staff

Who would train the staff of the writing center? *If* the writing center was staffed initially by native-speaking English faculty in the employ of KGU, and *if* the writing center followed the initial remedial philosophy recommended, the training needed for the faculty staffing the writing center would need to include training in the style which is used by writing centers around the world (Pantelides & Bartesaghi, 2012). Student writers learn little from having a native speaker simply write the correct expression on the paper. Writing center tutors are not directive or prescriptive in telling the writer how to fix her paper, but ask questions of the writer. This style is perhaps more time-consuming, but is more likely to result in learning by the student writer. If the writer needs to deduce, and articulate, what errors have been made, learning is more likely to take place. By explaining herself, the

student writer is far more likely to learn, and remember what the error was. The IEP coordinator or writing center director would hire and train the tutors. He or she would also observe occasional tutorial sessions and give feedback to the tutor after the session is over and the client left the writing center.

There would also be the possibility of a paper having so many problems that the errors cannot all be identified and corrected in one 30-minute session. Therefore, student writers could be advised to have only three sentences, or perhaps 30 words, identified that they, the student writers, are least confident about.² Writing center staff should be regarded as tutors, not editors.

After peer tutors (native-speaking or near-native-speaking students, undergraduates or graduate students) had been approved, training for those peer tutors would be done by the writing center director.

Evaluation of staff

How would the staff of the writing center be evaluated? The writing center director not only would train, but also observe and evaluate tutors as they interacted with the clients of the writing center. Clients would have a short evaluation questionnaire that they would be requested to fill out after their session. Staff evaluation would be done based on client evaluation and the director's observations. The frequency of staff evaluation in the U.S. is generally at the end of the school term, or the end of the tutor's contract. The frequency of evaluation at KGU would likely depend on how experienced the tutor is, and other criteria to be determined by the writing center director and KGU institutional preferences.

Funding

How would the writing center be funded? Writing centers are, in principle, service areas for the entire university community. There should be no extra charge for students to use the services of the writing center, in the same way that a library is a service center for the entire university community.

An ideal budget for the first year might include these considerations:

² To re-emphasize, the function of the writing center would *not* be to proofread entire papers. Some U.S. writing center directors keep a list on which they keep contact information of native speakers who provide freelance proofreading and editing services, and provide this list to student writer on request

TABLE 1
Suggested budget for the 1st Year of operation

<u>Resource</u>	<u>Money</u>	<u>Notes</u>
<u>Director</u> (<i>teaching limited to two or three koma per week</i>) One director	Annual salary ¥6,500,000	Benefits could include some research budget, access to int'l presenter's budget, personal housing & transportation allowance
<u>Tutors</u> (<i>students</i>) Likely three or more persons	Wages of ¥1,000/hour x 30 hours per week of tutoring = ¥30,000 per week; 14 weeks per semester x 2 semesters = 28 weeks x ¥30k/week = ¥840,000/year	Number of tutors could be determined in the future. Certainly more than one tutor is needed for 30 hours of tutoring per week. The director would tutor also.
<u>Furnishings</u>	Need at least one computer, a printer, desks or tables, chairs, a room available on evenings and weekends, lights, possibly a refrigerator and a microwave oven . Cost of these will vary.	Donation from this author: a hot-pot for heating water, a gas heater, kitchen equipment, manuals and style guides. <i>Possible purchase:</i> commercial online booking system.

Where these funds would come from is a matter of speculation at this writing (Feb 2014).

Materials

What materials would be used in the writing center? The author intends to contribute her own materials which she has developed for Advanced Writing and MDS C (Academic Writing and Presentation) courses. These have been left in boxes on top of the lockers in the SIL rooms. Materials include grammar drills and practices, creative writing prompts, timed-writing prompts and academic/research-paper writing teaching materials. Furthermore, some style guides and writer's manuals, which have been used with native-speaker classes in the US, have been purchased with funds from the 2013 budget, and used in this author's classes in fall 2013. These manuals and style guides have been added to the library for the new writing center. The writing center director could consult [<http://writingcenters.org/resources/starting-a-writing-center>] for additional library suggestions.

Constituencies and service

Who would use the writing center? It is this author's hope that the writing center will be used by everyone in the university community, from students to staff and faculty. Having a service point like a writing center, which could be used by everyone in the university, would secure the writing center's place in the whole community. There may be misunderstandings as to the center's function and purpose, as discussed in the Literature Review and Philosophy sections above. These would need to be worked out as they arise. Having an active writing center director who will go to the faculty and staff (e.g. attend their departmental monthly meetings) to help them understand the intent and function of the center would be particularly useful.

The service provided for students, staff and faculty could be the same, or could be altered according to the needs of that particular population. As LaClare and Franz (2013) discovered, their faculty and graduate-student constituency had different needs than the undergraduate constituency. Therefore the response of the writing center altered according to those varying needs. Without additional data, the community response to the KGU writing center service is difficult to predict.

Policies

What would be the policies of the writing center? Would the center focus on the process of writing, as practiced in US-based centers? Or will the center focus on editing and proofreading (the product of writing), which is more responsive to the Japanese educational system and its focus on grammar-translation and “correct” answers? These are questions that the writing center director and Japanese administrators need to discuss. It is this author’s expectation that the center will start out as the latter (editing and proofreading) and progress to the process of writing as the general writing ability and needs of the Kwansai Gakuin community evolve.

Appointments vs. drop-ins are another policy point to consider. Most U.S. writing centers use a commercial online appointment booking system such as “WOnline”. The U.S. centers’ clients make appointments online, then come to the writing center with their questions and concerns. U.S. writing centers whose clients fail to keep appointments have a “three-strikes” policy; then the client is barred from using center resources for the rest of the term. Japanese writing centers most often require students to make appointments in person at the writing center itself, without online convenience. For all writing center appointments, if a client makes an appointment, that appointment is honored over someone who has no appointment. Japanese university writing centers have a general policy that if the client does not appear for an appointment, that client would be placed on a warning list. Clients who make appointments but are no-shows three times in a semester are barred from using the writing center for the rest of that semester.

Writing center director

Who would direct the center? Ideally, someone who has had some experience with starting or running writing centers would be hired as a director. However, most of those faculty come from English-speaking countries, and/or come from Composition/Rhetoric backgrounds. They are well-versed in composition pedagogy, but not necessarily in English as a second/foreign language theory or practice. They are unlikely to have had experience teaching in a Japanese university. Therefore, hiring experienced writing center directors from the US,

Canada, or Europe might not work, given the circumstances of starting a writing center in an ESL environment. Conversely, experienced ESL teachers of academic writing already working in Japan would be easy to find and hire, but those faculty may not be familiar with writing centers. Perhaps a pairing of local ESL expert and temporary imported writing center director might work to get the center started.

One possible source of funding for temporary personnel is the US Department of State, through Fulbright Grants. Information on Fulbright Grants is available at [<http://www.cies.org>]. These grants take at least two years to process, and personnel from the US would come for only a limited period of time, such as a semester or, at most, an academic year. In addition, there may be other grants available, such as the Australian Endeavour awards [<http://www.innovation.gov.au/InternationalEducation/Endeavour/Pages/Endeavour.aspx>], or the British Council [<http://www.britishcouncil.org/>].

Record-keeping

What records would need to be kept? Libraries keep a record of the number of people who come in and out the doors, based on the fact that not all library users want to borrow a book. Libraries also keep track of numbers of books being borrowed and returned daily, but NOT the names of borrowers or what books they borrowed. Keeping names and materials-used information is considered to be a violation of privacy. Similarly, writing centers in the US keep track of appointment vs. walk-in, gender, major, number of clients served per hour or per day, the topic or focus of that client's session (e.g. writing process, organization, proofreading), when the assignment is due, and if the student was sent by an instructor or not. WOnline, the subscription-based, online appointment-making database used by many U.S.-based writing centers, tracks such demographics and creates reports on demand. Writing centers in the U.S. generally do not track the names of clients (unless they are no-shows for appointments), nor are the topics of the papers tracked. What records should be kept at a writing center at KGU needs to be discussed, with consideration for privacy versus consideration for documenting usage.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the possibilities and problems of creating a writing center at Kwansei Gakuin University. Is it possible to have a writing center at Kwansei Gakuin University? Absolutely. Is it desirable to have a writing center at Kwansei Gakuin University? That depends on the will of the Japanese administration. Personnel, funding and location are key factors which must be discussed and decided upon before the center can come into being.

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APPENDIX A: Questions for Starting a Writing Center

(from <http://writingcenters.org/resources/starting-a-writing-cente/#BasicSteps>):

Develop answers to the following questions:

1. What will be the mission and philosophy of the center?
 2. Where will the center be located?
 3. Who will staff it?
 4. How will they be paid for their time?
 5. How will they be trained? By whom?
 6. How will the staff be evaluated? By whom?
 7. Where will funding for the center come from? Institutional budget lines? Grants? Combination?
 8. Where will materials for the center come from? What kinds of materials are needed?
 9. Who will be the constituencies of the center?
 10. How will they be served?
 11. What will the policies of the center be?
 12. Who will direct the center? To whom will that person report? What will the compensation be?
 13. How will records be kept? What information will need to be gathered? For whom? For what purposes? How often? How will it be distributed?
- Write a goals and purposes statement for the center to clarify how your center will fit into your school's structures and mission.
 - List the goals for a period of several years so you are sure of what you will aim for each year of operation.

APPENDIX B: Sample Mission Statement and Values Statement

[<http://www20.csueastbay.edu/library/scaa/>]

SCAA Mission Statement

The mission of the Student Center for Academic Achievement (the SCAA) is to help California State University at East Bay (CSUEB) students:

- *develop and improve their skills and abilities in order to meet the demands of college level coursework;
- *achieve and maintain academic excellence;
- * accomplish their academic and career goals and graduate as self-directed lifelong learners.

To accomplish our mission, the SCAA will:

- *Provide content and skills tutoring, workshops and other programs that foster writing and quantitative reasoning skills, and encourage a disposition towards lifelong learning.
- * Provide students high quality tutoring, which includes reviews of concepts, discussions of ideas, and strategies for improving math, statistics, and writing skills.
- * Provide faculty with a resource for students who need additional help with writing or math, as well as a resource for writing and thinking across the curriculum projects.
- * Provide the university with an intellectual hub offering innovative programming that reflects our values.

SCAA Values

- **Excellence*: help students become competent in writing and math with the goal of developing independence and confidence.
- **Fairness*: offer services to all CSUEB students, including working adults, at-risk, and disabled populations.
- **Collaboration*: share resources and expertise with university programs, groups, and departments.
- **Continuous Improvement*: improve quality of staff and services through professional development, assessment, evaluation, and realignment of services to meet university needs

APPENDIX C: URLs of Writing Centers in Japan

- Nagoya University's tutor manual,
http://en.nagoya-u.ac.jp/upload_images/tutor_manual.pdf.
- National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies in Tokyo's Academic Writing Center, <http://www.grips.ac.jp/en/pstudents/resources/writing/awc1/>
- Osaka Jogakuin College's Writing Center,
<http://www.wilmina.ac.jp/ojc/4yrs/sassc>
- Sophia University (Jochi Daigaku)'s writing center,
<http://www.sophiawritingcenter.com/>
- The University of Tokyo's Komaba Writing Center,
<http://ale.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/joomla/index.php/kws-public>
- The Writing Center at Waseda University near Tokyo,
<http://www.cie-waseda.jp/awp/en/wc/>
- Writing Center Japan, <http://writingcenterjapan.org/aboutwcj>
- The Writing Centers Association of Japan (WCAJ)
<https://sites.google.com/site/wcajapan/>