Academic Communication in Interdisciplinary Educational Settings: Teaching Academic Skills in a CLIL Approach

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Abstract

This paper describes the implementation of *Academic Communication* in the first year of the new 2024 English electives curriculum at Rikkyo University. *Academic Communication* is part of the *Global Communication* courses offered as the English language component of University-wide Liberal Arts Courses. By adopting the Content and Language Integrated Language (CLIL) approach, the course integrates content and language instruction, focusing on the development of academic skills in both oral and written communication. Thus, students are expected to simultaneously acquire procedural knowledge (i.e., content) and language through various forms of presentations, while drawing on factual and conceptual knowledge (i.e., content) from their own fields of study. Open to undergraduate students from all colleges, the course accommodates a diverse range of academic backgrounds. Students are encouraged to explore their specialised disciplines and collaborate on interdisciplinary academic research to propose comprehensive solutions to global issues in academic settings such as university seminars and conferences. This paper highlights examples of students' interdisciplinary collaborative work of the course's outcome, such as group posters, along with planning and reflective activities.

Keywords: *Academic skills, CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), Liberal Arts, Interdisciplinary educational settings*

Situating *Academic Communication* in the Content and Language Integrated Language (CLIL) Curriculum

This paper first describes where *Academic Communication* is theoretically and methodologically situated in our Content and Language Integrated Language (CLIL) curriculum at Rikkyo University (e.g., Mok, 2021; Peragine & Mattson, 2023; Ueno, 2024).

In response to "a need for the English language curriculum to be more closely integrated with education across the university" (Yamamoto & Nitta, 2021, p. 126), the three areas of

Global Communication, *Global Studies* and *Global Career* were developed as part of the curriculum reform that started in the academic year (AY) 2021. A total of 34 elective courses, including the *Overseas Cultural Studies Course*, of *Global Communication*, *Global Career*, and *Global Studies* were developed in the framework of CLIL, adopting an action-oriented approach where language learners or users are viewed as social agents, drawing on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Yamamoto & Nitta, 2021).

This reform of the university-wide curriculum for undergraduate elective English language courses was finally completed in AY 2024 with the addition of a newly developed course titled *Academic Communication* in the strand of *Global Communication*.

During the AY 2023, the three authors of this paper collaboratively developed this new course to fulfil the objective of *Global Communication* to "further develop the academic language skills acquired in their mandatory first year courses" (Yamamoto & Nitta, 2021, p. 128). Thus, *Academic Communication* was uniquely designed by setting two major pedagogical goals: (i) to provide opportunities for undergraduate students to experience conducting academic research, aiming to familiarise themselves with the expectations and standards of the academic fields and (ii) to facilitate the educational philosophy of Rikkyo University, Liberal Arts, by encouraging students' interdisciplinary learning through collaborative work (Rikkyo University, n.d.). Therefore, the course can be novel and distinctive among all elective courses since the contents (one of four components, or 4Cs, in the CLIL approach) (Coyle, 2007) are likely to be extensively determined by enrolled students' specialised majors and then to be potentially varied in every class, in contrast with more "language-led" courses (e.g., *Reading for Pleasure* in *Global Communication*) and "content-led" ones (e.g., *CLIL Seminars: Tourism* in *Global Studies*) (Yamamoto & Nitta, 2021, p. 130).

The following sections outline the course overview and illustrate examples of interdisciplinary collaborative activities and products in a class conducted by the first author in the fall semester of the AY 2024. The paper concludes with suggestions for future course development.

The Overview of *Academic Communication*

In tertiary education in Japan, English language courses aiming to improve the academic skills of university students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels are commonly tailored to specific academic disciplines. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) are predominant terms to describe the approaches to language teaching targeting the academic or occupational needs of learners commonly in discipline-specific educational settings (e.g., Anthony, 2018). Our newly designed course, *Academic Communication* is unique as it is conducted in interdisciplinary educational settings as written below.

We designed this course to improve academic and communication skills through

interdisciplinary collaboration between enrolled students from diverse backgrounds majoring in different disciplines. Although in the university-wide mandatory English courses at Rikkyo all first-year students are allocated to classes according to the colleges they belong to (i.e., their majors or disciplines), *Academic Communication* is one of the elective courses, in which undergraduate students from thirteen different degree programmes as well as international visiting students for selected courses can optionally enrol. In *Academic Communication*, students learn content in the form of factual, conceptual and procedural knowledge, understood as knowledge dimensions in the Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Where factual and conceptual knowledge are largely domain specific, procedural knowledge is based on knowing how to perform a specific skill or task. So, students learn the knowledge of how to perform a presentation or discussion. Students then learn the skill of presentation or discussion through practice with feedback. In *Academic Communication*, students draw from their respective specific fields of study, their factual and conceptual knowledge of their subjects, to communicate and contribute to class projects. They learn procedural knowledge on how to complete their class projects such as poster presentations, academic discussions, oral presentations and essay writing. For example, students learn the structure of a poster, how to sequence discussion and how to make the poster. As a result, students learn procedural knowledge (content) while drawing factual and conceptual knowledge (content) from their own fields of studies.

This course is open to students with English level at least the CEFR B1 level proficiency. As students estimate their own English proficiency before taking this course, we expect students to be from a broad range of levels. This is because some students tend to be close to the minimum B1 suggested level, while others may be from a higher level (i.e., B2 or C1). The course targets those in the second to the fourth years and the first to the fourth years, in the spring and fall semesters, respectively. The maximum possible number of enrolments is twenty-five students.

Regardless of anticipating having potential students with specialised knowledge from different majors and therefore less shared knowledge, we set the main objective of *Academic Communication* as to enable students to communicate effectively in academic settings such as congresses, conferences, and symposium-style discussions and debates. Therefore, the enrolled students are expected to acquire communication skills necessary for both semi-formal and formal academic presentations, discussions, and writing including evidence-based, appropriate academic communication style, citations, and referencing.

In order to provide opportunities for the students to conduct interdisciplinary collaborative work, groups containing three or four members with different academic majors are formed, and each of them are asked to address current global and/or local issues and suggest solutions through two types of presentations (i.e., an interactive poster presentation and a one-way oral presentation followed by a Q&A session). Suggested topics of issues are given by the instructor, referring to the university's undergraduate majors, such as "business and

management," "environment and tourism," "community and social," "health and well-being," "political and legal," "science and technology," "religion and philosophy," and "communication and culture." In addition, as a final individual product, students are required to complete a short academic paper based on the topic of the group oral presentation in approximately 2,000 words.

Classroom activities implemented in the course are summarised below:

(i)   Discussing and explaining content knowledge relevant to understanding and solving current global/local issues

(ii)   Analysing global/local issues and synthesising ideas through discussions to present their solutions

(iii)   Presenting their views from multiple perspectives and critiquing others in an academic environment both orally and in writing

Table 1 presents the basic outline of the course schedule in the university's open syllabi. As aforementioned, three major projects assigned in this course are a group poster presentation, a group oral presentation, and an individual final research paper based on the research conducted for the oral presentation.

Table 1

The Outline of Course Schedule

Lesson	Contents
1	• Orientation of the course • Introduction to current global issues • Getting ready for the group poster presentation: Finding a global issue/problem
2	• Getting ready for the group poster presentation: Researching
3	• Getting ready for the group poster presentation: Preparing for the presentation
4	• Group poster presentation: Presentation, Question handling, and Feedback
5	• Getting ready for the group oral presentation: Finding a global issue/problem • Academic language: How to conduct academic research
6	• Getting ready for the group oral presentation: Researching • Academic language: Finding and interpreting the evidence-based resources
7	• Getting ready for the group oral presentation: Researching and summarizing • Academic language: Differences between casual and academic presentations
8	• Getting ready for the group oral presentation: Preparing for the presentation • Academic language: Academically appropriate and persuasive use of vocabulary and signposting
9	• Group oral presentation: Presentation, Question handling, and Feedback
10	• Group oral presentation: Presentation, Question handling, and Feedback
11	• Academic writing for the individual research paper: Basics for academic writing, Differences in language styles between academic speaking and writing • Making follow-up research

12	• Academic writing for the individual research paper: Structure and moves in academic writing • Writing the first draft of the formal academic paper
13	• Academic writing for the individual research paper: Peer-review on the first draft
14	• Academic writing for the individual research paper: Completing a final draft

Group Poster Presentation

By utilizing their acquired language skills, the students were instructed to conduct research and integrate their solutions to tackle their chosen issue in consultation with the instructor into a poster, while the purpose and format of the poster presentation in academic settings were explicitly taught. Figures 1 and 2 show the posters created by two groups of students who agreed to share their work in this paper through their consent forms. The students' ID numbers and names were deleted or covered with black masking. The original size of the poster was A1. In Lesson 4, a poster presentation week, all five groups were split into two presentation sessions, each of which lasted about 40–50 minutes. Each group spent about 15 minutes explaining the overview of the research in one round. Some of the audience did not manage to listen to all the poster presentations within a given time. So, the first 30 minutes of Lesson 5 after two sessions in Lesson 4, every student freely visited the posters, provided feedback to all groups, and self-evaluated and made reflections on their presentations using Google Forms. Individual students evaluated and reflected on aspects such as the poster's visuals, content, presentation performance, preparation, contributions to teamwork, and so forth. The instructor's and students' evaluations, along with written feedback, were provided to the presenters.

Figure 1

Poster Sample 1: 'Overtourism Measures Around the World'

Overtourism Measures Around the World

INTRODUCTION

These days, it has been discussed all over the world that the development of the tourism industry brings about the great benefit for a country's economy but has the several drawbacks at the same time.

In fact, although various countries which put effort into tourism have been aimed at achieving "Sustainable tourism" -tourism with considering all aspects including environmental responsibilities-, they are suffered from serious matters until now.

Therefore, we are going to focus on the difficulties which the specific two tourism-oriented countries have as well as analyzing the causes and strategies. Moreover, we would like to share some resolutions to settle or improve these situations.

BACKGROUND OF THE ISSUE

1. Cheap Travel and Transportation

• The rise of low-cost airlines and affordable travel options has made it easier for people to visit popular tourist destinations. As a result, large numbers of tourists often gather in the same places at the same time.

2. Social Media and Online Promotion

• Social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube promote famous places, encouraging more people to visit the same spots. Viral posts and videos can quickly attract large crowds to popular locations, creating congestion.

3. Seasonal Tourism and Concentration in Popular Areas

• Many tourists visit the same destinations during peak seasons, such as summer vacations or holidays. This leads to overcrowding in certain areas, especially around famous landmarks or popular cities.

What's the problem with "Over tourism"?

When over tourism occurs, it affects many aspects.
(1) Environment
Increased tourism causes environmental pollution, waste problems, destruction of nature, and impact on ecosystems.
(2) Society
An increase in tourists may worsen the living environment for residents, including traffic congestion, noise, invasion of privacy, and an increase in crime.
(3) Cultural
Increased tourism may cause commercialization for tourists, cultural friction, etc.
(4) Economy
Over tourism can create an economic structure dependent on tourists and lead to instability in the local economy. In addition, higher prices for tourists may put pressure on the livelihood of residents.

EXAMPLE

Spain is a world leader in the tourism sector, and constitutes one of the main source of their economy and brings about some great benefits thanks to its success such as creating jobs or developing the infrastructure. However, the public confronting with the underlying shortcomings of the tourism industry are currently experiencing various anxieties.

For example, the residents in Barcelona have been concerned by the issue of the rent increase. This occurred because the rapid increase in short-term rentals has driven up rents. In July 6th 2024, thousands of protesters from over 150 organizations marched in protest against this matter. Though it has been announced that around 10,000 shot-term rentals will have the licenses revoked by November 2028 in order to address over tourism, the situation remains largely unchanged.

#MALLORCA NO ES VEN

EXAMPLE

Number of tourists in Kyoto

The problems caused by overtourism in Japan are also serious.
Kyoto is a major tourist destination in Japan and is visited by 50 million people annually. However, the overconcentration of tourists has resulted in a number of challenges, including an increase in the number of bus users and the inability of residents to use the buses.
In addition to the problem of bus use, there are also issues such as littering and noise.
The cooperation of local residents is essential to protect tourism resources.
How can tourism and residence be compatible?

Solution①

Implementing tourist taxes

impact of the policy

① refrain from long term staying of tourist

By introducing a tourist tax, travel costs will increase, making it harder for people to stay for extended periods. As a result, the flow of tourists will improve.

② use taxes to protect environment

In places like Barcelona and the Balearic Islands (Mallorca), tourists already pay a small tax when they visit. This tax could be increased and the money used to help maintain the city, fix roads, and protect the environment.

SOLUTION②

Prompt non-tourist destination

Impacts of the policy

① reduction of pressure on popular sites

With fewer tourists flooding the area, local residents experience less strain on public services, transportation, and infrastructure. This creates a more balanced coexistence between tourism and daily life, improving the overall quality of life for locals.

② increasing number of tourists in no-tourist areas

Increased tourism in non-tourist areas brings new revenue to local businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, and shops, leading to economic growth. It also creates new jobs for local residents, boosting the local economy and improving living standards.

Solution③

Building a Sustainable Tourism City

Overtourism Measures in Kyoto City

① The Three Decentralizations

とっておきの京都

Kyoto City is working on decentralization of time, place and season to reduce congestion.
In fact, the Kyoto City Tourism Association's website introduces a variety of tourism promoting decentralization. The dispersion of locations is referred to as the "Totteoki no Kyoto Project," which introduces spots other than existing tourist attractions.

② The Three Decentralizations

Recognizing the challenges posed by overtourism, Kyoto City aims to create a virtuous cycle for the future development of Kyoto by aiming for higher quality tourism for all residents, visitors, and tourism businesses under the motto "Good to Live, Good to Visit, Good to Work".To achieve this, we are using AI and regional collaboration
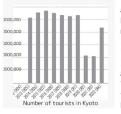
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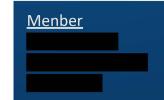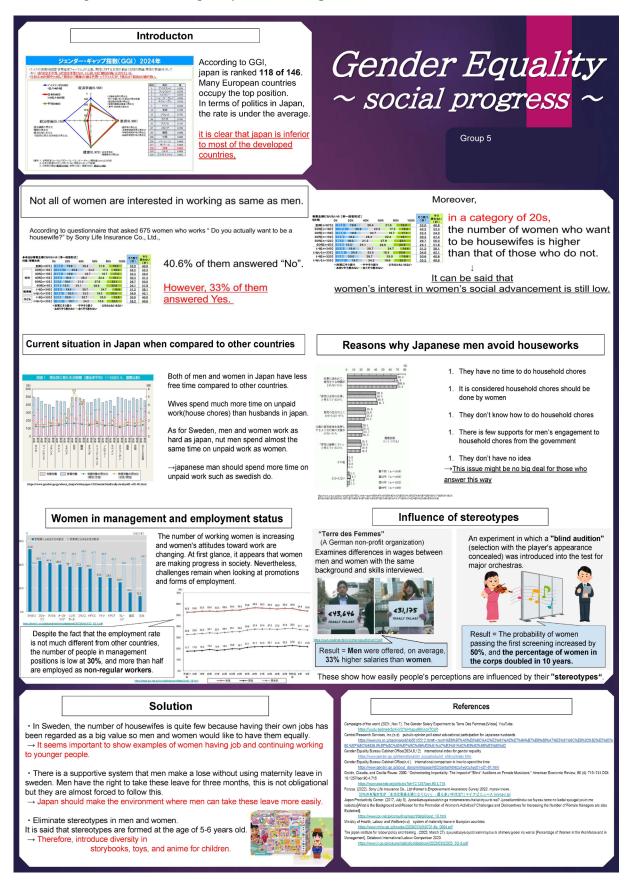
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Figure 2

Poster Sample 2: 'Gender Equality: Social Progress'

Towards Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Bridging a Poster Presentation to an Oral Presentation Planning and Reflections

After the group poster presentation, students were allocated into new groups for the next project, a group oral presentation. Four lessons (from Lesson 5 to Lesson 8) were dedicated to teaching the basics of academic presentations. These lessons covered topics such as the structure of academic research, represented by the standard flow of "IMRaD (Introduction, Method, Result, and Discussion)" (ALESS Program, The University of Tokyo, Komaba, 2012; Nakatani, 2016). Students also learned how to find and interpret evidence-based resources, distinguish between casual and academic presentations, and use academically appropriate and persuasive use of vocabulary and signposting. The content was based on online academic research guides for presentations and written assignments provided by various higher education institutions overseas. These include universities in the UK (e.g., the University of Manchester, Canterbury Christ Church University, and the University of Reading), Ireland (e.g., Dundalk Institute of Technology), the USA (e.g., the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse), and Asia (e.g., the Hong Kong Polytechnic University).

As shown in the Appendix, between Lesson 5 and Lesson 6, students were assigned a worksheet as homework to reflect on their group poster presentations in relation to their own academic fields (i.e., Writing Assignment 1). This activity aimed to prepare them for the upcoming oral presentation project with new group members, enabling them to identify similarities and differences in their research interests and academic backgrounds. Students were not only asked to clarify their own department and college in English but also to search potential academic conferences in their discipline online (see Questions 1 and 2). Additionally, they were asked to describe their specialised field and research interests, as well as to identify potential issues in their discipline (see Questions 3, 4 and 5 as written below). Finally, they were given Question 6 to reflect on whether their academic knowledge of their own discipline was useful for their group poster presentation. Table 2 presents responses from two students from the groups whose posters are shown in Figures 1 and 2. Some of the information that could be identifiable is anonymised with pseudonyms. Apart from that, the responses are shown verbatim.

Question 3
Please describe your major (discipline) in more than 100 words. Please include the following information. You can add other more information.
i)   Your college and department
ii) Course subjects you are required/eligible to take and/or you have taken so far

Question 4
Please describe your research interest in more than 100 words. Please include the

following information. You can add other more information.

i) Seminars (ゼミ) you belong to/you are willing to join in your own college/department

ii) (Potential) topic/s for your graduation thesis or project

Question 5

Please write down any potential topics/issues/problems you can identify in your area/discipline in more than 50 words. Please clarify reasons or include background information.

Question 6 (Reflection on Group Poster Presentation)

Do you think your academic knowledge of your own major was useful for your group poster presentation? Yes/No? In what way? Please write down in more than 50 words.

Table 2

Responses in Writing Assignment 1

Question	Student 1 (A Group of Poster Sample 1)	Student 2 (A Group of Poster Sample 2)
3	My department is Sociology. Sociology is the study of the 'norm' of society. Therefore, the study of sociology covers all social phenomena and problems. Within sociology, I am particularly interested in environmental sociology, economic sociology, and sustainability. I have taken classes in various sociology departments. For example, I have taken courses in Sociological Principles, Social Research Methods, Sociology of Culture, Life and Culture, and Environment and Culture. The coverage of the sociology department is comprehensive, and students are free to take classes according to their interests. I think the most interesting aspect of sociology is that the more you learn, the more you can see various phenomena around you as an academic discipline.	I major in international business law at law. There are variety of law subjects so that we can freely choose the subjects that we are interested in. However, we are highly recommended to take course about constitutional law, civil law, criminal law because these are fundamental parts. Especially, constitutional law covers all the other rules. In my department, there are lots of classes focusing on international and commercial aspect. Compared to other college, we are required to gain the useful knowledge in globalization, that is why we need to learn rules in other countries and comparison between Japan and other countries play an important role.

Question	Student 1 (A Group of Poster Sample 1)	Student 2 (A Group of Poster Sample 2)
4	I am currently participating in a seminar focused on ecological sociology and economic sociology, under the guidance of Dr. X. We study the local community and environmental sustainability. Last summer, our seminar was in YY city, ZZ prefecture. Then, we researched the people who moved and live in the area. We interviewed some people including farmers, a teacher and an office worker and we are going to write treatises based on the content of that interview. Our primary objective is to elucidate the connections between social capital and the influx of new residents. The Region has some relationships between them. In particular, the Japanese local area has relationships, rules and traditions. They are barriers to new residents. However, some newcomers overcome those barriers and transform community relations. Movers who enter into that relationship will make some good effects on the area and expansion of area-capability. By examining the impact of in-migrants on these communities, we aim to contribute to ongoing discussions about revitalizing shrinking rural areas in Japan. There are just studies as of the third grade. In my graduation thesis, I'm going to plan more advanced studies on what relationship between social capital and economics.	I belong to the seminar of environmental politics. It might sound weird that what is the relation between law and environment, but this is quite interesting in terms of learning environmental issue from political point of view. In this seminar, we usually discuss handles toward environmental issues by Japanese politics critically. In fact, Japanese consciousness to the issue is quite lower than any other developed countries. One of the reasons is there is no custom in Japan to give a demo to politics and we are unlikely to be in crisis of environmental problems. We aren't eligible to write graduation thesis.
5	The key topics are social capital and area-capability. Now, everyone calls our society an individualized society. In a society where individuals are respected, the bonds between people become weaker. So, it's important for relationship between people. According to way of thinking social capital, let relationship be capital. By doing so, we can add new value to relationships between people. Area-capability is the potential ability of region. I'm thinking that the society where local communities are shrinking should need to expand area-capability.	I want to search for LGBTQ. It was said on poster presentation, Japan is rankled law on gender equality and same sex marriage is not allowed in Japan. In contrast, the us [*sic*] have the rule to make it possible to get married between the people who are same sex. This problem get to drew a lot of attentions around world that's is why we also need to take it into consideration.

Question	Student 1 (A Group of Poster Sample 1)	Student 2 (A Group of Poster Sample 2)
6	Yes. Our group presentation deals with sustainable tourism. In my Class so far, I learned sustainability and Sociological thinking. In this group presentation, we make the foundation for the presentation by providing sociological ideas to the group. Also, I shared with group members the academic method of research. I believe that these knowledges will be useful for them.	I would say yes. Law is fundamental and essential part of this society. law perspective would be helpful to give more detail about social issues. In many cases, government and politics might be the beginning to cause problem. In addition, the first action to fix the situation is also up to government. Like this, I want to contribute to our group in terms of solutions.

Summary and Implications for Future Course Planning

In summary, *Academic Communication* is a skills-based course designed for students interested in communicating in academic settings. The goal of the course is to enable students to communicate effectively in academic settings such as congresses, conferences, symposium-style discussions and university seminars. Students will also develop the skills to discuss and explain content knowledge relevant to understanding and addressing current global issues. Through activities like presentations and discussions in this course, students use their factual and conceptual knowledge to contribute to class projects and learn procedural knowledge and thinking skills as described in the Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Students also learn language skills at the same time through instruction and feedback on their presentation and discussions. As such, through this teaching and learning process, content and language are interwoven and learned as a result (Coyle, 2007).

During the AY 2024, three classes of this course were taught by the first and second authors. One challenge encountered by enrolled students and evident to the instructors was the students' limited experience in conducting research in academic fields. This made it difficult for them to identify gaps in previous studies and propose unique solutions to address those gaps in the literature. The expected academic standards for basic research skills were not always met, even by students with high English proficiency, including those near-native in English fluency. Additionally, finding elements of common interest and focus among students from diverse academic backgrounds was sometimes challenging within allocated groups. Potentially, the additional work of finding common ground could be an area of reflection for students as they learn to negotiate and work together collaboratively. Instructors' efforts to supplement students' group work and monitor progress in interdisciplinary settings are essential to support ongoing learning and ensure successful completion of group activities. For future course development, it is recommended to provide sufficient scaffolding activities to enhance students' academic collaboration.

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Appendix

Worksheet for Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Writing Assignment 1 (2024/10/18)
Towards more academic research

Question 1
Please write down the name of your department and college in English.
Department:
College:

Question 2: Searching conferences in your academic area (major/discipline)
    (1) Google "conference" and your major (e.g., "education", "literature", "business", "finance", "intercultural communication", "history", social science", etc.)

    (2) Please choose one conference. Write down the name of the conference and copy the URL below.

        Name of the conference:
        URL:

    (3) Check if you can find the following information or section.

	Yes/No
Call for papers	
Abstract/paper submission	
Types of presentations (e.g., oral, poster, symposium, workshop, etc.)	
Registration	
Plenary speakers	
Organizing committee	
Proceedings	
Venue	

    (4) Please write down if you have found any other information than above.

Question 3 Please describe your major (discipline) <u>in more than 100 words</u>. Please include the following information. You can add other more information.
    i)   Your college and department
    ii)   Course subjects you are required/eligible to take and/or you have taken so far

Question 4 Please describe your research interest <u>in more than 100 words</u>. Please include the following information. You can add other more information.
    i)   Seminars（ゼミ）you belong to/you are willing to join in your own college/department
    ii)   (Potential) topic/s for your graduation thesis or project

Question 5 Please write down any potential topics/issues/problems you can identify in your area/discipline <u>in more than 50 words</u>. Please clarify reasons or include background

information.

Question 6 (Reflection on Group Poster Presentation) Do you think your academic knowledge of your own major was useful for your group poster presentation? Yes/No? In what way? Please write down in more than 50 words.