“I think this program is worthwhile for the students because they say they
could make a lot of friends … and it was really fun.”

(Teacher comment 2008)

J.F. Oberlin University is very well known and respected for its long tradition of
English language studies. In fact every freshman, regardless of department, takes a
mandatory 4 class (6 hours) a week, two-semester long 8-credit course in Foundation
English (FE) called Eigo Core, which is offered through the Cornerstone College’s
English Language Program (ELP). Students also have over 40 extension options to
choose from to further extend their studies in areas of their own interest. At any one
time, the English Language Program has 12-17 full-timers and 50-60 part-timers from
various countries, and three representatives from Oberlin College USA. - J. F. Oberlin’s
sister school.

Such a large, dynamic and influential program as the ELP, which expects active
collaborative participation, motivation and results, may initially seem very
intimidating and bewildering to new students, especially for those who have never
taken interactive EFL classes before. To help them adjust to the EFL program and to
give them some idea of what to expect, two sessions of English are included in the
Bridge College Program, one on each day of the program.

To cover the total number of students, eight teachers are hired to take a one-hour class
of a maximum number of 25 students. Teachers may also attend the extra sessions, in
which they can offer a few hints and words of encouragement to the collective group of
students on how to enjoy English and continue to improve in and out of the classroom.

Rather than focusing general English skills, the program places greater emphasis on
encouraging the students to feel comfortable with the Eigo Core division, and the ELP class environment. The teachers base their sessions around introductory “breaking the ice” activities and then, to mirror the arrangement of the Eigo Core A and B classes, a focus on listening and speaking activities on the first day, and reading and writing activities on the second day. By using a variety of activity types, coupled with movement in and out of varying group sizes, as well as activities requiring movement around the classroom, teachers aim to help students overcome any apprehension they may feel about the very active ELP classes. A secondary focus in each class is placed on introducing ideas and ways for studying English both at college and at home. Teachers work collaboratively on class work preparation, meeting freely to coordinate, create and share their materials, most of which include a cultural element, and many involving the use of visual aids.

The program also includes a period in which the teachers and students lunch together. After class on the first day of the program, students collect bentos from a central point in the Gaikujikan and then lunch together in the classrooms. This very popular activity encourages student cooperation and coordination, gives students time to make friends, and allows the teacher and students to interact in a less formal relationship.

Students have reported they enjoy the classes, are pleased with the program and generally think the work is useful. Teachers “love” Bridge, and several return to take it every year. They have commented that the positive effects of the program are clear when “Bridge students” approach them on campus with enthusiasm, confidence and friendliness, and when they can be relied on in class to participate and cooperate in Eigo Core activities. Thus the English contingent of the BCP has been most successful helping to ”break the ice”, to give the students a few faces to “know” around campus, and to help create in our new students a sense of belonging and confidence to succeed at J.F. Oberlin.