

Short-term Programs in Japan: The Outlook for the Future

by Peter B. Oblas

Last year only slightly over 1,000 American students studied in Japanese universities while in recent years, between 40,000 and 50,000 Japanese students annually enroll in American institutions of higher learning.¹ In response to this situation, the Japanese and U.S. governments, in cooperation with private and public educational institutions and groups, are attempting to stimulate American student interest in Japanese studies and in Japan as an educational destination. Japanese university short-term abroad programs for foreign students are still in the foundation stage, and stress firsthand experience, or understanding and friendship, rather than academic rigor.

A continuing dialogue among U.S. and Japanese teachers and administrators on sister school relations and reciprocal exchanges will be required to further develop on-site classes and study tours in Japan. The objective should be to enhance learning, not only about Japanese culture, but also about the Asia-Pacific region from Japan's vantage point. There is a need to balance the goodwill principles of internationalization or intercultural exchange with well-defined academic goals. A substantial increase in student flows from the U.S. to Japan will not occur overnight. Still, any stimulus that promotes academic studies in Japan for American students is a positive development for educational globalization and Asian studies in the U.S.

Perhaps the best way to obtain some perspective on prospects for expanding U.S. student flows into Japan is to consider the ongoing Japan-U.S. effort regarding this problem. In May 1996, under the auspices of the Japanese Ministry of Education (MOE), a Japan-U.S. Symposium on Study Abroad Programs was held in Fukuoka. Programs initiated or under development at the national universities to take advantage of new financial incentives were spotlighted. To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, the Japanese government established peace and friendship scholarships for American and Japanese short-term exchange at the university level. The scholar-

ships are administered by the Association of International Education (AIEJ), a nonprofit unit affiliated with the MOE and provide 80,000 yen per month for up to twelve months, plus round-trip airfare and a settling-in allowance.²

Representatives of Japanese national and private universities attended the symposium. Among the U.S. participants were representatives of the American Association of Colleges and Universities and the U.S.-Japan Friendship Commission. A common thread of all the sessions was discussion on the performance of a program instituted for American students at Kyushu University two years prior.³ This program offers a core curriculum, with English as the language of instruction.

According to Okazaki Tomomi, of Kyushu University's international student center, his university's short-term program requires no Japanese language prerequisites. In Okazaki's opinion, merits of the courses in English lie not in their disciplinary approach to a subject, but in their attractiveness to U.S. students, since the program seeks "to broaden the students' understanding and appreciation of Japanese culture."⁴

Other short-term programs for American students which have followed the Kyushu model, such as those at Tokyo and Tsukuba Universities, focus upon general culture. The Kyushu model includes courses such as Japanese Culture and Behavior, Natural History of Japan, Medical Science and Japan, Art, Law and Japan, etc.⁵ In addition, special beginning Japanese language courses are offered for all American students, with more competent students being allowed to enroll in regular Japanese language classes. Since its focus is not on academic disciplines, Kyushu's short-term program is entitled "Japan in Today's World."

Another reason for the title is the difference in thinking between U.S. international educators and other U.S. university faculty on the meaning of short term, with regard to study abroad programs. For U.S. international educators, a "short-term" program is at most ten weeks and, as such, can be highly oriented toward enhancing the awareness and appreciation of the host culture. In contrast, many U.S. university faculty generally believe that one year programs should be more closely tied to the regular curriculum of the sending school.

At Tsukuba University, in addition to

Japanese culture courses, students are allowed to choose courses from over twenty major degree program courses in the fields of international relations, law, history, economics, psychology, and education.⁶ These courses existed prior to the short-term program and have not been custom-tailored to fit the educational objectives of the American students. The *raison d'être* for including such courses is that they are taught in English. Regarding the future of the curriculum, Hosono Akio, of Tsukuba University, believes that stress should be on intercultural communication in that "issues with international or transnational dimensions in which both Japanese and foreign students are strongly interested could be recommended" for active debate.⁷

The understanding that the outstanding pull for U.S. students into these new programs lies within the intercultural communication parameters does strike a responsive chord among American educators with a strong interest in international cooperation. Richard Wood, Chairman of the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission and President of Earlham College, believes expanding cultural linkages are reason enough to support MOE's initiative. For Wood, the future of junior-year-abroad in Japan should be the following: "The focus of program expansion needs to be on undergraduate education, concentrating on cultural learning and cultural understanding, on creating significant numbers of leaders of the future who can see behind stereotypes, who have a greatly increased capability to understand how things look from the other side, and how the other side functions. These people need language skills, but not at the same level or same type as academic specialists."⁸

Aside from its student pull possibilities, an emphasis on the Japanese living experience does facilitate U.S. exchange because it addresses academic calendar problems. Academic years in Japan run from April to February, while in the U.S., September to June is the norm. The Kyushu program seeks to reproduce the U.S. schedule to some extent in that the short-term first semester begins in October and the second

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semester begins in April. However, this still leaves a gap in the short-term program's academic schedule due to the Japanese university's spring break, which takes place in March. At Kyushu University, the short-term program includes a course in independent study or research under a faculty adviser of the student's major to fill the void. Independent study allows for placement of the student in local government, industry, or other sectors where practical examples can be garnered for later academic papers.⁹

Still, it would be more appropriate for the future of these short-term programs if the underlying conceptualization combined both friendship and academic disciplines, with more stress on the latter. Grounding the courses in academic disciplines will enable American students to transfer credit while studying in Japan. This should serve as a positive incentive in attracting more Americans to Japanese universities. Participants at the U.S.-Japan Symposium considered the credit transfer issue crucial to the expansion and success of the programs.¹⁰

A reconstitution of the short-term curriculums would also probably increase their popularity appeal among non-Chinese-language communities of Asia, such as India, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Currently, 36,000 Indian students study in the U.S., while only 120 students enroll in Japanese universities. The Southeast Asian countries mentioned above were among Japan's eight leading countries of origin of its overseas students in 1992-93. Malaysia (no. 4) sends approximately 700 more students annually than the U.S. (no. 5) or some 1,900 students, and Indonesia (no. 6) sends almost as many students to Japan as the U.S. Thailand (no. 7), however, is below the 1,000 level, and the Philippines is no. 8 at some 500 students.¹¹ Short-term programs carrying more academic credit would likely result in large increases in English-literate Asian students in Japan in view of the proximity of these countries and Japan's advanced political economy. However, the developing-Asia pull is still more skill and knowledge than cultural-immersion based. Students from developing countries are more interested in opportunities for career advancement, certificates, and degrees, than in expanding their cultural horizons.

Regarding the academic guidelines for revised programs, regular dialogue between Japanese and U.S. universities and confer-

ences such as the Fukuoka symposium, is imperative. International education flows are defined to a significant extent by sister-school agreements of student exchange within the Japanese national university system. Short-term programs have therefore been linked from the beginning to sister universities. Consequently, if flows are to be increased, it will be necessary for host and sending institutions to synchronize their agendas. In view of the diversity of sister-school agreements, a common agenda would best be realized if the short-term program is designed to have a somewhat universal appeal to satisfy the strengths of both institutions. Such an appeal, in turn, would be realized most effectively if the core curriculum is interdisciplinary.

Interdisciplinary studies, e.g., area, development, international or education, could include firsthand experience and also be sufficiently flexible to allow for multiple interfaces with courses offered in the various departments of the sister universities. In this respect, credit transfer will be facilitated, and the award of a special joint certificate can be negotiated between the national university and its foreign sister school to be applied to the student's four-year or graduate degree.

Presently, the social sciences draw the largest proportional number of foreign students to Japanese national universities. The University of California Education Abroad Program, which sent 446 students to Japan from 1990 to 1995, listed 57.6 percent as social science majors.¹² Therefore, with programs such as area, development, international or education studies, one can link up with a fundamental network of student flows consisting of linguistics, economics, political science, sociology, and history majors, as well as service career options for students in such fields as economic development, public administration, or adult education.

There is a need for a dialogue between sister schools and enabling organizations centering on a structural reorientation of the short-term programs. Cultural immersion would remain, but within an interdisciplinary program framework. A short-term program in development studies, for instance, would focus on the economic development of modern Japan, comparative development in Asia, and the Asian context of development education. Future growth for U.S.-Japan educational exchange depends on the availability and quality of this type of curriculum. ■

NOTES

1. *Outline of the Student Exchange System in Japan* (Tokyo: Ministry of Education, 1997), 7, 32.
2. Information regarding AIEJ activities, Japanese colleges and universities, short-term study programs, and scholarships can be accessed on the internet at <http://www.aiej.or.jp>.
3. See outline of Sugano Michihiro, "The Program at Kyushu University" (paper presented at Japan-U.S. Symposium on Study Abroad Programs, Fukuoka, Kyushu, May 13-15, 1996).
4. See summary of Okazaki Tomomi, "Japanese Language Courses and Study Abroad Program at Kyushu University" (paper presented at Japan-U.S. Symposium on Study Abroad Programs, Fukuoka, Kyushu, May 13-15, 1996).
5. See the section on courses in *Japan in Today's World 1996-97*, (Fukuoka: Kyushu University, 1996).
6. See summary of Hosono Akio, "Japan-U.S. Symposium on Study Abroad Programs" (paper presented at Japan-U.S. Symposium on Study Abroad Programs, Fukuoka, Kyushu, May 13-15, 1996).
7. *Ibid.*
8. See summary of Richard J. Wood, "Cultural Learning and International Exchange" (paper presented at Japan-U.S. Symposium on Study Abroad Programs, Fukuoka, Kyushu, May 13-15, 1996).
9. See outline of Kono Toshiyuki, "Independent Study Project—Beyond Formalities" (paper presented at Japan-U.S. Symposium on Study Abroad Programs, Fukuoka, Kyushu, May 13-15, 1996).
10. See summary of Ishii-Kuntz Masako, "Unit and Credit Transfer" (paper presented at Japan-U.S. Symposium on Study Abroad Programs, Fukuoka, Kyushu, May 13-15, 1996).
11. *Open Doors 1992/1993* (New York: Institute of International Education, 1993), 7.
12. See summary of Ono Kanji, "The Philosophy and Practice of Undergraduate Education at UCLA" (paper presented at Japan-U.S. Symposium on Study Abroad Programs, Fukuoka, Kyushu, May 13-15, 1996).

Editor's Note

Below are four Japanese universities that are interested in making connections with foreign institutions regarding short-term student exchanges:

Division of Foreign Student Affairs

University of Tsukuba
1-1-1 Tennodai
Tsukuba-shi, Ibaraki 305 Japan

International Student Division

Hiroshima University
1-4-5 Kagamiyama
Higashi-Hiroshima-shi
Hiroshima 739 Japan

International Student Exchange Division

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies
4-51-21 Nishigahara
Tokyo 114 Japan

International Student Division

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1-1 Yamadaoka, Suita-shi
Osaka 565 Japan