

# Setting Priorities for International Education in Japan

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## Abstract

This paper will advocate that Japanese universities should be increasing the number of international programs as well as developing programs for foreign students in Japan. The paper will cover reasons for international exchanges and how an institution might find international partners. It will discuss ideas on how international programs can generate favorable publicity for a university and may actually attract students and faculty as well. We will present a case for expanding foreign experiences beyond language and give some examples on how many international programs could be managed by one institution. This article will also discuss ideas on how to set up and staff an effective international office and what duties it should be allowed to undertake.

As Japanese universities' budgets are being tightened, there arises a need to reevaluate the various programs that are being run by a given institution to see where cuts may be made. Unfortunately, this focus on the bottom line often makes institutions forget their mission, forget their duty to their students and forget their duty to their society. Often the budget cuts fall hardest on the foreign exchange programs of the universities which are often perceived to be expensive and troublesome to develop and to operate. In this paper, we will advocate that these programs should not be cut, indeed they should be increased and managed in such a way that they might pay for themselves as means of attracting both domestic and foreign students to a university.

The reasons to offer international exchanges to students of any institution of learning are quite diverse. We all know that globalization has become the watchword of the business and industrial world. This demands that graduates must be able to deal with people from a variety of cultures and, perhaps, be able to live in a different culture. With the many international mergers and acquisitions of and by Japanese companies, e.g., Nissan Motors and Renault and Softbank, it is unrealistic to imagine that Japanese students will never have to deal with or work in an intercultural environment or deal with international clients. As a result, it behooves universities to prepare their students for the numerous challenges of a career in what is becoming more and more a global economy. Dr. Maurits Van Rooijen, Director of the Westminster University's International Office, opines that "certainly outside Japan, institutions are convinced that students without international 'exposure' are insufficiently prepared for a more senior position." He further declares that it is his experience that "in a competitive market, students without international sensitivity are becoming less attractive to employers." Similar ideas may still be a minority position in corporate Japan, but Japanese universities can not allow themselves to become complacent, they must be in the vanguard, and prepare their students with quality international experiences, if they wish to survive in the

competition for quality students.

Presently, the United States is the destination for roughly one third of the 1.5 million international students or 481,280 students (1997-98 academia year). Japan was the number one country of origin of this number. Japan had only 56,000 foreign students. Is this situation good for Japan? We do not think it is. Japan is clearly under represented. Japan is the number two economic power in the world and must strive for a similar position in the field of education. Japan has much to teach the world about education, business, management and technology. It also has an obligation to teach the beauty of its cultural history to the world. What better way to accomplish all this than through encouraging foreign students to come and spend some time studying and living in Japan in a quality program as well as developing quality foreign programs for our own students.

Some critics may say that international experiences should be left to those departments with International or *Kokusai* in their name, but this is not logical as the globalization movement will continue to expand into all areas of Japanese business and professional life. In the job market, there is a clear need for computer operators, managers, CPA's, and secretaries with international experiences and foreign language abilities. As this fact becomes more evident to high school advisors and incoming students alike, departments and faculties which have developed quality international programs will become more attractive and, thus, foreign programs will become more important as a marketing tool for institutions. In fact, institutions should take the initiative and educate high school students and councillors about how valuable international experiences may be to a student's future employment and income.

Fortunately, the globalization process is not just a one way process of Japanese universities sending students abroad. Indeed, the 56,000 foreign students studying in Japan last year represented a new record for Japan. As you read this article, there are thousands of students attending Japanese language and history classes at various institution around the world. Asian students in particular are very interested in Japan. Thousands of students are sitting in Japanese classes in Korea, China, Taiwan and other countries preparing for studying in Japan or preparing to do business with Japanese. On recent trips to Manila, Bangkok, and Seoul we heard many Japanese songs and saw many posters advertising Japanese groups like Speed, Puffy and the talented Hikaru Utada. All this gives proof of the influence Japan has on the popular cultural in this area of the world, but Japan must offer its Asian neighbors more than songs. It must offer true cultural leadership by developing and promoting foreign exchanges and opening its doors to more academic exchanges with Asian nations as well as with western nations.

Once a university has accepted the reality of the globalization of education and the need to develop international programs, it must then create an action plan of forming international linkages. For many universities, the first step has been to establish sister school agreements with schools in foreign countries. Bunkyo University has established sister school agreements with Michigan State University, Dusseldorf University, and Monash University in Australia among others. These relationships have been used mainly to enrich or augment our language programs like our summer English program at Michigan State. However, Michigan State has sent several groups of students to our Faculty of International Studies from its business department to experience and study Japanese

culture. Our staff was able to present a series of lectures on Japanese economics, education, history and management, as well as arrange home stays near our campus. Additionally, we were able to arrange visits to local companies, a cultural and history oriented tour of Kamakura led by our noted Zen scholar Dr. David Loy, and tours to other historic places. These students received credits from Michigan State University through writing reports and taking tests given by the professor accompanying them. Although this latter program is not a continuing one, it does show how university linkages can enhance the programs of participating institutions in areas beyond language.

We would like to emphasize that in choosing an international partner, an institution should look for areas of commonality as well as areas of contrasts between the home university and its prospective international partner in order to insure the mutual benefit of the participants. For example, if both institutions have an education department, then they may be able to exchange students and professors and do joint research in that area. Another model might have an institution looking for a partner that is strong in an area they are weak in, such as Japanese language or tourism. In the latter case, the institution with a great tourism course would offer courses in tourism and hospitality and the other partner would offer Japanese language to students of the tourism department. In fact, Bunkyo is sending Japanese language students to Christchurch College of Education, New Zealand, to enrich the Japanese language program there, and our students receive valuable experience in teaching Japanese to foreigners. It is easy to see how this type of sharing could save a university money on the development of courses and still offer their students a large variety of course offerings, as well as provide them with an international educational experience.

Another important step in establishing international programs would be for an institution to join and become an active participant in a regional associations of universities. Bunkyo University joined the AUAP (The Association of Universities Asia and Pacific ) in 1996 in order to expand its Asian and Pacific contacts. The AUAP (membership of over 140) is very active in its region acting as a conduit for its members to form linkages and organize joint projects like the UNESCO sponsored UNITWIN on environment improvement in Thailand in which Bunkyo and Prince of Songkla University are cooperating, and the AUAP Distance Learning and Multi Media Education Network (APDMEN) of which professor Nakamura is co-chair. This latter project is attempting to harness the power of technology in order that universities may serve new kinds of students.

Bunkyo University and the other members of the APDMEN see a need to expand the university's mission to include life-long continuing education which may be better handled by distance education technology already developed or which will be developed in the near future. We see a need for universities to provide mass education to a wide age group of people, some who will actually be employed in full time jobs and supporting a family. This situation will be different from the traditional role of teaching young unmarried students. APDMEN is trying to find out what multimedia tools will be useful to institutions wishing to utilize technology to tap these new markets for education. We believe that technology can be a complement to our more traditional based instruction and not a replacement. We think technology will become a dynamic tool for education in the 21st century. One only has to look at a map of Asia to understand why the AUAP is interested in distance multimedia education. The geography of the area almost demands distance education,

mountains and deserts separate large cities in China and India, the ocean separates the Islands of Indonesia and the Philippines, so in these countries it may be easier, if not necessary, to use technology to overcome these geographic obstacles. That is why the members of APDMEN are trying to pool our resources and help each other develop course ware that will be mutually acceptable and meet each of our needs. We believe we can make our courses more student centered and free them from attending classes by putting everything on the World Wide Web. In the future, we may be able to have students in Chaing Mai actually take classes on line at Bunkyo and our students could attend classes at Suranaree University of Technology. This would usher in a whole new type of international program.

As a result of our experience in the AUAP, we have discovered that regional cooperation offers countless opportunities for innovative activities among members. The members seem in agreement that we must develop cross-cultural programs that will build mutual respect among our various people. At the same time, we desire to promote moral and ethical education that will help our students deal with the rapidly changing world of technology and globalization. We want to draw inspiration from the wisdom of Asia's great civilizations, cultures and religions, in order to protect the uniqueness of our diverse cultures as well as our individuality, even while keeping pace with technology.

In addition to these joint programs, we are actively pursuing relations with several individual member universities like Angeles University, Philippines, Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand, and Chung Hee University, Korea, among others. We must recognize that regional groups of universities like the AUAP can act like clearing houses for international linkages between and among universities desiring to complement or augment their course offerings as well as promote international experience for their faculty, staff and students. We concur with DR. Andris Barblan, Secretary General, Council of Rectors of Europe (CRE) when he argues that "...it is the place of associations like AUAP or CRE to foster those linkages .... that is bottom-up inter-university cooperation based on complementarity and the strengthening of the weaker parts of the system if they represent a potential for common action."

In addition to acting as a clearing house for linkages between its members, the AUAP gives its members a voice among similar regional associations of universities like CRE. Interaction between these groups hold the potential for exchanging information about member universities seeking linkages with members of other associations of universities, making the process of finding international partners much easier. Regional associations or thematic associations can also act as advocates by participating in various international conferences which are only open to such groups, like the UNESCO's World Conference on Higher Education, which was held in October, 1998 at the UNESCO conference center in Paris. The fact is that the conference was driven by the various regional groups like AUAP and CRE. It was the regional associations that organized the regional conferences that preceded the WCHE. These regional conferences were immeasurably valuable in creating the agenda for the conference. Many of the main speakers were presidents or vice presidents of the various regional associations. It was these people who presented a consensus of the concerns of their members to the official national delegations in attendance.

Professor Duval had the honor of representing Bunkyo University as a member of the AUAP delegation and addressed workshops on coordinating international programs and evaluating various programs. It was a great experience to observe the dynamic power radiating from the various regional groups. Although we have always known that there was strength in numbers, we were very impressed by the power and unity of purpose exhibited by the various associations, and by how much we had in common with each other concerning mutual problems like accreditation, credit transfer and so forth. It was a great forum for universities to present their ideas to the national delegations, a kind of mass advocacy group that might be more effective in influencing national educational policy than individual universities might have in their home countries. Granted, the questions raised and the requests for financial assistance and administrative reforms, may go unanswered, but universities can point to the various proposals and recommendations and ask their governments to implement measures that will assist educational institutions achieve the goals outlined at the conference. This is another way in which participation in trans-national associations can benefit academia in general as well as individual universities.

Once an exchange program has been set up, several administrative problems like funding, student assistance and accreditation occur. At Bunkyo the student participants of our summer program at Michigan State or our spring program at Monash must pay the bills themselves. The university has tried to reduce the cost for the students by paying the expenses for accompanying faculty members. More recently, the administration has introduced a policy of sending the accompanying faculty member for a shorter stay and leaving the students in the care of their host university. Although some Japanese universities may be uncomfortable without on sight supervisors, this short stay system for escorts reduces the time commitment for these programs for both faculty and staff, thereby freeing them for their other duties or research. The reduced time burden on faculty and staff may help to change the perception that international programs are too troublesome as well as reduce costs.

In addition, Bunkyo has initiated a scholarship program for study abroad for superior students who wish to take a year off and attend a full year at Michigan State or other schools with a sister-school relationship with us in the U.S., China and New Zealand. There are only six positions a year offered for the entire university, so the selection process is very competitive. These students must pay a portion of Bunkyo's fees, but the grant will cover most of the students' costs abroad for one year. Other students can leave for a year on their own money and attend programs at any university or school they wish, but they must pay part of the fees at Bunkyo and the credits they earn at the foreign schools may not be transferred if the school they attend does not have a sister school relationship with us (the credit transfer will be discussed later).

Finances are always a problem for international programs. Institutions like Waseda allow their students to go abroad to the University of Westminster for a year to attend language and academic classes without charging them the full fees. Other universities charge their students full fees and pay the tuition at the host university. Some schools are even getting a kind of rebate from the host university. Dr. Van Rooijen reports that the University of Westminster "...is engaging in an arrangement whereby part of the student fee (500 pounds per student) is given back to the sending institution, which can then decide to either use this to cover administrative costs or to make it

available as scholarships for other students.”

Now that the university has established several bilateral relations, it is faced with the problem of how many international linkages it should have. We think setting limits to international contacts is difficult if not really dangerous for a university. Often we have seen or heard of Japanese institutions limiting themselves to one or two schools. These institutions seem to be defining international experience as only for language and cultural exchange. In the global educational sense, this is far too narrow a definition. Institutions must look beyond language and search for partnerships that would serve the academic interests of both students and faculty equally well. There is a clear need for universities to offer their students and faculty a wide range of international programs and experiences that will enrich their academic careers. We believe that a university should have numerous linkages. It should be able to introduce a student or a faculty member to an institution in Africa, Laos, Italy or the United States. However, we agree with Dr. Van Rooijen that these links should be prioritized with some links “..given preferential status.” It is these links that institutions should exert higher levels of energy on and financial assistance, if possible. It remains the prerogative of the individual university to choose the individual relations that it wishes to place on a higher plane. Other universities would be serviced in a more cost efficient manner by placing them on mailing lists and exchanging journals with them, but contact should be maintained.

We would like to turn the discussion to what kind of programs Japanese universities may offer their international partners. Many institutions in Japan, like Bunkyo, have little or no capacity to offer a full year academic program in English for students from their sister schools. With the notable exception of the previously mentioned series of English lectures offered to Michigan State students, Bunkyo's foreign students must know Japanese to participate in academic classes offered at any of our faculties. At the Faculty of International Studies, we have hired a full time Japanese professor to help the students with their Japanese once they are admitted, but the students must have a pretty good command of Japanese before they are allowed to enter. Other departments offer tutors and other assistance with Japanese language. Bunkyo is fortunate to have our Japanese Language and Cultural Institute located on our Saitama campus which trains about 30 students every year, so that they may sit for entrance tests for Japanese universities. Although this institution is separate from the university, the various faculties of the university offer special entrance exams to a set number of its graduates. This frees these few students from the constant round of entrance tests that they would have to take in order to enter other universities, and could serve as a valuable marketing tool for both the institute and the university. At the very least, it gives Bunkyo an introduction to foreign students and presents us with the opportunity to offer classes at the institute to our international partners.

If organizing a full semester or full year English language based program for foreign students is impractical, institutions should look into offering short term seminars in the summer or other time of the year. Most institutions should be able to gather professors whose English is good enough to make presentations in areas of interest to their international partners. These programs could have student cultural advisors that would help to lead the foreign students around on cultural excursions to festivals or historic areas of Japan. The programs may not produce money, but they should be self-supporting from the fees gathered from the participants or from rebates from their home schools.

The question arises about how a university can manage all the kinds of programs listed above with the a limited staff. The answer is not simple. Most Japanese universities treat international programs as an administrative function and staff their international offices with regular administrative staff who rotate every year or so. This is not a desirable situation from what we have learned from attendance at NAFSA conferences over the last five years. Our colleagues in NAFSA ( Association of International Educators, formerly the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors) overwhelmingly concur with our opinion that an international office should be staffed with people committed to international education and who can remain at the job for a long time. This would give continuity and stability to the various programs. This might mean that institutions would have to hire specialists who would not rotate to other departments. This fact could cause problems within the administration of the university because it would create a two class system, one rotating and one not.

One answer might be for the staff of the international office be hired on a contractual basis with reduced bonuses, but with the ability to travel abroad and investigate new international linkages. By no means should it be staffed with hourly employees with no possibility of traveling abroad. We strongly concur with Dr. Van Rooijen's opinion that we "...need people with specific qualities, such as a very high level of intercultural sensitivity... personable and patient." Although Dr. Van Rooijen also believes that English proficiency is required, we believe that any second language proficiency would be good. It really depends on the given situation of the university. Granted, English is the leading international language, but at Bunkyo we have many Chinese and Korean students, so perhaps we could have a staff member proficient in one of these languages. A well staffed international office would be able to handle the various international linkages, explain various programs to students and give first hand advice to students traveling abroad. This would lessen the work load of the international exchange committee and free the professors for research or even joint research with an institution's international partner. It would also give the professors more time to prepare lessons and meet with their students. If financial reasons preclude the creation of a specialist international office, the institution should find a faculty or staff member with some if not all of the qualities mentioned above to become head of the international office for four or more years. However, the institution should recognize that this is a full time job and reduce the teaching load of any faculty member who accepts the position (2-4 classes would be good), but the faculty member should understand that he or she must be on campus five days a week with pay commensurate with this additional work. The other members of the staff could be regular staff members or some kind of contractual full time assistant. Again we do not think hourly part time employees would be a good idea.

In addition to the above mentioned duties, the international office could also act as a liaison with the local communities' international clubs and associations. It could help organize symposiums with visiting foreign faculty or even foreign student that would be open to the public thereby giving the school publicity which might encourage more students into applying. At the very least, promoting contact with local groups may increase an institution's ability to offer social opportunities and home stay opportunities to foreign students, as well as enrich the social life of the community. Also, the

office could develop an alumni association of foreign students or at least keep in touch with them through news letters. Many NAFSA members have reported that their foreign alumni clubs have been very successful in gathering more students from a graduate's home country as well as increasing donations from foreign graduates. The center could also oversee the creation of Web pages in various languages like Chinese, Korean or Thai, to name just a few. Web pages in foreign languages have proven to be helpful in gathering foreign students and keeping up with foreign alumni.

We would like to turn now to the question of awarding credits to students participating in international programs. Japanese universities are encumbered with government rules that prevent them from freely accepting credits earned abroad. One way around this obstacle is to establish a formal sister school relationship with foreign schools. This makes it possible to accept credits from those schools, like our summer language program with Michigan State. In the past, Bunkyo has been able to assign English language credit to students who participated in the program. Grades from Michigan State were transposed by formula into our A, B, or C. Once students received their credits they would be excused from one of our required English courses. Other schools have similar programs in place for languages. Transfer of credits for non language academic work presents more problems. However, the problem of accreditation is not unique to Japan. We know that one of Bunkyo's former students living in California was told by Sony USA that her Japanese diploma was only an associate degree in the United States, and she was hired at a lower salary than a graduate of an institution based in the United States. The real issues of accreditation are complex and beyond the scope of this paper, but it is our opinion that they could best be resolved through joint actions of various Japanese universities or advocacy groups like JAFSA (Japan Association of Foreign Student Advisors). Granted, JAFSA may not be as powerful as its American namesake NAFSA, but it seems to have some influence with the Education Ministry, and works well within the Japanese context.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, It is our Position that the globalization of commerce and industry demands that universities globalize their program or be left behind in the search for students and in some ways the search for talented faculty. An institution that can boast of many international links will look more appealing to perspective students and faculty alike. The former because they hope foreign experience will help prepare them for the globalization that is taking place in the work world, and the latter because it will give them access to more research possibilities and further professional development and experiences. Also, International programs can save the university money by utilizing the various developed programs of its foreign partners instead of trying to develop their own programs. Yes, there are many problems associated with international programs, but institutions must have the right attitude. That is why an international office should be staffed with positive, inter-culturally sensitive people. Additionally, institutions must educate society about the need to internationalize education and how it will enhance the marketability of their graduates. All institutions of higher learning must recognize that our future is global and that we must embrace programs that will prepare our students for it.



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