

# Ushering in the Global Age for Shimane University and Its Students

Scott MENKING

島根大学生涯学習教育研究センター紀要第7号

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Scott MENKING

(法文学部言語文化学科)

### Abstract

In the race to lead Asia, Japan is continuing to slip behind in terms of the internationalization that occurs with study abroad. While 21.3 percent of the total enrolment in Hong Kong tertiary institutions is studying abroad, the ratio is just 1.4 percent for students in Japan. This paper discusses research exploring students' opinions about participating in study abroad programs, with a focus on the location of the programs and length of stay.

A questionnaire was administered to 180 first-year students with an advanced English ability; the results indicate almost half of the students expect to participate in a study abroad program before they graduate from university. The United States was the most often provided destination, followed by the United Kingdom and Australia. The results of the study also indicate that students (1) want programs of two weeks or less and (2) have a propensity toward programs of about one month. The results suggest that additional programs in the United States and Australia may be well received by students. The paper examines the benefits of the creation of additional study abroad programs and concludes with the suggestion that Shimane University can become a leader among universities in rural Japan by fostering students' awareness of and perspectives on internationalization and study abroad.

アジア地域での国際競争の中で、日本の国際化にむけた取り組みの遅れが指摘されている。香港の高等教育機関に在籍する学生の21.3パーセントが国外での学習経験を持つのに対して、日本は実に1.4パーセントに過ぎないのが現状である。本論は、日本の大学生が国外での学習活動に参加しやすいプログラムやその期間を調査することを目的に、大学生の意識調査を行ったものである。

調査は、比較的英語力の高い初年次の大学生180人を対象に行った。調査対象のうち、およそ半数の学生が大学卒業までに国外研修に参加する意欲を見せた。国外研修先として、アメリカをあげる学生が最も多く、イギリスとオーストラリアがそれに続いた。さらに、多くの学生が(1)2週間以内の研修プログラムと、(2)1ヶ月程度のプログラムとを求めていることがわかった。このことから、アメリカやオーストラリアを研修先とした国外研修プログラムが学生を受け入れられるであろうことが明らかになった。本論は、地方の大学が国際化を図るとともに、新たな国外研修プログラムを実施することの意義と課題を提起するものである。

## I . Introduction

Advances in travel, telecommunications, and other technologies have ushered in the new global age, blurring the boundaries between nations. Both politicians and educators are eager to "lift our vision and responsiveness to the rest of the world" (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2009), and as a result, federal governments are increasing their efforts to heighten young people's cultural awareness and linguistic understanding. In the United States, for example, the Senate designated 2006 as the "Year of Study Abroad" (University of California, Irvine, Center for International Education, n.d.). The resolution stated that it is the responsibility of the educational system to ensure that Americans are globally literate (United States Senate, 2005). The bill also cited the value that students gain when they are exposed to global knowledge and cultural understanding, both of which form an integral part of the students' education (University of California, Irvine, Center for International Education, n.d.). In addition, the Senators recognized the necessity of increasing the acquisition of language and cultural competencies to meet the demands of the current world economy, and they noted that positive goodwill can be created as students share American values and ideas. In 2009, the United States House of Representatives passed legislation to provide the financial resources necessary for more students to study abroad. Reacting to the miniscule study abroad participation rate of .3 percent of the total American tertiary enrolment (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Institute for Statistics, 2008, p. 124), the act also contained provisions to force tertiary educational institutions to correct factors that impede students from studying abroad.

Japan has also been placing a priority on the internationalization of tertiary education. In 1983, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) created a "Plan to Accept 100,000 Foreign Students" to study in Japan. Building on this success, in 2008, MEXT announced the "Global 30" Project for Establishing Core Universities for Internationalization. The goal of the project is to increase the number of international students in Japan to 300,000 by the year 2020 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), n.d.). This emphasis on inbound students may, however, be at the long-term expense of the students who will be Japan's future leaders.

*The Global Education Digest 2008*, published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics (2008, p. 121), provides evidence that in the race to lead Asia, Japan is continuing to slip behind in terms of the internationalization that occurs with study abroad. *The Digest* calculates the outbound mobility ratio, which is the percentage of the total tertiary enrolment that is studying abroad. While Hong Kong has a 21.3 percent ratio, South Korea sees 3.0 percent of its tertiary enrolment studying abroad; and 2.0 percent of the Chinese tertiary population goes abroad. However, Japan maintains a ratio of just 1.4 percent. *The Digest* also provides the

net flow of students by subtracting the number of outbound students from the number of inbound students and expressing the difference as a percentage of the total number of tertiary enrolments (2008, p. 290). It is not surprising that both China and South Korea are net dispatchers of students, with ratios of -1.6 percent and -2.5 percent, respectively, while Japan receives more students than it sends, resulting in a ratio of positive 1.7 percent. It is for this reason that the current study was undertaken.

## II. Current Study: Methodology and Subjects

A questionnaire, written in English with enough Japanese translation to ensure students understood the meaning of each item, was administered to 180 first-year students (79 male, 101 female). The questionnaire, exploring students' opinions about study abroad, has three parts: part one with demographic data, part two with questions about participation in a study abroad program from an ideal point of view, and part three with items asking students to think realistically about such things as their class schedules, money, and club commitments and indicate their realistic intentions. Within the data, two main factors—location of the study abroad program and length of stay—were investigated.

Of the 180 students who completed the questionnaire, 31 (17.22 percent) are studying in the Faculty of Life and Environmental Science, 32 (17.78 percent) are in the Faculty of Education, 33 (18.33 percent) belong to the Interdisciplinary Faculty of Science and Engineering, and 84 (46.67 percent) study in the Faculty of Law and Literature. Compared to course enrolments (i.e., 20.28 percent in the Faculty of Life and Environmental Science, 16.31 percent in the Faculty of Education, 39.80 percent in the Interdisciplinary Faculty of Science and Engineering, and 23.62 percent in the Faculty of Law and Literature), these ratios may appear to concentrate on the opinions of students in the Faculty of Law and Literature and understate the ideas of students in the Interdisciplinary Faculty of Science and Engineering. However, an examination of participation in the university's study abroad program at the University of Arkansas between 2005 and 2009 indicates that the results of the current study may actually slightly over-emphasize the viewpoints of students in the two science faculties (e.g., only 15.39 to 33.33 percent of the participants came from the two faculties, combined), which is a caveat that must be appended to the results.

## III. Results and Discussion

### 1. Participation

In part two of the questionnaire, students indicated whether they would like to (ideally) participate in four different study abroad programs: 1) a ten-day homestay program to the United States, 2) a ten-day homestay program to Australia, 3) a six-week homestay in the United States featuring English and cultural instruction, and 4) an eight-

week homestay in the United States featuring English and cultural instruction. The response showed an overwhelming interest in at least one of the programs (82.22 percent). Specifically, students were more interested in the ten-day homestay programs in the United States (58.33 percent) and Australia (52.78 percent) than the six-week (38.33 percent) and eight-week (30.56 percent) programs. Proportionately, science students were more likely to indicate no interest in any of the programs (19.35 and 21.21 percent of the Faculties' respondees), while Education (90.62 percent) students expressed the most interest. One of the science students who did not want to go on any of the four programs indicated she expected to participate in a program in the United Kingdom for "a number of days." Similarly, a Law and Literature student asserted that she plans to study in Malaysia for six months. Consequently, a student's lack of interest in the four programs cannot be over interpreted to mean an unequivocal lack of interest in study abroad since only four specific programs were examined.

## 2. Location

When students were asked to realistically consider participation, 78 students (43.33 percent) indicated they believed they would study abroad before graduating from university. Students were also asked to provide the countries where they believed they would study, and the length of time they would study. While 26 students gave one country, 48 provided two, one student wrote three countries, and three students did not specify the location; this resulted in 126 responses. It is not clear whether the students who provided multiple countries foresee studying in those countries or are simply uncertain about where they will eventually study.

Country	Number of students(n=78)	Percent response
United States	55	70.51 %
United Kingdom	27	34.62 %
Australia	24	30.77 %
Canada	7	8.97 %
Germany	4	5.13 %
Italy	3	3.85 %
China	2	2.56 %
Korea, Malaysia, France	1 each	1.28 % each

Table 1. Countries students believe they will study in.

As Table 1 demonstrates, students provided ten countries to which they believe they will travel. Twice as many students selected the United States as any other country. With more than two-thirds of the students expecting to study in the United States, this study demonstrates the continued popularity of the United States as a destination for

both travel and education. The United States was the most common response of the students who only wrote one country (38.46 percent) and of the 49 students who provided two or three countries (91.84 percent included the United States). The latter students most often paired the United States with the U.K. (38.78 percent of the students who furnished two countries) or Australia (34.69 percent).

After the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia were the most commonly mentioned study abroad destinations, with about one-third of the students anticipating studying in each of these countries. In addition to being paired with the United States, these regions were given by students who wrote just one country, with 23.08 percent and 15.38 percent indicating the United Kingdom and Australia, respectively.

Because the university currently does not offer official programs in either the United Kingdom or Australia, one can postulate that students who plan to go to these countries are either not aware of this fact or plan to find alternative (i.e., unofficial) programs in which to participate. Privately run programs can, however, be wrought with problems. For example, two students who went on the university's Arkansas program and two students who participated in the Faculty of Law and Literature's Florida program gained the confidence to look for and make all of the necessary arrangements to participate in programs in Australia and Canada. Upon their return, however, the students admitted that their host families were not nearly as good as those they had had in the United States. One of the students who went to Australia reflected back and noted that his homestay was cheaper than staying in a hotel, but other than that, there was little benefit to staying with a family who never ate meals together and rarely interacted with him. Unfortunately, this is not a unique experience, particularly when students are unable to talk with former participants before deciding to go on public programs. For this reason, Atkins (2008) suggested the creation of an independent body or database that would be accessible to teachers and that would have honest feedback about all of the programs in which Japanese students have participated. While this is an excellent concept, the realization may be less than straightforward, and in the intervening time period, Shimane University students will still be looking for study trips to Australia.

The results of this portion of the current study have two implications. First, Canada is not a very popular destination with students, and this may provide one explanation for the low participation rates in the current summer program. A program to the United Kingdom, or even another program to the United States, may result in more students participating, although several other factors (e.g., cost, timing during summer vacation) must be investigated before pursuing this recommendation. Second, a program to Australia should be considered. Australia is a multilingual, multicultural society with 161 living languages (Lewis, 2009). In addition, the rich diversity in its ecosystems, its proximity to Japan and factors associated with its location (e.g., cheaper airfares, no jet lag)

make it an ideal candidate for future programs. This program does not, however, need to be an official, university-wide program.

Faculty-led, short-term programs are nothing new, with one American university having 300 students participate in them every year (Hulstrand, 2006). Semi-official programs such as these have several benefits. First, programs that are sponsored by a Faculty or a faculty member can be designed to appeal to specific groups of students. As a result, rather than utilizing traditional coursework, these programs can better meet the students' unique needs (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). Second, these programs often have the flexibility to better match students' schedules and financial restrictions. Third, as both Moriyama (2009) and Riley (2009) noted, participation in overseas programs can vary dramatically from year to year (e.g., between 3 and 9 participants on Moriyama's program between 2005 and 2008 and between 5 and 14 participants on Riley's program between 2007 and 2010). Unofficial programs may be better able to respond to these fluctuations than formal programs. Finally, when overseas programs are conducted by university faculty members (e.g., the Law and Literature professor's yearly "London Tour"), students can travel with a degree of confidence that may be missing when they must search for and participate in programs operated by businesses.

### 3. Length of Program

On the questionnaire, students were also asked to provide the length of the program(s) in which they believe they will participate. Four students did not provide an anticipated length of stay, resulting in statistics for 74 students who asserted they will study abroad before they graduate. Because of multiple-country responses, a total of 123 time frames were collected.

Length of program	Number of times provided (n=123)	Percent response(n =74)
"1 week" or "a number of days"	16	14.86 %
"10 days" or "2 weeks"	19	14.86 %
"3 weeks"	4	2.70 %
"weeks"	4	2.70 %
"4 weeks" or "1 month"	36	25.68 %
"2 months"	12	8.11 %
"3 months"	4	2.70 %
"6 months"	8	8.11 %
"months"	3	2.70 %
"a year"	5	5.41 %
Other responses (given once or twice)	12	12.16 %

Table 2. Program length.

As Table 2 demonstrates, there was great variety in the responses, but three tendencies can be observed. First, over one-fourth of the students want programs of two weeks or less. This topic will be revisited later in the paper. Second, as Table 2 demonstrates, students have a propensity toward programs of about a month, the length of the Faculty of Law and Literature's Florida program. Finally, students' dispositions do not support programs of three weeks and three months.

#### 4. Length and Location

Currently, most of the Shimane University students who participate in an official (i.e., university-wide) English study abroad program go on the three-week spring program that is affiliated with the University of Arkansas. While this program has been successful, the current study suggests that there may be a subtle shift in the length of program that students desire. As the previous discussion demonstrated, students appear to differentiate programs of three weeks with those that are one month in length, finding the three-week programs to be less desirable. As Table 3 shows, this desire is not specific to one location but instead was consistently given for Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Riley (2009) noted that Toyama University has had a three-week program to New Zealand, but that from this school year, the program has been lengthened to four weeks, providing additional evidence that this move away from three-week programs may be a national trend.

Length of program	Australia	U.K.	U.S.
Up to 2 weeks	40.91 %	28.57 %	33.33 %
3 weeks	4.55 %	4.76 %	4.17 %
4 weeks - 1 month	31.82 %	38.10 %	29.17 %
1 month - 6 months	22.73 %	23.81 %	29.17 %
1 year	0	4.76 %	4.17 %

Table 3. Cross-sectional examination of location and length of program.

Note. Responses that could not be accurately classified (e.g., "weeks") were removed.

In addition to demonstrating a propensity for students to favor one-month programs over three-week ones, Table 3 once again demonstrates the current popularity of shorter programs. Intuitively, most people assume that the longer the study abroad program, the more students will gain (Hansen, 2009). However, recent research, including the following four studies, has suggested that this does not have to be the case. McKeown (2009) found that the students who gained the most from studying abroad were those who were on their first trip out of their home country and discovered that after two weeks there was intellectual development that sometimes mimicked that of students who had been abroad for much longer periods of time.



Next, Hansen's research (2009) demonstrated that the degree of immersion and the quality of the program are two important factors that can offset the length of the program. He asserted that when students are there to "see" the country there may not be as large of an increase in cultural awareness as there is for students who "live in and are in" the country, even when the program is shorter. Hansen concluded that quality, not just the length, defines the value of a study abroad program.

Third, Ryan (2009) discussed a ten-day program to the Philippines. During their stay, Japanese students experience everyday life and its culture. One of the participants felt that through the experience he had grown exponentially; upon his return he claimed, "You took a boy to the Philippines, but I came back a man."

Finally, about 18 years ago, Arcadia University started offering first-year students the opportunity to participate in one-week overseas trips to four locations in Europe. These short-term programs proved to be an impetus for increased participation in year-long programs, with yearly participation increasing from four or five students to nearly 200 (Hulstrand, 2006). McKeown (2009, p. 6) concluded, "since college students tend to cite desire for travel and adventure as a primary motivator for studying abroad, colleges and universities should deliberately harness their students' interest in travel by designing as many study abroad programs as possible, including short-term programs, in order to satisfy this student demand without worrying erroneously that these programs are of little academic value." At Shimane University, approximately half of the students who apply for the long-term study abroad programs have previously studied in another country. These studies suggest that Shimane University students would personally benefit from the creation of a one-week or ten-day program, with the added possibility that participation in the three-week and ten-month programs may increase as a result.

#### IV. Necessity of Program Expansion: University Competitiveness

Guest and White (2009) called the expansion of international exchange programs crucial to "the survival of the university," particularly since the privatization of national universities has forced tertiary education to become more like a business (e.g., increased concerns over income and expenses). While one may want to discount the national trends discussed at the beginning of this paper by noting that leaders at Shimane University have no direct control over them, an examination of two other universities provides further evidence that Shimane University must become proactive rather than reactive in order to compete nationally. Chubu University, for example, requires all English majors to participate in a one-semester (approximately four month) overseas program in either the United States or Australia (Chubu University, n.d.). A second university, Osaka Gakuin University, has a population that is fairly comparable in size to Shimane University but offers nine different spring or summer programs ranging in length from 10 to 29 days;

the programs focus on language training (i.e., German, English, French, and Chinese) or outdoor activities as well as intercultural communication skills and adaptability (Osaka Gakuin University, n.d.). In addition, Osaka Gakuin University has year-long programs with nine universities in four countries (Osaka Gakuin University, n.d.). Equally important, the university offers overseas internships in nine locations, helping it achieve its "goal of developing international-minded individuals with a global vision and foreign language communication skills who can play an active role in the 21st-century world" (Osaka Gakuin University, n.d., *Overseas Internship*, second para.).

These two examples imply that, in addition to meeting students' needs and providing the education necessary for students to become true global citizens, expanding opportunities for study-abroad programs provides Faculties and universities a means to compete for prospective students. Japanese universities must now follow trends in global education, and when they do not, they will be less competitive, resulting in the university and its students and graduates facing increasingly limited opportunities (Gilmour, 2007, p. 32). A July 2009 article in the *Japan Times* emphasized this when discussing job seekers and the importance of not only language skills but also experiences living abroad, flexibility, and the ability to adapt to different cultures (Slodkowski, 2009). As the examples of Chubu University and Osaka Gakuin University illustrate, providing students with more options and opportunities to travel overseas within the safety of official programs creates a niche that Shimane University can utilize in this increasingly competitive market for tertiary students. Consequently, by fostering students' awareness of and perspectives on internationalization and study abroad, Shimane University can become a leader among universities in rural Japan. This is, therefore, one effective way to help control and direct the university's future.

## V. Directions for Future Research

The results of this study suggest two areas where additional research is necessary. First, although in part three of the questionnaire the term "study abroad" was used, part two discussed English programs exclusively, and as a result, the lack of responses indicating interest in studying in Asian and non-English-speaking European countries (e.g., France, Germany) should not be over interpreted. Additional research should measure Shimane University students' desire to study in these non-English speaking countries. Second, the questionnaire was administered to students who have an advanced English ability. Further research with lower level students is necessary to determine whether they plan to participate in study abroad programs during their four years at the university.

## VI. Conclusion

In our increasingly global, interrelated society, it is not surprising that the fourth goal in Shimane University's Charter is "to promote international exchange with Asian and other foreign countries" (Shimane University, n.d., p. 3). The University's Strategy for International Exchanges states that the mission is "from a global viewpoint, emphasizing the focus on the coalition with Asia" (Shimane University, n.d., p. 4). Considering Japan's status within the global and Asian communities, this focus seems natural, and continued expansion of the study abroad programs in Asia should be commended. However, the current research suggests that additional programs in the United States and a program in Australia should also be considered. Additional programs are essential if the university is going to obtain its vision "to develop salient international cooperation programs with various international institutions...to build Shimane University's *brand reputation* and cultivate the international competitiveness of students, staffs, and faculties" (Shimane University, n.d., p. 4 emphasis added). This same one-size-does-not-fit-all approach must be carried over to study abroad. To do this, more, rather than fewer, options must be provided to students. With more choices in types and durations of programs, students can select those that best meet their needs and objectives while at the same time matching their interests with their financial and linguistic restraints. This, in turn, will help the university become more nationally and internationally competitive.

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