

## The Asia Summer Program: An Asian Learning Experience in Japan

by David Williams (Josai International University, Tokyo)

### Introduction

In recent years, Japanese higher education has seen an enhanced drive to promote internationalization. This push to ‘globalize’ is epitomized by the 2009 *Global 30* (G30) program and the 2014 *Top Global University Project* (TGUP) - two initiatives of the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) that are geared towards developing the international profile of Japanese universities.

The G30 provided 13 universities with ¥200-300 million annually. This was followed by the TGUP which grants assistance to universities of up to ¥420 million annually until the year 2023. Its aims are to raise foreign student enrolment, expand the growth of English medium programs and encourage universities to take a more strategic approach towards international educational cooperation (Shimmi and Yonezawa, 2015).

For universities with a clear management approach, the benefits of receiving such sustained MEXT support are clear. However, with just 37 universities selected for the TGUP, a key question that remains is what should the other 700+ universities that have *not* received any monies do to globalize? One solution, according to Sandhu (2015), is for universities to adopt innovative strategies using existing networks of global partners.

### Josai International University and the AUPF

Josai International University (JIU) is a multi-campus private Japanese university of 6,000 students. It was established in 1992 with a network of over 100 global partners. Due to its outward-looking vision towards international education, JIU is ideally positioned to put Sandhu’s observations into practice. With this in mind, in 2005 the university helped to found the *Asian University Presidents’ Forum* (AUPF), an alliance focused on developing international education in Asia. From five founder members, this has grown to be a network of over 50 universities that work to promote the globalization of education in Asia through student exchanges and international programs.

Arguably the most successful AUPF initiative is the *Asia Summer Program* (ASP), an annual 3-week for-credit program that welcomes up to 250 students from AUPF member universities to one of the founding institutes that acts as host. The ASP features an academic program together with cultural and friendship activities. It was first held at Petra Christian University in Indonesia in 2012. In July 2015, JIU acted as the program’s 4<sup>th</sup> host.

### The Asia Summer Program 2015

Prior to holding ASP 2015, a busy schedule of administrative planning was drawn up in 2014 and a taskforce was established headed by the Director of JIU’s *International Education Center* with representatives from each faculty and campus. Progress meetings were held on a bi-weekly basis and key tasks carried out such as preparing English documentation and setting up a website and social media platforms. At the same time, a committee of 15-20 Japanese student helpers was created to plan a program of cultural and extracurricular activities that would form a cornerstone of the ASP.

At an early stage, it was decided to hold the ASP 2015 at all three of JIU’s campuses (two in Chiba, one in Saitama). Participating students pre-selected their campus according to the academic content offered. This required 3 sub-administrative structures to be set up that could allow for the inter-campus pooling of resources and ideas.

<b>Japan</b>	▪ Josai International University
<b>South Korea</b>	▪ Dongseo University
<b>China</b>	▪ Shenyang Normal University
<b>Philippines</b>	▪ Pan Pacific University
<b>Indonesia</b>	▪ Petra Christian University
<b>Malaysia</b>	▪ University of Malaysia Perlis ▪ Tunku Abdul Rahman University
<b>Thailand</b>	▪ Bangkok University ▪ Naresuan Christian University ▪ Rajamangala Univ. of Technology

Table 1 Asian Universities Participating in ASP

The ASP 2015 welcomed 140 students from 12 universities in 8 Asian countries together with 12 academic staff from AUPF founder members. The modular academic program included courses on tourism, culture, language and entrepreneurship. Students selected one course from 3 possible options for each of two sections (Table 2). These courses ran during the mornings for fifteen 90-minute sessions. The 18 courses that were offered were taught by six JIU academic staff and by three academics from each of the four AUPF founder members. Accommodation and outsourced catering for students and staff was provided at each respective campus, or at nearby hotels.

In the afternoons, a program of cultural exchange activities was offered. This was prepared and run by Japanese students, and included dance, culinary skills, traditional sports, local festivals,

homestays and sightseeing visits to Tokyo. At the end of the 3-week program, an optional 2-day sightseeing program to Mount Fuji was offered.

	Section A (Period 1 classes)	Section B (Period 2 classes)
Campus A	1 Culture and tourism in Korea 2 Wine Studies 3 Japanese Language	1 Tourism Destination Marketing 2 Heritage Tourism in Indonesia 3 English for Academic Purposes
Campus B	1 Japan and Westernization 2 Welfare and Culture in Japan 3 Critical Thinking Skills	1 Japanese Culture & Arts 2 Understanding Indonesia 3 Business and Economy in Japan
Campus C	1 Korea as a new power in Asia 2 Effective Public Speaking 3 Entrepreneurship	1 Global Business Excellence 2 Healthcare, Food and Medicine 3 Practical Japanese

Table 2 Academic Program for ASP 2015

### Successes and challenges

Welcoming a large group of Asian students for a program like the ASP is a major undertaking but one that can offer a number of merits for students, the host university and partner institutes.

First, the ASP format created a short-term 'ready-made' international environment for Japanese students. This was very effective for motivating 1<sup>st</sup> year students about to embark for study abroad and popular with 3<sup>rd</sup> year students returning from sojourns overseas. A key issue for educators in Japan is how to sustain the motivation of students returning from overseas. Anecdotal evidence suggests that programs like the ASP can provide one possible answer. The 'readymade' international environment was also a solution for students who, for financial or other reasons, were unable to join other study abroad programs.

A second merit is the leadership opportunities that the program created. Not only did Japanese students collaborate to design cultural activities but also acted as mentors, advisors and leaders for their guests during the program itself. In this latter role, the ASP provided students with ample opportunities for English practice with *Asian* speakers rather than with English native speakers. As more than 80% of Japan's inbound visitors are from non-native English-speaking Asian countries, such experience is invaluable for students planning to enter the tourism or hospitality industries in Japan.

Holding the ASP also benefitted our university by enabling it to realize goals similar to those

set by the 37 TGUP institutes. In addition to internationalizing student life and involving foreign students, by offering an academic program taught exclusively in English by staff from international partner institutes, the ASP exemplifies the notion of strategic international educational co-operation. Since the program offers transferrable credits for academic courses, it champions the idea of international compatibility in higher education. Such benefits can only be of help to participating institutes in their goal to reach a 'global' standard.

Despite receiving positive testimonies, holding a large multinational program like the ASP can present a number of challenges. In addition to administrative headaches caused by the multi-campus format, the lack of administrative staff able to produce documentation in English acutely flagged the challenges Japanese universities face in developing a campus-wide English environment.

Perhaps the most significant challenge for our university, however, was *Ramadan*, the Islamic month of fasting, part of which fell during the first week of ASP 2015. The program welcomed 30 practicing Muslims (10 at each campus). Although Japanese organizers were aware of food sensitivities, it was not possible to find a local catering service that would prepare freshly cooked meals at 5 a.m. when Muslim students needed them. Instead breakfasts were prepared the night before and given as *bento* lunch boxes. This created some criticism at the start of the program and required a director-level response to ensure student satisfaction. Although awareness of *halal* and other dietary requirements is growing in Japan, the experience can act as a lesson for universities planning to expand their presence in Asia.

As a means to improve a university's global credentials, programs based on networks of overseas partners can be effective for internationalizing Japanese universities. Although not without challenges, a program like the *Asia Summer Program* can be a template for Japanese higher education institutes that have not received government funding but are eager to globalize and offer innovative global education programs.

### References

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**David Williams** Josai International University,  
Togane, Chiba, Japan <davidokj2@gmail.com>