

(2nd of 2 installments)

Special article for promotion of Japan-US student exchange



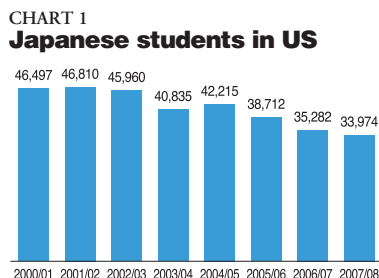
Trends in International Educational Exchange between Japan & the United States

By Anthony C. OGDEN

In the May/June 2009 issue of *Japan SPOTLIGHT*, editor Natsuko Toyoda wrote nostalgically about her time as an exchange student during the 1990s in the cornfields of Iowa. She reflected on her interactions with her US host family, themselves immigrants from former Czechoslovakia, and of her experiences attending Turkey Valley Community School. She described her admiration of the Amish and their horse-drawn carriages canvassing the Midwestern landscape. The essay reminds readers of the importance of developing an appreciation and respect for other cultures. For Toyoda, studying abroad for a year allowed her to not only experience a different culture, but to also look at herself and her home culture in a new and reflexive way.

For this *Promenade* installment, Toyoda asked the Japan Special Interest Group (SIG) of NAFSA: Association of International Educators to further expand on the value of international educational exchange and to highlight trends between the United States and Japan. The association, originally known as the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers when incepted in 1948, has since changed its name. NAFSA serves international educators and their institutions and organizations by setting standards of good practice, providing training and professional development opportunities, and advocating for international education. NAFSA has nearly 10,000 members at 3,500 institutions worldwide, representing over 150 countries. Within NAFSA, the Japan SIG has served as a forum for more than 20 years for those interested in furthering educational exchange with Japan and as a working group to develop resources, exchange ideas and information, and network professionally. The Japan SIG works in partnership with the Japan Network for International Education (JAFSA) and the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO).

According to NAFSA, students like Toyoda who live and learn in countries and cultures other than their own gain important global knowledge and intercultural competency that better enables them to succeed in a global climate of constant change. Through their experiences abroad, students also develop essential foreign-language skills through cultural immersion that is unavailable in their campus classrooms. In particular, educational exchange between the United States and Japan has a long history, with key milestones stretching back to 1872 when two Japanese students came to study law at Harvard University, and 1963, when Earlham College organized the first exchange program with Waseda University. Although contemporary trends suggest that this relationship remains strong, there are key strategic differences emerging in the national policy initiatives of the two countries.



Source: *Open Doors*, 2008, *Institute of International Education*

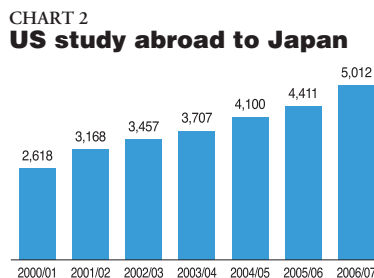
International Education & the United States

The United States remains the world's most popular destination for international students. The number of international students at US colleges and universities increased by 7% to a record high of 623,805 in 2007/08, according to the *Open Doors* report published annually by the Institute of International Education (IIE). According to Allan E. Goodman, president of the IIE, "The steady increase in the number of international students in the United States reflects actions taken by the US government and many individual colleges and universities to ensure that international students know they are welcome here, and that we appreciate how they contribute to the intellectual and cultural environment on campus and in the wider community."

Accounting for 61% of the total international student population, Asia remains the region sending the most students to the United States, with a 10% increase in 2007/08. India is the leading sending country, followed by China and South Korea. There has been a continued drop in the number of students from Japan, the fourth-leading sender, down by 4% to 33,974, declining for the third consecutive year (*Chart 1*). Business and management remain the most popular fields of study for international students, followed by engineering.

According to the IIE, international students contribute more than \$15.5 billion to the US economy. In fact, US higher education is one of the country's largest service sector exports, as international students provide revenue to the US economy through tuition and living expenses, including room and board, books and supplies, transportation, health insurance, support for accompanying family members, and so on.

Recognizing the value of international education in today's global society, US undergraduate students are studying abroad in record numbers. According to the IIE, the number of Americans studying abroad increased by 8% to 241,791 in the 2006/07 academic year. This latest increase marks a decade of unprecedented growth in the number of American students receiving academic credit for their experiences abroad, with an increase of close to 150% from under 100,000 in 1996/97 to nearly 250,000 in 2006/07.



Although Europe continues to host the largest share of American students (57%), Japan remains a very popular destination. Since 2001/2002, student flows to Japan have seen an average annual increase of 11.5%, with an impressive 13.6%

increase in the most recent reporting cycle. In 2006/07, just over 5,000 American students studied in Japan. Although study abroad to neighboring China has risen dramatically in recent years, hosting more than 11,000 American students in 2006/07, all indicators point to continued growth in study abroad to Japan (Chart 2).

Although study abroad participation is increasing, institutional and financial barriers prevent many US students from studying abroad. *The Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act* has been introduced into Congress as legislation with the goal of dramatically increasing the number and diversity of students studying abroad by increasing available funding. Within 10 years of the date of enactment, not fewer than one million US undergraduate students will be studying abroad for credit.

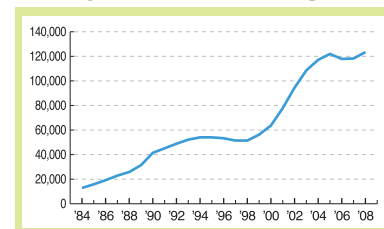
International Education & Japan

The number of Japanese students studying abroad has also increased in recent years. Based on statistics gathered from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the IIE and other organizations, 82,945 Japanese students studied abroad in 37 major countries in 2004, which is an increase of 11% over the previous year. Generally, about 70% of Japanese students study at educational institutions in Europe or the United States. Unlike most American students who study abroad as part of their undergraduate education, many Japanese students choose to study full-time and graduate from foreign institutions. Japanese students are thought to study abroad mainly to gain international experience and to improve their English proficiency.

The number of international students studying in Japan has similarly increased in recent years. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and JASSO, 123,829 international students were studying in Japan as of May 1, 2008, which signals a 4.5% increase over the previous year (Chart 3). The leading countries of origin are China, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam and Malaysia. JASSO reports that only 2,024 American students studied abroad in Japan in 2008, of whom 1,447 were classified as short-term international students. As was noted above, the number of short-term study abroad students reported by US institutions was much larger. This discrepancy in reporting between the two countries has important implications for American students in Japan, many of whom do not enroll in Japanese universities as regular students or participate in official university exchange programs.

In Japan, “short-term student exchange programs” refer mainly to exchanges based on agreements made between universities. The purpose of the exchange is not necessarily for students to obtain a degree but rather to allow them to study at a foreign university, to experience a different culture, or to master a foreign language. As such, MEXT does not account for those American students participating on increasingly popular short-term educational travel programs to Japan or students entering Japan on non-student visas. Continued underreporting of American students traveling to Japan for educational purposes may work to only further marginalize this population of students into programs administered by American organizations and steer Japanese universities away from capitalizing on the potential value of this largely hidden clientele. With greater knowledge of such trends in international educational exchange, Japanese institutions would be better positioned to respond with diverse programming and student services that could work to further internationalize their campuses and curricula.

CHART 3
Foreign students in Japan



Source: JASSO (www.jasso.go.jp)

These issues are not preventing the Japanese government from issuing policy initiatives to boost its number of international students. In his speech to the 169th session of the Diet in January 2008, then

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda put forward a “Plan for 300,000 Exchange Students” that would create *A Japan that is Open to the World*. The government hopes to increase its share of international students in Japan to 300,000 by 2020. Until now, Japan’s policy for accepting international students has been based on the *Recommendations for a Foreign Student Policy for the Twenty-First Century*, which was advanced by former Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone in 1983. The plan proposed to increase the number of international students in Japan 10-fold to 100,000. The plan reached its numerical target in 2003, and the number of students continues to rise.

Though much is still unclear, the new plan proposes to help universities to hire more English-speaking professors/lecturers, offer more courses taught in English, and increase the number of Japanese-language classes for foreign students. The plan also emphasizes the need to simplify immigration procedures and provide more inexpensive and reliable student accommodation. Though the plan primarily targets degree-seeking students, there appears to be the promise of added recognition and opportunities for short-term exchange students.

Conclusion

Today’s global challenges demand international competence. Whether studying abroad for just one semester or as matriculated student at a foreign institution, students living and studying in countries and cultures other than their own learn important skills that enable them to better navigate today’s globalizing society. While the United States is poised to continue welcoming its rising tide of international students, there has been significant momentum in recent years to dramatically boost undergraduate study abroad. Supporting these efforts is the US government, which has come to view study abroad as a matter of national and economic security. In the United States, the emphasis is on short-term study abroad for academic credit. In Japan, the focus is less on study abroad and more about increasing the number of international students. With nearly 93% of its international student population coming from Asia, it will be essential for Japan to realize its goals through student diversification. Reaching out to US undergraduate students by providing inclusive programming and student support may be a welcomed step in this direction.

The Japan SIG welcomes all who are interested in supporting international educational exchange with Japan and furthering NAFSA’s goals of advancing learning and scholarship, building understanding and respect among different peoples, and enhancing constructive leadership in the global community. More information can be found at www.nafsa.org/japansig. **JS**

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