

# Developing Global Leaders at Hitotsubashi University Graduate School of International Corporate Strategy

By Christina AHMADJIAN

The Hitotsubashi University Graduate School of International Corporate Strategy (ICS) was founded in 2000 to develop global professionals for the 21st century. Its mission is to develop global business leaders, for Japan, Asia and the world, and to create knowledge and disseminate research output originating from Japan on a global scale. ICS achieves its mission with a curriculum that combines global-standard MBA classes with content particularly relevant to Japan and Asia.

ICS has three programs to develop professionals: a full-time, MBA program in International Business Strategy taught in English, and evening programs in Finance and Business Law, taught in Japanese. The International Business Strategy course is truly international, and is designed to educate a diverse group of young business professionals to become global business leaders, in their home countries and around the world.



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## Students from Around the World

Every year, about 70-80% of the students in the International Business Strategy program are non-Japanese. Over 15 countries are represented in the student body. While most of the non-Japanese students are from Asia, ICS students come from all over the world, including the US, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Spain, Italy, Russia, France, Ireland, Australia, Saudi Arabia and Dubai. A broad range of Asian countries are also represented: China, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Myanmar, and India, among many others. ICS is truly a multicultural environment, with no dominant culture.

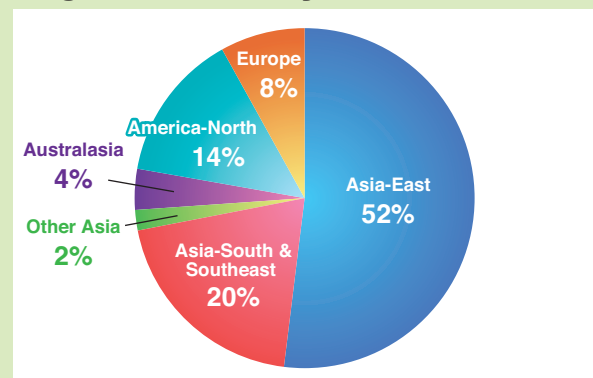
International students come to ICS for a variety of reasons. Many come because they would like to work in Japanese companies, in either Japan or their home countries. Others come because they would like to do business with Japanese companies, or because they would like to learn from Japanese companies about innovation, quality and service, and bring these lessons back to their home countries. Other students come to ICS as a way to differentiate themselves from the many MBA graduates in the world—they have found that companies value their global insights, and the lessons they have learned and skills that they have developed at ICS and in Japan.

Japanese students are also diverse. Some Japanese students at ICS attend through company sponsorship, while others come independently, seeking a career or job change. Some have been educated abroad and have been thriving already in global careers, and want to continue to develop their knowledge and skills. Others have had little international exposure, and come to ICS to begin their journey of becoming global business leaders. Although they strive to become

global leaders, they would like to do so while remaining rooted in Japan—to become global leaders, with a Japanese perspective.

Because ICS has such a diverse group of students, it offers several types of programs and activities to fit student needs. Students can choose between a one-year program and a two-year program. Students in both programs take the same core classes in the first year. Students who go on to the second year can choose between an internship at a company in Japan or globally, or spend one term visiting one of 12 partner schools—including UCLA, London Business School, Kellogg, ESADE, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Beijing University and Seoul National University. Students also work closely with faculty members, in small seminars, which are a tradition of Hitotsubashi University, and in independent research projects.

## Regional diversity of ICS students



Source: Hitotsubashi University

## What is Global Leadership?

Several words come immediately to mind when we think of globalization. These include speed, ambiguity, uncertainty, risk, competition, change and, of course, diversity. Global leaders not only need knowledge of different cultures and different systems of business, but also need skills and experience to make decisions and lead others in a world where there is no right answer, people have different values and ways of thinking, the future is not certain, and everything has to be done at a pace that gets faster every year.

Since the Lehman Shock and the subsequent world financial crisis, uncertainty has just gotten greater. Ten years or so ago, there was a growing consensus that the US represented the “global standard” of business, and that global business education meant teaching US management practices and philosophy. No more. Enron and Lehman Brothers have taught us the limits of US-style management. On the other hand, recent scandals and crises in Japan have showed just as strongly the limits of Japanese-style management.

The MBA curriculum at ICS teaches students that there is not one best way of management. And because there is no one best way, innovation in business comes from facing paradox, combining opposites, and acknowledging ambiguity. At ICS, students are required to work in diverse teams - not just once but again and again. Most classes are conducted based on the case method - meaning that students discuss several cases every day, they weigh the pros and cons of their recommendations and debate with their classmates - but they learn that there is never a right answer. Students are required to operate out of their comfort zones, through team-building experiences, active and challenging case discussions, and an intense workload, filled with heavy assignments and tight deadlines.

## Combining Best of Two Worlds

ICS focuses its program around the theme of the Best of Two Worlds. This describes the ICS philosophy that global leaders must face paradox and ambiguity, and that there is no one right way. At ICS, the Best of Two Worlds combines East and West; Old and New; Large and Small; Cooperation and Competition; Global and Local; and Business and Society.

ICS combines East and West with a curriculum that combines content from a western-style MBA, such as Finance, Accounting, Marketing, Strategy, and Organizational Behavior, with courses that have a more intuitive, eastern dimension, such as Knowledge Creation. Cases taught include both cases on western multinationals and cases on Japanese companies, many of which were developed by ICS faculty members. Guest speakers in ICS classes include leading Japanese corporate executives, who give a distinctively Japanese outlook on business. ICS combines Theory and Practice with a faculty that is balanced between leading scholars and business practitioners, including former consultants and investment bankers. Classes as well are balanced between theory and practical insight.

ICS combines Small and Large through global and local networks. The program in International Business Strategy at ICS is very small - only 50 to 60 incoming students each year,



and a student-faculty ratio of about 1:3. On the other hand, ICS is connected to a network of leading business schools around the world, allowing its students to take advantage of a wide range of courses, and ICS faculty members have broad business networks in Japan and around the world.

ICS combines Business and Society with a strong emphasis on values. During Knowledge Week, students spend their time exploring their own values and those of their classmates, and creating career plans that reflect their own values. Students discuss and debate cases that highlight conflicts between business and society. In the required Global Citizenship course, students spend time with mentally challenged children, homeless people, and handicapped people, to understand these social issues from different perspectives, and to think about how business can be more socially relevant.

## BEST Business School Alliance

In the global economy, networks are of the utmost importance. It is no longer possible to stand alone, or to be isolated. The centerpiece of ICS's network is the BEST Business School Alliance, signed in January 2011 by ICS, the Guanghua School of Management at Beijing University and Seoul National University Graduate School of Business. BEST stands for Beijing, Seoul, and Tokyo, and the vision of this alliance is to bring the best business schools in East Asia together, to design programs to develop the future business leaders of Asia. The BEST Business School Alliance includes exchange of students, double degree programs, joint faculty research, interaction with business leaders, and symposiums in the three countries. The BEST Alliance was recently the winner of a prestigious CAMPUS Asia grant, jointly presented by the governments of Japan, China and Korea.

## Learning Global Leadership in Japan

Global leadership is not simply about speaking English or having knowledge of other countries. Today, global leadership requires skills to manage in an environment characterized by risk, diversity, complexity, ambiguity and change. ICS provides an integrated curriculum consisting of classes, internships, exchange programs and team projects specially designed to build these skills. It offers both Japanese and non-Japanese students the opportunity to live full-time in a truly global community, in Japan. **JS**

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