

Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University Leads Fostering of Global Human Resources

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APU students chatting and laughing, with the Twin Towers, known as the APU symbol, in the background
Photo: Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University

Japan, about 2.8 million students attend the approximately 780 four-year universities, but the overall percentages of both foreign students and foreign teachers are no more than around 3%. The number of Japanese students studying overseas has now dropped to below 60,000, from its peak in 2005 of 80,000. Since the 1991 “revisions” of the standards for establishing universities, each university’s training and education has weakened, to a greater or lesser extent; meanwhile, it is still usual for “one-way teaching” in the same old style to take place, with no development of the skills said to be essential for global personnel, such as critical thinking ability and the ability to put forth logical arguments. As a result, from the corporate perspective, even graduates of so-called name universities lack something as global personnel. If that is the case, doesn’t it make more sense to employ eager students from China, South Korea, and other Asian countries instead?

Changes in HR Demand in Response to Globalization

In recent years, economic globalization has been steadily progressing. In the corporate world, too, not only companies involved in manufacturing but also those in a wide range of fields such as finance, insurance, distribution, IT, and retail sales are gradually transferring their bases from Japan, with its declining population and increasingly ageing society, to overseas. Disliking factors such as the high rate of corporate tax, high labor costs, uncertain supply of electricity, high risk of natural disasters, and the various kinds of Japanese governmental regulations that cover everything like a mesh, corporations that are steadily shifting overseas not only their production and sales bases but also their R&D bases constitute a certain amount of the increase.

Moreover, in an extension of this trend, there is a rapid growth in companies that are seeking personnel not only within Japan but overseas too. While some corporations now choose non-Japanese for as much as 70% of their new employees, others are developing recruiting activities in newly emerging economies such as China, in addition to the US and Europe. If they intend to conduct business overseas and deal with foreign corporations, they will need to understand international commercial practices, business needs, labor law systems, tax regulations, and administrative styles of action, and the culture, history, religion, etc. that underlie all of these in the respective country, as well as develop the ability to communicate in English and/or the language of the country they are operating in. It is no exaggeration to say that, for all kinds of companies, in all kinds of fields, we are now in a period when there is a need to have, at the very least, a global business sense.

How Are Universities Responding to Globalization?

So it is natural to ask, are the kinds of personnel required to meet such corporate needs being fostered at Japanese universities? Unfortunately, the answer is “No, except in only a very few cases.” In

Government Measures for Globalization of Universities

In these circumstances, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has not simply given up. In FY 2008 MEXT laid out the “300,000 Overseas Students” plan, implementing a wide range of measures, in conjunction with other ministries and agencies, with the goal of increasing the number of overseas students in Japan from 120,000 to 300,000 in 10 years. While implementing the G30 Program to provide financial support to universities that are attempting to increase their foreign student numbers three-fold or four-fold, from this financial year, through the Global HR Fostering Support Program (G30 Plus), financial support is also being provided to universities that are actively working to send Japanese students to study abroad.

Through the above measures, various projects are being undertaken, such as the establishment of courses whereby it is possible to gain academic degrees by studying in English alone, setting up overseas offices to serve as bases for student recruitment, distributing overseas study coordinators, and expanding student exchange agreements with overseas universities. Moreover, in the last two decades or so, several more fundamental measures have also been implemented in order to make university education more attractive to foreign students by improving its quality.

The Wall of Globalization

However, since the globalization of universities means that reform of the fundamental state of university education is required, it won’t happen so quickly. It is easy to speak of greater use of English in university education, but the number of Japanese teachers who can give lectures in English is limited, while there would be a large burden involved in preparing English materials, marking reports written in English, and advising on papers compiled in English. In that case, an obvious suggestion would be to hire more foreign teachers.

Efforts for Fostering Global HR

But if they were to take over the posts of Japanese teachers there would be great resistance, while it would also be necessary to strengthen the English ability of administrative employees who would have to deal with foreign teachers who don't speak Japanese, and faculty meetings and other discussions would have to be held in both Japanese and English.

Obtaining outstanding foreign students involves a large financial burden, including the payment of scholarships and exemption of fees, as well as the cost of building dormitories. For overseas study, not only are English language ability and mental toughness required, but since the experience has only a little benefit when job-searching in Japan, there is also a need for universities to build a powerful support system, such as making agreements with overseas universities to recognize credits so that study overseas can be undertaken without students having to take a leave of absence from their own university; offering scholarships; providing a wide range of information; and giving support on advancement paths after students return to Japan. Junichi Hamada, chancellor of the University of Tokyo, was quoted in a recent issue of the *Yomiuri Shimbun* bemoaning the fact that no more than 0.4% of its students go overseas to study, and so that will not produce strong graduates from his university. To a greater or lesser degree, however, this in fact is the actual state of the level of "globalization" of Japanese universities.

Ritsumeikan APU's Challenge: Building a Cross-Cultural Environment

With "Fostering Promising HR Who Can Contribute to Building the Future of the Asia-Pacific" as its slogan, APU is a young university that opened in 2000, through the material and psychological support of Oita Prefecture and Beppu city. From the start, it had as its top-priority goal "the three 50s" – gathering 50% of students from 50 countries around the world, and having 50% of its academic staff of a foreign nationality – to create a cross-cultural environment encompassing students from differing backgrounds in which both students and faculty members can have friendly competition, and to train personnel that will become active throughout the world. This is a goal that is easier to mention than achieve; members of staff visited many countries, especially in Asia, and exhausted themselves going to numerous high schools where they recruited outstanding, highly motivated students. They also recruited teachers from all over the world, who in principle could give education in both English and Japanese, and conducted repeated interviews that included giving mock lessons.

These unstinting efforts bore fruit, and currently, of the 5,734 students including post-graduates, a total of 2,526 (44.1%) are foreign and come from 83 countries or regions of the world. Meanwhile, about half of the teachers are non-Japanese, coming from 27 countries. About 90% of the students are from China, South Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia, but they are also actively welcomed from other regions such as the Middle East (14 from Saudi Arabia and elsewhere), Africa (42), and the US and Europe (208), with efforts being made to foster a global cross-cultural environment. Because of this, each year APU provides scholarships to foreign students amounting to about 1.9 billion yen, the equivalent of about 20% of the university budget. In the 10 years since our opening up until FY 2010, about 14.5 billion yen in scholarships has been paid to a total of about 19,000 foreign students. Of this amount, about 4 billion yen came from donations from 237 companies that were in sympathy with APU's philosophy when it opened; this corporate support is also a major factor behind the still-infant APU's having somehow achieved a certain degree of independence.

One of the biggest obstacles for foreign students in Japan is the acquisition of the Japanese language. At APU we have removed this obstacle and set up a "Japanese-English bilingual education system" whereby it is possible to take entrance exams in English, to make it easier for foreign students to enter our university. Students who have entered APU on the basis of the English standard study Japanese intensively during their first two years, and can start attending lectures given in Japanese from their third year. (Students who entered APU based on the Japanese-language standards learn English and take classes taught in English from their third year.) In fact, about 80% of specialized subjects are taught in both English and Japanese. Also, we have implemented biannual entrance exams in both spring and autumn, to help resolve differences in the timing of the academic year in various countries. Furthermore, we are aware of the importance of "Asia-Pacific languages" and provide instruction in six languages from basic to advanced levels: Chinese, Korean, Malay, Spanish, Thai, and Vietnamese.

The diverse abilities required of global HR cannot be expected to be obtained by classroom study alone. At APU we carry out many kinds of programs, such as experiential study overseas, overseas training programs in English and Asian languages, on-site surveys both within Japan and overseas, and study exchange programs abroad ranging in length from one semester to one year. Many students participate in these programs each year. Furthermore, on the APU campus there is an "international education dormitory" with a capacity of 1,300 people, and every foreign student has to live here during their first year at APU. In the dormitory, 300 of the rooms are a "shared type" where foreign students and Japanese students live together and can develop friendships. Also, senior students known as "resident assistants" provide support for dormitory residents in their daily lives and plan events to promote international exchange. At the national culture-introduction event called "multicultural week" the participation of students not only from the particular countries in question but also other countries is increasing year by year. This event plays an essential role in providing unparalleled opportunities for cross-cultural exchange.

APU in the Future

Students who are trained in this way choose diverse paths as they move onwards, such as going on to do post-graduate study at top-class universities both in Japan and abroad, including the University of Tokyo and Harvard University; entering Japanese companies or government agencies; or undertaking activities at NPOs. Corporate "on-campus recruiters" come to APU to provide explanations about their companies and conduct interviews; these have increased rapidly in recent years and currently number over 400 companies. Now that 12 years have passed since APU's opening, I feel at last that there is an increasingly high evaluation of the APU philosophy and its fostering of global personnel.

At the same time, stimulated by APU's success, global-style universities and faculties are being developed in different areas of Japan, resulting in increasingly severe competition among universities. Moreover, there is a strong counter-current, such as the extremely high yen and the nuclear reactor crisis, and the effect on students from countries with which Japan has territorial disputes, such as China and South Korea. APU will make further efforts to develop and remain a leader in the globalization of Japanese universities as a whole. **JS**

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