

***Building International Networks among Universities:
Understanding the Challenges and Creating Opportunities***

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International collaboration with faculty and administrators can be stimulating and productive but it can also be challenging, particularly when it comes to the execution of a joint project. Often priority is given to defining and clarifying the goals and content of the project itself. Although this is critical, equally important are understanding the cross-cultural context and identifying areas that must be addressed if collaboration or even meaningful sharing of knowledge and information is to have any chance for success.

Basic assumptions about everything from the educational system and institutional governance to specialized terminology can be starkly different in practice even though they may appear very similar on the surface. For instance, how would a given project be affected by the fact that the Japanese educational system is highly centralized while the U.S. system is on the whole very decentralized? Appreciating this kind of underlying systemic difference may be particularly germane when assessing the applicability of internationalization models, or when establishing formal academic links such as dual degree programs.

Professional and institutional relationships across cultures can be extraordinarily rich and productive. Too often well intentioned efforts fall short of their intended goals. Seminars and workshops on internationalization of higher education may be stimulating at the time but may not be applicable to your home institution, or a scheme to send junior researchers abroad may be unsuccessful for reasons that are not always clear. Effective transnational collaboration takes into account the realities of the target environment.

Once the importance of the cultural context has been recognized, it must be acted on. People who can provide background and interpret the context must be included in the process. Often such resources are found outside a specific academic department or even the school and require reaching across institutional barriers, or even outside the institution. In the long term, it is well worth the effort and will result in transnational learning and interaction that is productive and rewarding.

(*No PowerPoint slides from this presenter)

Q&A

Yamamoto: Thank you very much Mr. Shepherd. You have talked about your childhood experience and also about the international activities nowadays in universities. I believe it was really clear what the message was. I believe there must be many questions, comments from the floor. Would anybody like to start?

Q: You have been involved in this for a long time, have you seen any changes in the attitudes of the students who are coming to Japan, specifically, from the U.S., in what they seek in their experience or the motivations?

Shepherd: The most radical and perhaps the most obvious change is the extraordinary groundswell of interest in Japan having to do with anime, manga and pop culture. I see evidence of this both anecdotally and through my own experience having been back in the U.S. now for about four years. Just a few weeks ago, I was visiting a high school outside of Houston, with a student population of 90% Black and 10% Hispanic. I was visiting a few classes with teachers who introduced “things Japanese” into their classrooms in various creative ways. I also visited a gathering of the Japan culture club that had just been established. There were 30 or 40 students; almost all were there because they had some interest in anime and manga. They were very proud of what they had done and showed me their art work. I also spent 30 or 40 minutes answering very perceptive questions, not just about anime, but about Japanese culture and how much they wanted to learning the Japanese language. This was all motivated by their interest in anime and manga. This seems like an untapped area. I am sure there are some people in the U.S. doing it, but I think there are not enough teachers who use anime and manga in creative ways to study the Japanese language and get the students interested in mainstream Japanese culture. I see this as a real opportunity. Getting back to your reference to science and technology, here again anime and manga could present some very interesting possibilities since the field uses technology in so many creative ways, including graphic design.

Yamamoto: Thank you very much. Anyone else?

Q: Thank you very much for sharing with us your insights into this really important point about understanding the cultural context. It brings to mind the importance of understanding the teaching and learning process in the classroom, because a lot of

cultural differences are at play with both faculty and students in the classroom. So it seems that this really is important for all of us to look at how we can better work with our faculty in preparing them to teach students from different cultures and the importance of preparing our students for going into different contexts. I know that within the United States, institutions are trying to better work with students in preparing them to study in such places as Japan, beyond just the logistical aspects of how to get around or how to pack, but really in trying to understand the cultural context within the classroom. So I wonder if you have any further suggestions or ideas about faculty and student preparation for crossing the cultural barriers in the classroom. Thank you.

Shepherd: Thank you. I could not agree more. I did not dwell on the training aspect so much in this particular talk, but certainly this kind of training and orientation is critical, not only for students, but also for faculty or researchers who are heavily involved with various kinds of programming abroad. In some ways the more specific the program the easier it is, in theory, to build a training program for it. If the target group are students, there is curriculum that can be introduced into the classroom that build on anticipating a certain culture and language. In terms of faculty members, if you are dealing with Americans going to Japan, you can start with



Mr. Shepherd

introductions and the importance of business cards. Some might consider this to be superficial but this process is also symbolic of the way business is done in Japan. The social importance of things like the exchange of business cards are sometimes dismissed because they are so commonplace. But, I think it represents what I am suggesting; namely, recognizing the importance of understanding the context, the environment where you're going to teach, do research or study. One of the unfortunate things is that often when you start cutting budgets cross-cultural training is one of the first things to go. Say you have a well-designed 6-month study abroad to Japan. The program has been set up optimally so that 6 months prior to departure students receive some language and cross-cultural training, they go to their destination, and on return, the students participate in a special seminar that enables them to talk about their study abroad experience. If the budget cuts result in both ends getting cut off, pretty soon you still have the going to Japan, but they are just plopped down. It is not the end of the world, but I think for the student, it makes the experience more productive and much richer when there are pre- and post- segments. For those who are involved in research abroad, I think not understanding the context could have dire consequences because you

might not know what kind of a lab environment you're getting and what kind of norms and expectations there are at the university. All of this can be very subtle and can have significant impact on the quality of the experience abroad, not to mention the actual research. I think much of this can be anticipated and put in a format that can be learned. I'm sure most of you here today already do this, but over the years I have heard of so many situations where it has not been done. Often what happens is that when the effort to set up a research abroad program is done on a shoestring and does not succeed, it mysteriously gets put on ice and nothing happens after that. Much of what I have been suggesting is also implicit in Kimura-sensei's talk: people are very important in this process and the knowledge, skills and depth of experience of the person and persons involved is absolutely critical to the success of what we are all trying to do in the internationalization of higher education. We can accomplish this through personal experience, training, and education. It may not always be possible for participating faculty or students to receive the optimum training prior to their experience abroad, but it is absolutely essential for those serving as resources on campus to have the experience and training that we have been talking about.

Yamamoto: One more question maybe.

Yonezawa: Thank you very much. My name is Akiyoshi Yonezawa from Tohoku University. I was very interested in what you said about the relationship between Japan and the United States, especially with regard to university branch campuses in the 1980s. This history is very interesting to me. Related to that issue, over about the past 20 years, most countries, including the United States and Japan, have placed more priority on multilateral relationships than they do bilateral relationships. This can, for example, be seen in Japan's diversifying relationships with Southeast Asian countries. At the same time, the US, which used to have a more-focused interest in Japan, is now expanding its relationships with other countries. China has become a very important partner for everyone, and South Korea also has a close relationship with the United States. My point is that we are now living in a world of highly complex, mutually multilateral relationships. In this new context, my question is: What do you think about the future prospects of the U.S.-Japan relationship, especially in terms of higher education and scientific collaboration?

Shepherd: Thank you for the good question. Looking at the educational relationship between Japan and the United States on a whole variety of levels such as student

exchange, student flows, faculty flows in the greater context of the world and of the U.S.-Japan relationship, is very interesting and critical. Over the years, the global environment has changed radically but I think that the U.S.-Japan relationship is very important, not just geo-politically, but in terms of what we have come to share over the years relating to education. It is true that our two societies look at the educational context differently. However, there is a lot of value that is shared and these kinds of gatherings can strengthen that. With reference to branch campuses in Japan, I do not think their failure was related necessarily to the changing order of the world or the changing dynamic in Asia with China rising and so on. I think that there were many reasons why most of the branch campuses failed, but one of them was lack of local official support, and serious miss-steps by both the U.S. and Japanese partners. In the end, they failed to draw students. So, why didn't they draw students? Two critical factors were 1) the branch campuses were not officially recognized ("accredited") educational institution on the Japan side, and 2) the money ran out on the Japan side. One of the things that attracted U.S. institutions here that I think is critical to your point, is they for the most part they were not drawn here because of their interest in Japan. Many institutions, particularly smaller ones, were drawn here because they were given the opportunity of coming in and starting an international program that was fully funded by the partner in Japan. I think for many institutions, this was an offer that was very difficult to refuse. They were approached by an entity in Japan that offered to fully underwrite the branch campus, often with additional monetary incentives. This was mesmerizing for a lot of the smaller institutions. I was heavily involved in two efforts to establish branch campuses in Japan. Fortunately or unfortunately, in both cases the decision was made not to establish a branch campus. This was probably good. I am afraid I did not fully answer your question, but that would require quite a bit more time I am afraid.

Yamamoto: Thank you very much. I am afraid that we have to stop taking questions because we have to keep up with the schedule. And we will be having a separate reception this evening during which period you can personally ask that question. So once again, I would like to ask that you give Mr. Samuel a big round of applause.