

西九州大学
健康栄養学部紀要
第1巻別刷
(2015)

Approach to Designing Study Abroad Programs for Global Awareness

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(Accepted: February 25, 2015)

Study abroad is quickly becoming an integral part of university education. English speaking skills and an understanding of world cultures are a necessity in this global age, even for non-English majors. The purpose of this paper is to examine the study abroad programs at Nishikyushu University in 2013. Study abroad programs include ones to affiliated universities and a field work trip. Additionally, the findings of a questionnaire completed by students who went abroad will be evaluated. Also, students gave their valuable opinions on pre/post departure seminars and their own personal thoughts about language ability. Finally, this paper looks at what programs and strategies should be embraced to increase students' global awareness. By building on the foundation of what has been done in the past, study abroad programs will evolve into solid, secure and unique learning experiences.

Key words: study abroad, pre and post departure seminars, global human resources, global awareness

1 Introduction

How does a university like Nishikyushu University with no English Department, go about equipping its students with language skills to make the most of their study abroad? Indeed this a good question and one that this paper attempts to answer. Presently at Nishikyushu University, an Overseas Training Program for students wishing to study abroad is available for credit. From 2015, Nishikyushu University will be offering an additional Study Abroad Course in English for credit to students considering studying abroad. As for language studies, at present there is no study abroad language course in itself.

As Nagahara Gakuen approaches its 70th anniversary, Nishikyushu University (herein NU) has started to expand its connections with other institutions around the world. At present, NU plans to be affiliated with approximately 10 universities, mainly in the Asian region. Programs sending students abroad, as well as receiving students from abroad, are increasing. In the 2013 academic year, 15 students from NU and 10 students from Nishikyushu University Junior College (herein NUJC) went abroad on sponsored programs. Over the next 3 years, NU is aiming to increase this number to 40 students as a project of Nishikyushu University Group International Exchange Center (provisional name) which will be established in April 2015. By 2021, the aim is to have sent a total of 100 students abroad.

This paper looks at what programs took place in 2013, the results of a questionnaire completed by students who took part in the programs, what measures need be taken to design programs geared toward global awareness and how to prepare NU students for SA programs.

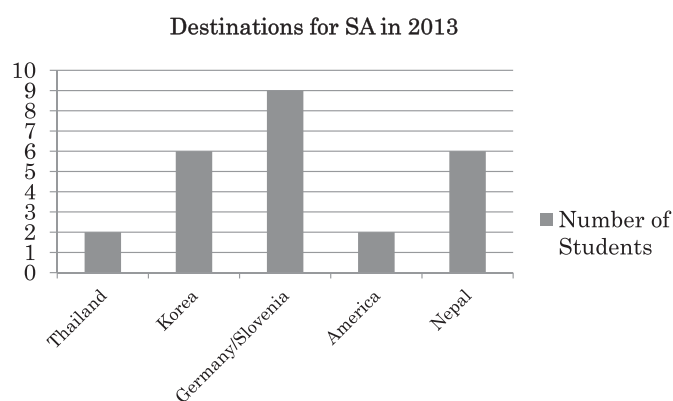


Figure 1: The Destinations of NU students in 2013

2 An Overview of SA Programs in 2013

The students who studied abroad in 2013, visited Thailand, Korea, Germany, Slovenia, America and Nepal. The programs varied in objectives and length. Only 2 of the twenty five students visited a native English speaking country.

1. Study Abroad to Thailand: The 2 students who participated in a SA program to Thailand studied at Burapha University (an affiliated university) on a 45 day program. They had limited Thai speaking ability so they used English to communicate with Thai students. Their program involved learning Thai and interacting with local students.

2. Study Abroad to Korea: The 6 students who participated in a SA program to Korea studied at Mokwon University (an affiliated university) and Hyecheon University (an affiliated university) on 45 day programs. They stayed in a dormitory with other foreign students where English was the common language spoken.

3. Study Abroad to Germany/Slovenia: The students who participated in a SA program to Slovenia and Germany/Slovenia studied on two different programs. One program started out in Germany and ended in Slovenia. It was a social welfare based program led by Professor Mark Hudson (NU) and involved visits to various welfare institutions in both countries. The other program was based at the University of Ljubljana (an affiliated university) where students stayed in a short stay apartment and attended classes with students from the Japanese Studies department.

4. Study Abroad to America: The 2 students who participated in a SA program to America studied at SUNY Adirondack (an affiliated university). They studied with American students, went sightseeing, stayed in a dormitory during the week and stayed with host families on the weekends.

5. Study Abroad to Nepal: The 6 students who participated on a field work trip to Nepal for 10 days were accompanied by Professor Michiyo Yokoo (NU). They did volunteer work at a child care center, listened to a lecture about malnutrition and infectious diseases and participated in discussions.

3 Method: Questionnaire

In May 2014, a 6 part questionnaire was compiled and the students who studied abroad in 2013 were asked to fill it out. The results of these questionnaires were examined and the results are to be used to improve the current situation related to SA. In Part 1, students were asked about pre-training/departure seminars and one third of the students expressed a wish that there was a language based (English) component of

the seminar. One of the students who went to Nepal expressed a wish that there was a Nepalese language seminar, as they traveled to a remote part of Nepal where very few people spoke English or Japanese. Communication was extremely difficult and it would have been better if they had some Nepalese background. The 2 students who participated in SA to America had some pre-departure English seminars for about 2 months prior to departure. In Part 2, students were asked about their own personal foreign language speaking ability. 70% of the students claimed their English speaking ability was low. 30% of the students were able to speak another foreign language (Korean). In Part 3, students were asked to write about any language difficulties they experienced during the program. Students expressed having language difficulties at the airport, at the immigration counter, in a taxi, in everyday conversation with locals, when shopping, using public transport, such as subways and buses, during explanations at the orientation program, when talking with their dorm-mates, and in the classroom. One student who went to Slovenia expressed relief when she knew the teacher and students were all able to speak Japanese (they were staff and students of the Japanese Studies Department). One student who went to America was detained by Immigration Staff at the airport and taken for further questioning because she was unable to answer their questions in English. In Part 4, to the answer of the question "After your trip, what is your attitude towards English and speaking languages?" all students answered that they see a need to be able to speak English when studying or traveling in the world, regardless of destination. Also, all students wished they had a better English speaking ability.

The questionnaire was filled out by almost all of the 25 students who went abroad in 2013. Students completed the survey in May/June in 2014. However, a few students were unavailable to complete it. All respondents were told the nature and purpose of this research and agreed to be a part of it. All responses are anonymous. The questionnaire is written in English (with a verbal explanation in Japanese). Students were able to write their answers in Japanese and most students completed the questionnaire within 5-10 minutes. The questionnaire was open-ended and not based on a Likert scale with the intention of giving the participants more freedom to answer. In essence, the purpose of the questionnaire was to see how much pre-departure preparation had been done and what the students' thoughts about English were and a self evaluation of their personal English competence. From the results the necessity of pre and post departure seminars and making students

aware of how important English is as a lingua franca is apparent.

4 Study Abroad Research

At many universities, SA is quickly becoming an integrated part of students' courses. One semester to one academic year abroad is being integrated into the curriculum so that students gain experience not only in language but in learning about foreign culture and specified studies. With an increase in the number of students studying abroad, there has been an increase in study abroad research. The quest to define and document the emergence of language proficiency is one of the major themes in applied linguistic research on SA¹⁾. Such research usually involves Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPI) conducted pre and post departure. The only drawback with OPI is that it seems to be unsuitable for evaluating improvement during short term SA.

Additional research examines the effectiveness of short term SA programs in the development of intercultural competence²⁾. Another study examines the impact on the development of global competencies through short term SA³⁾. Hartlen suggests that long term SA may not be for everyone, but short term SA can be for everyone⁴⁾. Powers reports that SA programs can enhance students' acquisition of a foreign language, improve their knowledge of a host culture, and even transform world views⁵⁾. Arenson recommends short term SA as opposed to longer, one term programs because students are more inclined to be focused on communicating with locals as opposed to sticking together with their fellow students⁶⁾. Cushner suggests that students who participated in short term SA were more likely to study more foreign languages after they returned and this can be linked to a higher possibility of participating in long term SA, at a higher education level⁷⁾.

5 Study Abroad Statistics

In recent years, the number of university students studying abroad is increasing. This is not just happening in Japan, but all over the world. In America, the statistics for long term SA increased steadily and impressively during the 1980s and 1990s⁸⁾. Recently, the number of students studying abroad short term is on the increase and is the fastest growing sector⁹⁾. In Japan, the data shows that while there has been an increase in the overall number of students participating in short term SA, there has been a decrease in the number of students participating in long term program¹⁰⁾¹¹⁾.

Figure 2. JASSO : The Number of Japanese Students studying abroad in 2012 (2011)¹⁰⁾

Country	Less than 1 month		Between 1-3 months		Between 3-6 months		Between 6-12 months		More than 1 year		TOTAL	
Asia	9,791	(8,133)	561	(553)	1,068	(1,121)	1,904	(1,701)	225	(180)	13,549	(11,688)
Middle East	41	(58)	5	(8)	6	(4)	17	(19)	8	(1)	77	(90)
Africa	52	(78)	11	(0)	4	(3)	10	(19)	4	(0)	81	(100)
Oceania	2,971	(2,593)	1,616	(1,282)	302	(328)	406	(379)	23	(17)	5,318	(4,599)
North America	6,610	(5,077)	1,817	(1,698)	2,817	(2,510)	2,996	(2,757)	202	(146)	14,442	(12,188)
Latin America	62	(78)	29	(35)	69	(33)	102	(87)	7	(11)	269	(244)
Europe	4,693	(3,357)	1,294	(1,307)	967	(803)	2,075	(2,125)	243	(155)	9,273	(7,747)
TOTAL	24,220	(19,374)	5,333	(4,883)	5,233	(4,802)	7,510	(7,087)	712	(510)	43,009	(36,656)

Figure 2 shows that a total of 43,009 Japanese students studied abroad in 2012, 6353 more than in 2011. It also shows that short term SA makes up more than 50% of the number of Japanese students studying abroad in 2012. The number of students studying on programs for less than one month, accounts for the largest sector with a total of 24, 220 Japanese students in 2012 (19,374 Japanese students in 2011). As far as destinations go, North America is the most popular destination for all durations (14,442 in 2012 and 12,188 in 2011) suggesting that English is the most popular language being studied and used.

As educators we are responsible for educating our students to become Global Human Resources or Global Citizens. The qualities needed for Global Human Resources can be defined as someone who has: 1. language skills and communication ability; 2. independence, positive attitude, challenging spirit, co-operation, flexibility, sense of responsibility, sense of mission; 3. identity as being Japanese and understanding of cross-cultures; 4. deep expertise in a wide range of areas, discovery and problem solving skills, teamwork and leadership and so on (12). By providing our students with the chance to study abroad and having them participate in both pre and post departure seminars we are covering all the necessary criteria that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology have laid out for us to nurture Global Human Resources. Even if students are unable to study abroad, they can gain global awareness by learning from the students who have had the opportunity to study abroad.

6 Strategies to be implemented

Wherever the destination, students need to be prepared and able to speak basic English for communication. In 2014, to try to encourage students to practice English conversation, Takeshi Fukumoto (NUJC) and Sonobe started an English

Conversation Lunch group, known as ENGLUNCH for students who want to practice English conversation. At present there are about 33 members and it is held on Wednesdays at Kanzaki campus and on Fridays at Kamizono campus during the lunch break. By attending this club, students wishing to study abroad, or students who are interested in English, can practice speaking and gain confidence to speak English on a regular basis.

In addition, students need to have many more opportunities to speak foreign languages, especially English. This can be improved on by the addition of elective conversation and discussion subjects to the curriculum. At present English conversation classes are only available to freshman. The introduction of English conversation classes to sophomores, juniors and seniors is strongly recommended. Also the establishment of community involved discussion groups (involving high school students, exchange students and other university students) is necessary to give NU students a chance to develop their discussion and presentation skills. The first discussion event of this nature, Discuss-ENG will be held in February in the ALS at Kanzaki campus.

Also in 2015, NU will attempt to and design a questionnaire for students to fill out before and after studying abroad to see how effective NU's pre and post departure seminars are and to gain some more feedback. Students need to have the opportunity to give a presentation about where they went and why; what they learned; what was similar or different between Japan and their host country and how they hope to use the experiences they have gained in their future study/job.

Pre and post departure seminars to fully prepare students for their SA are a must. Not only do students need to be able to communicate in English, they need some knowledge of the native language of the country they are visiting. Knowledge

about culture and customs are also necessary. After returning to Japan students need to make power point presentations to verbalize and share their experiences with their peers. This is also an excellent way to recruit new students for future programs.

Until now, most SA programs have been between 7-10 days in duration, with the longest program lasting for 2 months. In the future, we need to prepare for sending students on longer SA programs (one semester or one year) and also examine the student's level of not just English, but their language ability depending on the country of destination. If the programs are longer, the introduction of language, culture and learning surveys can be implemented to design an individualistic approach to SA (Paige, 2002). These learning surveys are effective to help students identify their own individual learning styles and students can be involved in their own learning and strategies of learning.

In addition, there needs to be an increase in the number of programs available and an increase in the number of destinations. In 2013, there was only one program to a native English speaking country. By increasing the number of programs to English speaking countries, students will have firsthand exposure to native English and improve their communicative skills. We need to design programs targeted at improving NU students' global awareness and communicative competence. In 2015 Sonobe plans to conduct a specialized health and welfare research for global awareness SA program to Curtin University in Perth, Australia. The 8 aims of this program are to: 1. give participating students the opportunity to experience English outside of the classroom; 2. give participating students the chance to experience another culture firsthand; 3. give participating students the chance to compare a foreign culture with Japanese culture; 4. give participating students the opportunity to visit institutions such as schools, day care centers, nursing homes, volunteer centers and gain specialized knowledge in their respective fields; 5. give participating students the opportunity to conduct fieldwork/research on a topic related to their major; 6. give participating students the opportunity to meet with local youth (Curtin University students); 7. give participating students the opportunity to make a presentation about their experiences abroad after returning from overseas; 8. give NU students the chance to gain global awareness by listening to presentations by the participating students. This program has been approved by JASSO and 11 students will receive financial assistance to participate. It is Sonobe's intention to establish an official affiliation agreement between Curtin Uni-

versity and NU and establish this program as a yearly program open to all NU/NUJC students.

7 Conclusion

NU has a solid foundation for SA programs. By increasing the number of affiliated universities and destinations, many more students will have the opportunity to study abroad and increase their global awareness. The implementation of pre-departure seminars will ensure that students are well prepared for what they will encounter and hence be able to get the most of their experience. The implementation of post-departure seminars will ensure that students have summarized what they experienced and thought about how they can build on their experiences in the future. It will also be a good opportunity for new students to learn about NU's SA programs. Questionnaires evaluating the programs need to be distributed, filled in and the data shared and discussed by academic and office staff. Opportunities to speak foreign languages, especially English, need to be increased, both within and without the curriculum. It is our duty to educate and encourage our students to become global citizens.

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