

FACT SHEET

Virtual Exchange/COIL Partnerships

VERONICA ONOREVOLE

U.S.-JAPAN HIGHER EDUCATION ENGAGEMENT STUDY (USJP HEES)

This fact sheet is part of a larger study by the American Council on Education (ACE). This fact sheet and the accompanying live, interactive database, real-time analysis, case studies, and infographics provide a foundation to capture U.S.-Japan higher education institutional partnership activities.

The goals of USJP HEES are to improve mutual understanding and cooperation within the U.S.-Japan higher education community and to capitalize on its strengths within the global higher education context.

The U.S.-Japan Higher Education Engagement Study is made possible through the generous support of the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership.

Visit www.acenet.edu/usjp-hees to learn more about the project.

A growing number of U.S. and Japanese higher education partnerships are seeking new ways to provide students with global competencies that compliment traditional forms of physical mobility and academic exchange. This has led to a dramatic increase of interest in virtual exchange, including one of its most comprehensive forms, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). COIL involves the development and use of teaching approaches to foster online student and faculty collaboration. It links students and classrooms around the world through co-taught multicultural and blended online course work.

This pioneering practice is bridging the physical distance between students from various parts of the world. It is important to understand that while COIL relies on technology to connect faculty and students, COIL is not a technological system or software platform, nor does it require institutions to use a particular type of education technology. Rather, the “Learning” aspect of COIL takes center stage with specific tools chosen to match the unique needs of the students, instructors, and institutions involved. Implementing and sustaining this technology-based learning is a complex process that requires time as well as effective educational leadership. COIL involves a high level of institutional commitment and often time coordination between the international office, academic affairs, technology and services, centers for teaching, and career services.

BACKGROUND

One of the first competency-based virtual exchange programs to take place at a Japanese higher education institution was at Waseda University, an elite private university based in Tokyo. In 1999, Waseda University implemented a joint learning virtual exchange program called Cross-Cultural Distant Learning (CCDL) with its overseas partner universities in Taiwan, mainland China, and South Korea. CCDL was designed as a foreign language exchange (specifically English and Chinese) in which students used video conference systems in real time. Nearly 20 years later, CCDL courses are still in existence and are embedded in Waseda’s general education curriculum across all academic departments affecting approximately 3,800 enrolled Waseda students each academic year (Waseda University n.d.).

Collaborative online international learning (COIL) was first introduced to Japan in 2014 at Kansai University in Osaka. Starting with a single faculty member’s successful pilots of COIL courses, Kansai University committed funds to develop a COIL Center (KU-COIL). KU-COIL became the first Japanese institutional member to join the Global Partner Network of the State University of New York COIL Center in the United States. Akita International University, a private university with a strong focus on international students and English language instruction, became the second Japanese institutional member to join SUNY’s Global Partner Network, also in 2014. The SUNY COIL Center is considered a pioneer of the COIL method and was established in 2004 to serve SUNY’s 64 campuses and their global partners.

GOVERNMENT-UNIVERSITY SUPPORT

In 2017, Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the central driver of higher education internationalization policy, became interested in COIL. COIL is a research-based pedagogy of virtual exchange, involving faculty in two or more countries collaborating to develop a joint syllabus that involves activities where students work together online to complete assignments that meet shared learning objectives.

MEXT approached ACE with the idea to utilize COIL as a bilateral government framework for strengthening collaboration between Japanese and U.S. universities. As the number two partner country of U.S. higher education institutions, ACE recognized the opportunity that COIL could build upon the numerous partnerships already in place between its U.S. higher education institutions and Japan as a new mode of virtual collaboration.

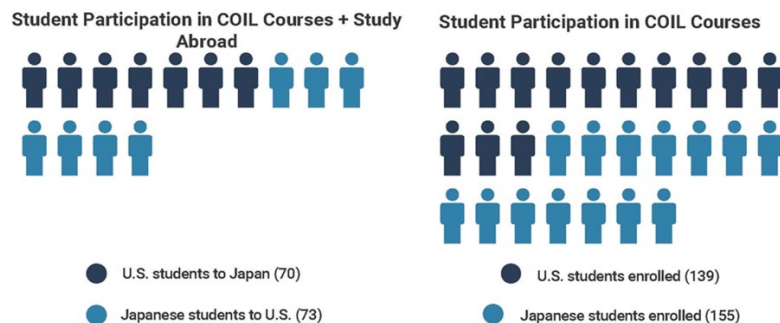
ACE and MEXT jointly devised and put forward a bilateral COIL proposal before Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs Task Force on Strengthening Grassroots Japan-U.S. Ties (2018), whose primary objectives were to find solutions for revitalizing U.S.-Japan student exchange, cultivating a global workforce, and enhancing leadership to strengthen U.S.-Japan relations. MEXT granted a five-year commitment with appropriations commencing in 2018 as the Inter-University Exchange Project COIL (IUEP-COIL). ACE then created the U.S.-Japan COIL Initiative (USJP COIL) with the support of the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, in cooperation with MEXT. ACE initially selected six U.S. institutions, but then received additional funds to extend training support to an additional seven U.S. institutions to develop new COIL courses with Japanese partner institutions over a two-year period. ACE, in collaboration with the State University of New York COIL Center, provided faculty and administrator training to the cohort of U.S. and Japanese partner higher education institutions.

Kansai University in Osaka was selected by MEXT to provide direct training, networking opportunities, and support to nine Japanese institutions in the IUEP COIL. With this enhanced role in the IUEP COIL project, the Kansai COIL Center adopted a more comprehensive name, becoming the Institute for Innovative Global Education (IIGE) in 2018.

IMPACT

Since 2018, both MEXT’s IUEP COIL and ACE’s U.S.-Japan (USJP) COIL award programs supported a total of 56 U.S. and 14 Japanese higher education institutions with the formation of new COIL partnerships. Both projects predict that by 2023, nearly 10,000 U.S. and Japanese students will participate in a COIL module or course along with over 100 faculty and administrators (Japan Society for the Promotion of Science 2021). Based on the MEXT Inter-University Exchange Project interim reports from the Japanese institutional partners, student participation in COIL-like experiences and study abroad from 2018–19 resulted in 769 Japanese students traveling to the U.S. and 578 U.S. students traveling to Japan. In combination with MEXT’s results, ACE’s first cohort of six U.S.-Japan COIL partnerships supported four outbound and two inbound COIL Plus Study Abroad Programs in AY 2018–19, benefiting the following number of students (American Council on Education n.d.).

Student Participation in COIL Courses and Study Abroad, U.S.-Japan COIL Initiative, 2018-19



Although the pandemic ceased all continued COIL Plus Mobility plans, U.S.-Japan partner institutions are continuing to expand their COIL offerings. Part of their motivation to support COIL expansion is that staff are observing how faculty and students want to visit with their peers after a COIL experience. They believe that when travel restrictions are lifted, many of the faculty and students who participated in COIL will be more likely to pursue study abroad options as a means to reconnect and continue their studies alongside their respective COIL counterpart.

In addition to continuing with co-teaching, U.S. and Japanese faculty COIL instructors are also pursuing collaborative research with their counterparts because of their COIL teaching experience.

For example, COIL faculty teams from James Madison University and Kansai University are co-investigating the potential outcomes of COIL and study abroad as transformative learning practices as part of a grant from Bringing Theory to Practice, a project of the American Association of Colleges and Universities. The grant will allow both James Madison University and Kansai University the chance to illuminate the potential outcomes of COIL and study abroad as transformative learning practices. Faculty from the University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa and Chiba University recently co-authored an academic research article about their USJP COIL collaboration in the *Journal of International Social Studies*.

Beyond teaching and research, the U.S.-Japan COIL partnerships are also leading to workforce development programs called COIL Plus Internships Abroad, which encompasses global competency-based, work-based learning, alongside academic learning. For example, IIGE at Kansai University offers advanced COIL Plus Internship programs where students are able to go abroad to experience a temporary, overseas staffing experience. Students participate in various activities including internships, company visits, and classes in line with specialized themes taken from the COIL courses both before and after the study abroad program. This project is supported by the CARES consortium, led by Kansai University and comprised of organizations from the industrial and financial sectors, academia, the Osaka Prefectural Government, and local community groups (Institute for Innovative Global Education n.d.).

In addition to the MEXT- and ACE-supported U.S.-Japan higher education partnerships, higher education institutions are increasingly pooling together to share new approaches and build from each other's strengths to advance COIL virtual exchanges, especially in Japan. For example, Sophia University, Ochanomizu University, University of Shizuoka, and 10 institutions from the U.S. formed a COIL virtual mobility consortium whereby three Japanese universities are offering online curriculum within their particular discipline strengths (read more about this consortium [here](#)).

Virtual mobility involves university students accessing and obtaining credit for taking online courses at universities other than their own. As this is institutionally supported, virtual mobility participants enjoy the formal advantages of studying at that other institute, such as instructional support and assessment of their performance in the course. Also, the gained credits for a successfully completed virtual mobility course are accepted by the students' home institutions and recognized as part of the curriculum. Another example is Tokyo University of Arts and the University of Southern California. Their COIL collaboration on game creation begins with student pairs (U.S. and Japan) that generate a plan for a new game concept through online meetings. The students from both sides of the partnership are provided travel to each other's schools to present their projects in public showings.

In December 2018, IIGE formed the Japan COIL Association with an initial membership of 21 Japanese institutions that identified themselves as already practicing COIL or in the preliminary stages of implementing COIL.

DEFINITIONS AND DATA COLLECTION

The U.S.-Japan Higher Education Engagement Study’s (USJP HEES) intent is to represent virtual exchange programs, including virtual mobility and the COIL method, that are a part of U.S.-Japan higher education partnerships.

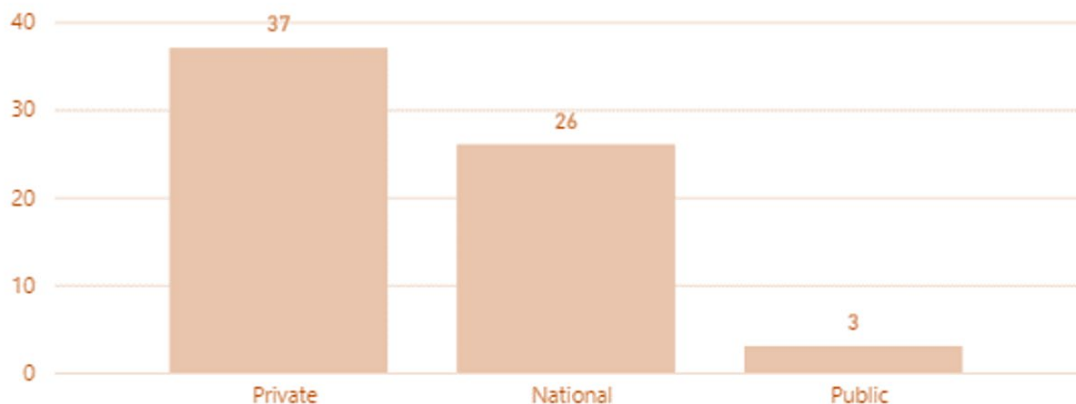
Virtual mobility can take a variety of forms ranging from taking regular courses to virtual seminars, virtual internships, virtual campuses and other forms of virtual learning and collaboration in which students from partner universities can take part (Bijnens et al. 2006). To support this form of student learning and mobility, the student, the home institution, and the “virtually” visited institution make use of a Learning Agreement as an instrument that stipulates the rights and duties of each party in the agreement (Ubachs and Henderikx 2018).

The Study’s data does not include distance learning programs, such as MOOCs, as they do not entail collaboration between two or more higher education institutions. ACE and JACUIE/JANU recognize this list is by no means exhaustive and that there are many forms of online programs being forged between the U.S. and Japan, especially as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

FINDINGS

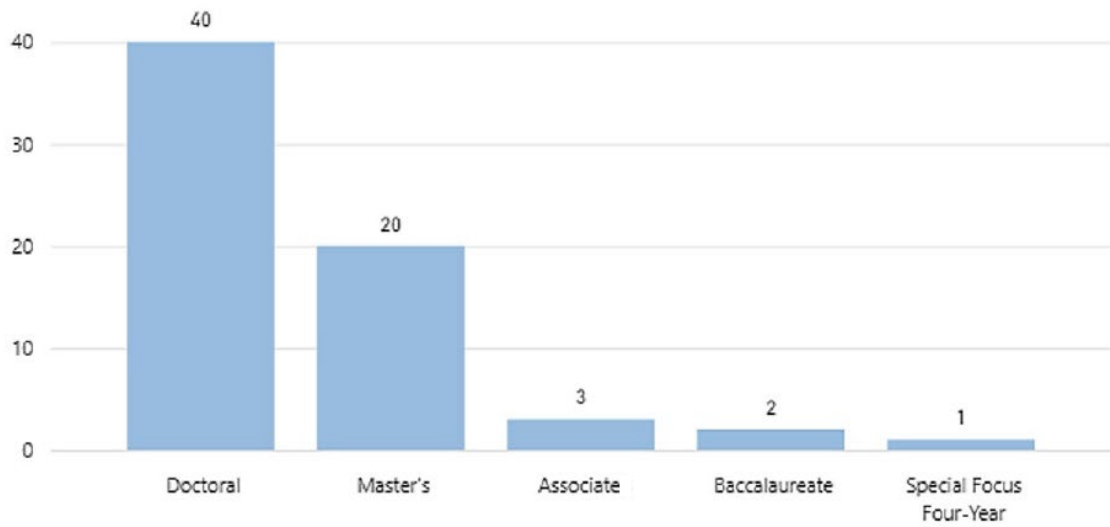
As of 2021, according to data from ACE and MEXT, there are currently 66 formalized U.S.-Japan COIL partnerships. Private, doctorate-granting institutions account for the largest share of current COIL partnerships in Japan, while in the United States, it is public doctorate-granting higher education institutions.

Figure 1. U.S.-Japan Virtual Exchange/COIL Partnerships by Japanese Institution Type, 2018–2020



Source: ACE U.S.-Japan Higher Education Engagement Study, 2021. See <https://www.acenet.edu/usjp-hees>.

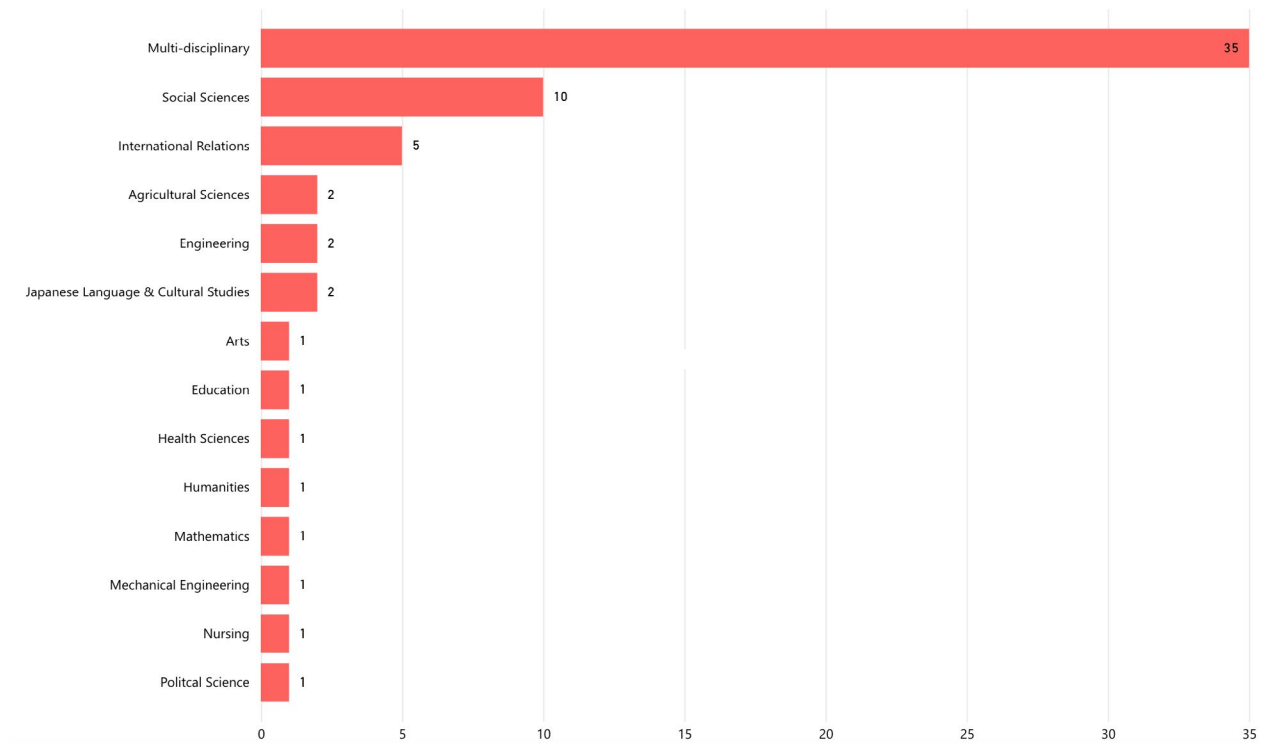
Figure 2. U.S.-Japan Virtual Exchange COIL Partnerships by U.S. Institution Type, 2018–2020



Source: ACE U.S.-Japan Higher Education Engagement Study, 2021. See <https://www.acenet.edu/usjp-hees>.

More than half of the COIL partnerships are occurring across multiple disciplines with a concentration in the social sciences and international relations. These disciplines are often the first to infuse virtual exchange/COIL by proxy of the existing curriculum subject matter and natural infusion of global perspective.

Figure 3. U.S.-Japan Virtual Exchange Programs by Discipline, 2017–2020



Source: ACE U.S.-Japan Higher Education Engagement Study, 2021. See <https://www.acenet.edu/usjp-hees>.

CONCLUSION

While many institutions in the U.S. and Japan now acknowledge COIL virtual exchange as a tool for increasing student mobility and cultivating a talent pipeline, its value for enhancing other aspects of internationalization, such as the formation of joint/dual degree programs or outputs of new international scholarly research, is less known. It is anticipated that with time, through continued promotion of evidence-based research and strengthened collaborative approaches among U.S. and Japanese higher education institutions and associations, VE/COIL will continue to grow and show greater promise for strengthening innovative and inclusive internationalization both in the U.S. and in Japan.

REFERENCES

- American Council on Education. n.d. "ACE Transformation Labs." Accessed April 30, 2021. <https://www.acenet.edu/Programs-Services/Pages/Professional-Learning/Transformation-Labs.aspx>.
- Bijnens, Helena, Machteld Boussemaere, Kamakshi Rajagopal, Ilse Op de Beeck, and Wim Van Petegem, eds. 2006. *European Cooperation in Education Through Virtual Mobility: A Best-Practice Manual*. Heverlee, Belgium: Europace IVZW. <http://www.europace.org/articles%20and%20reports/Being%20Mobile%20Manual%20-%20Internet%20version.pdf>.
- Institute for Innovative Global Education. n.d. "IIGE Advanced Programs." Accessed April 10, 2021. <https://www.kansai-u.ac.jp/Kokusai/IIGE/COILPlus/>.
- Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. 2021. "Inter-University Exchange COIL Project." Accessed March 31, 2021. https://www.jsps.go.jp/j-tenkairyoku/sentei_jigyo_h30.html.
- Ubachs, George, and Piet Henderikx. 2018. *EADTU Mobility Matrix*. Maastricht, The Netherlands: EADTU. http://eadtu.eu/documents/Publications/VM/2018_-_EADTU_Mobility_Matrix.pdf.
- Waseda University. n.d. "Cross Cultural Distance Learning." Accessed April 10, 2021. <https://www.waseda.jp/inst/ches/en/ctl/teaching/ccdl/>.