

A Post-War Bilateral Exchange with a Lasting Impact

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

This case study is part of a larger study by the American Council on Education (ACE). This case study and the accompanying live, interactive database, real-time analysis, fact sheet, 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.

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In the late 1950s, Jackson Bailey, professor of history at Earlham College, embarked on a diplomatic mission to strengthen Earlham's study-abroad efforts. Bailey, a newly minted Harvard PhD in Japanese history, asked his former faculty advisor for an introduction to Waseda University. More than a half a century later, this particular request has had a life-changing impact on several thousand students from Japan and the United States.

Since its official launch in 1963, Japan Study has been a thriving academic and cultural exchange program, offering undergraduate students from across member institutions of the Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) and the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM) the opportunity to study and live at Waseda University in Tokyo (Great Lakes Colleges Association 2021). In a similar fashion, Waseda University, a prominent and highly selective institute, sends its students to one of the GLCA or ACM campuses.

This bilateral relationship is distinct, propelled by innovation, enthusiasm, and commitment to global citizenship. Together, GLCA and ACM represent a consortium of nearly 30 small-sized liberal arts colleges and universities in the upper mid-east region of the United States. GLCA and ACM colleges enroll approximately 1,300 students each. In contrast, Waseda University is a large metropolitan-based research institution with five satellite campuses, enrolling nearly 50,000 students. Participation in this purposeful two-way exchange allows Japanese and American students to step out of their academic, social, and linguistic comfort zones and experience problem-solving and flexibility in a foreign environment.

To date, Japan Study has hosted roughly 3,600 American and Japanese students in Tokyo and the United States, respectively (Japan Study 2019). Though the program headquarters is located at Earlham College, GLCA and ACM conduct a rigorous program review process. This objective evaluation enables the GLCA and ACM consortium and Waseda University to endorse Japan Study and feel confident in sending students abroad. To fund their overseas experience, American students use financial aid, scholarships, and family resources. But because of the tuition discrepancy Japanese students face in the United States (i.e., the cost of higher education is significantly lower in Japan), all GLCA and ACM campuses offer a 50 percent tuition waiver for Japan Study students from Waseda University.

For American students, Japan Study is language intensive, requiring them to enroll in six credits of Japanese with Waseda's Center for Japanese Language (CJL). Students also enroll in elective courses offered by the university's long-established School of International Liberal Studies (SILS). Formerly the International Division Program at Waseda, SILS was established in 2004 to offer undergraduate degrees in English for both domestic and international students. Thus, in addition to language development, Japan Study aims to help students strengthen their intercultural communication skills, deepen their understanding of Japanese culture, society, and history, and hone their career ambitions.

To achieve these goals, American students live with local families near campus and commute via public transportation to Waseda University, a cost that is covered by Japan Study. American exchange students also engage in campus clubs and organizations, participate in weekend retreats and day-trip excursions, and complete a four-week cultural internship outside of Tokyo to improve their language and cultural acquisition skills. From rescuing animals in Osaka, to learning about becoming a Zen monk in Okayama, to working in a local factory in Iwate, American students from across the Great Lakes basin experience the natural beauty of rural Japan.

Japanese students in the United States experience Japan Study in different ways, with some overlap. Waseda University students enroll in the wide menu of course options available at their Midwest host institution, often with an accompanying advisory component to support their writing projects in English (Japan Study 2021). Students live on campus in dormitories, as the GLCA and ACM member institutions are residential colleges that host a bevy of shared academic and social activities. Once settled on campus, Waseda students are frequently found sharing traditional holidays, like Thanksgiving and New Year's, with classmates' families or independently exploring famous, nearby cities like Chicago and New York City. Japanese students might also engage in the many service and experiential learning opportunities offered across the GLCA and ACM campuses.

The importance of engaging all stakeholders and leveraging the power of the GLCA and ACM consortium to provide global opportunities for students cannot be overstated. For example, faculty across GLCA and ACM campuses and Waseda University are encouraged to pursue professional development and overseas teaching opportunities. Moreover, in their effort, GLCA and ACM member institutions assume leadership and responsibility on behalf of the full roster of colleges. Select campuses are labeled "agents" and expected to fulfill certain duties that advance the aim of globalization in higher education.

Being an agent college entailed managing the program abroad, recruiting and selecting students and faculty, arranging visas and transportation, etc. This model has proved remarkably durable and successful, though not uniformly so. It requires faculty champions, who when the time comes, will in turn be succeeded by new faculty champions. For this to succeed, deans and presidents, too, must be committed to this kind of international education. (Japan Study 2021)

It is important to honor enduring partnerships like Japan Study, which is now approaching its 60-year anniversary, as they are fundamental to the advancement of higher education and the development of global citizens. In this spirit of international alliance building, Japan Study has launched an alumni network to extend the overseas experience beyond one's undergraduate education and amplify the meaningfulness of Japan Study (Asada 2019). With a focus on recruiting and supporting underrepresented undergraduate students, the Japan Study Alumni Network has opened doors for students of color and low-income collegiate learners who otherwise might not have experienced Japan culture and society in this deeply profound way. By expanding students' world views through firsthand cultural exchanges, this bilateral agreement, designed half a century ago, has made a lasting impact.

References

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