

# FACT SHEET

## Degree Programs

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### 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.

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Visit [www.acenet.edu/usjp-hees](http://www.acenet.edu/usjp-hees) to learn more about the project.

Collaborative degree programs, such as dual and joint degree programs, can be the most complex but also the most rewarding of global partnership engagement activities between the U.S. and Japan. U.S.-Japan degree programs lead to a deeper, more sustainable relationship than other internationalization program strategies as it involves close collaboration by academic units at both partner institutions. It also has the potential to strengthen curriculum innovation, facilitate exchanges of professors and researchers, and increase access to the expertise and networks of the partner university.

## BACKGROUND

For the U.S. and Japan, there are several academic and administrative complexities to navigate in order to move ahead in the development and recognition of collaborative degree programs and qualifications, including tuition, completion requirements, teaching and learning expectations, and the general differences between each educational system.

Tuition at most Japanese universities does not distinguish fees for international students, with most students paying the same costs. Tuition is significantly lower than in the U.S., and there are a lot more financial assistance programs available for international undergraduate students sponsored by Japan's national government. In 2019, studying at a Japanese national or public university costs an annual total of ¥1.16 million (\$10.4K), while for private universities, studying humanities annually costs ¥ 0.9 million (\$8K) and sciences ¥0.8 million(\$7.2K) (MEXT 2019). In the U.S., international students pay on average \$25,000 to \$35,000 per year at a U.S. public university and \$30,000 to \$45,000 at U.S. private institutions. The cost can reach up to \$50,000 to \$55,000 per year for some private institutions (Ma, Pender, and Libassi 2020). There is an abundance of scholarship opportunities available for students in both directions. According to the Fulbright Scholar Program, more than 600 American universities offer scholarships worth \$20,000 or more to international students. They are typically assessed on either academic merit, financial need, or extracurricular contribution (Ing and Bhardwa 2021). U.S. students have a number of undergraduate and graduate level scholarships available to pursue their degree studies in Japan, though most scholarship programs do not allow U.S. students to apply until they have arrived in Japan (Japan Student Services Organization 2021).

**Completion requirements** at the undergraduate level differ considerably between the U.S. and Japan when it comes to fulfilling general education requirements. Japan has fewer required subjects at the undergraduate level than the U.S., so students have the freedom to take specialized courses in their major starting from their first year. When Japanese institutions try to negotiate transfer credits for students from their home institution to participate in a dual degree program at a U.S. host institution, most of the credits often do not fulfill the U.S. degree requirements. Therefore, most Japanese students find themselves taking general education courses during their studies in the U.S. to meet the general education requirements for the U.S. degree, all within a relatively short program timeframe.

**Differences in teaching and learning** can be a deterrent for institutions trying to validate program quality assurances. Depending on the level, a three-credit hour course at a U.S. institution may require students to take midterms and finals, and these courses often involve daily assignments and project-based group work. In contrast, many courses in Japan up until the last decade did not require attendance and only required students pass a final examination. It was not until 2016 that most Japanese universities had also adopted a grade point average (GPA) system.

In Japanese undergraduate programs, there is usually no capstone course but rather a seminar course (called *zemi* in Japanese) in the third year and fourth year, which is the final year. The seminar course has a small class size and is intended to allow students to further their studies in the field of their interest. Some instructors have students write thesis papers (Kasuya et al. 2019).

Differences in how each institution interprets the internationalizing of its curriculum and the value each places on inclusivity for international students can also be a factor to consider when comparing each institutions quality of coursework. Providing internationalized curriculum that accounts for students' previous educational experiences and encourages contribution to the learning community can greatly benefit both U.S. and Japanese students, but requires that instructors have strong intercultural competencies (Bhandari, Robles, and Farrugia 2018).

**Quality assurance and accreditation standards** are of fundamental importance from the outset of any collaboration, but pose significant hurdles for U.S.-Japanese institutional partners to adhere to when there are a number of different requirements set forth by each country's respective accrediting bodies. Adding to the challenges is the fact that accreditation standards are often tied to shared regional standards, national commissions, and councils.

Japan's higher education accreditation system is highly centralized through Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). As explained by Kasuya et al.:

the Japanese educational system continues to respect the 'principle of territoriality of laws' and exclude the involvement of foreign universities from Japan's School Education Law and other laws and regulations, even when a JPD [joint degree program] is newly established as a system in a Japanese jurisdiction. Therefore, pursuant to the School Education Law and other laws and regulations, a JDP under this Japanese scheme is deemed as 'a degree conferred by Japanese universities' allowing universities in foreign countries to sign jointly with Japanese universities on a relevant diploma, while the actual process in reality may differ from legal treatment. (2019)

For U.S. institutions, this is a particular deterrent for attempting to form joint degree programs with their Japanese partners. Further, it is required that Japanese institutions apply for accreditation of their proposed joint degree programs with MEXT, which can be a fairly lengthy process that requires the U.S. partner institution to provide a blueprint of the program's architecture, including their own plans for U.S. accreditation, the course curriculum, and a list of faculty members (Kasuya et al. 2019).

In February 2018, Japan signed on to the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education, also known as the Tokyo Convention. The Tokyo Convention includes a framework for validating and authenticating higher education qualifications, including the exchange of documents between member states and access to a regional database to codify manuals for course units and credits to facilitate recognition of higher education qualifications. As of May 2021, there are 12 state parties: Australia, China, New Zealand, Japan, Republic of Korea, Holy See (Vatican City State), Mongolia, Turkey, Fiji, Russian Federation, Afghanistan, and Armenia. The framework includes standards that base assessment of prior learning and qualifications on not only inputs, such as program length and hours of study, but also on outcomes that provide insight into "experience, knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies" that a

qualification holder has acquired as a result of their academic program (APNICC 2020). This has led to the global development of various initiatives on outcome-based recognition, including qualifications frameworks, competency-based education, micro-credentials, digitalization of certificates, and diploma supplement.

As a party to the framework, in September 2019 Japan created a new branch called the National Information Center for Academic Recognition Japan (NIC-Japan) as part of the National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education (NIAD-QE). NIAD-QE is an independent agency affiliated with MEXT, whose primary responsibilities include providing evaluations of Japanese university academic and research programs along with their consortia.

In contrast, the U.S. accreditation structure is decentralized mirroring the complexity of the American higher education system. There is no single authority in the United States for the recognition of foreign degrees and other qualifications. Most of the specialized or programmatic agencies review units for international collaborative degree programs come from within an institution of higher education (U.S. Department of Education 2021). The accredited unit may be as large as a college or school within a university or as small as a curriculum within a discipline.

Ultimately, it is voluntary for U.S. higher education institutions to seek accreditation from independent credential evaluation organizations. There are various providers, which are private educational associations of regional or national scope, and with varying evaluation criteria—some focusing on programs and others on institutions, some focusing on inputs and others on processes or outputs. All of them are independent organizations that are not affiliated with any government agencies. They perform analyses of non-U.S. qualifications and issue recommendations on how a particular qualification compares to a similar qualification or set of qualifications in the U.S. education system. These variables can be very confusing for non-U.S. partner institutions. Depending on the specialized accrediting agency, accreditor recommendations can vary widely in character and quality assurance measures.

## DEFINITIONS AND DATA COLLECTION

The U.S.-Japan Higher Education Engagement Study (USJP HEES) includes data on over 20 collaborative degree programs between U.S. and Japanese partner institutions that were active during the period of 2017–20.

As a starting point of ACE and JACUIE/JANU's research, data from the Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) survey results about recognized international joint and dual degree programs were reviewed as a baseline. ACE then directly reviewed each Japanese institution's website, along with their U.S. partner's, to verify the details of their collaborative programs.

During this process, ACE and JACUIE/JANU agreed on establishing the following definitions to find a common understanding of the variations of terminology, concepts, and frameworks interpreted by U.S. and Japanese higher education institutions and higher education government and nongovernmental accreditation agencies.

**International joint degree programs** offer students one curriculum designed and offered collaboratively by two universities based in different countries. Students receive a single diploma or degree endorsed by both participating institutions. The motivations for institutions to offer a joint degree program may often be centered around the premise that both institutions benefit from each other's expertise and instructional strengths. Joint degrees are considered new programs and must go through a rigorous approval process by each institution's review board. Japanese universities are required to submit a lengthy application for joint degree programs to MEXT for final approval (Central Council for Education 2014). Because of their complexity and the time commitment required for their development and approval, joint degrees are rare to find in higher education.

Universities that are seeking to support these deeply engaged students need to carefully assess their ability to develop and support the intensely collaborative relationship required for an international joint degree program. Creation of a joint degree program presents challenges, but the reward is a unique program that provides opportunities for students, staff, and faculty at the universities involved (Helms 2014).

**International dual/double degree programs** are designed and delivered by two or more partner institutions based in different countries. The agreements permit students to take courses and receive a degree or diploma from each participating institution. Dual degree programs that are **nonreciprocal** acknowledge only one partner institution as the sending institution of students. While issues of course equivalencies and program requirements must still be resolved, there is often more flexibility because each institution retains autonomy on independently deciding degree requirements and conferment of the separate degree.

**Reciprocal dual degrees** require careful assessment of student demand, foreign language requirements, residency requirements, and tuition and fee rates. Partner institutions commit to sending a balanced number of students each way. Students pay tuition and fees to their home university and pay the host university for course and lab fees, books and supplies, international student health insurance, and room and board.

**Transfer articulation agreements** offer a formal relationship between two academic programs, where students begin their degree program at their own university before transferring to a similar program at the partner institution to complete the remaining degree requirements for both home and the partner host institution. These arrangements are commonly referred to as a 1+3 or 2+2, etc. The partner host institution may accept up to a certain number of credits that the student earned at the home institution and confers a separate degree. Students following this route are awarded a degree from the partner institution on completion of their coursework. **Nonreciprocal transfer articulation agreements** acknowledge one partner institution as the sending institution of students to its partner institution as the designated host for completing credit requirements to confer a degree solely by the host institution.

## FINDINGS

The U.S.-Japan Higher Education Engagement Study (USJP HEES) found the following active articulation transfer agreements and collaborative degree programs in place between U.S. and Japanese higher education partner institutions from 2017–20.

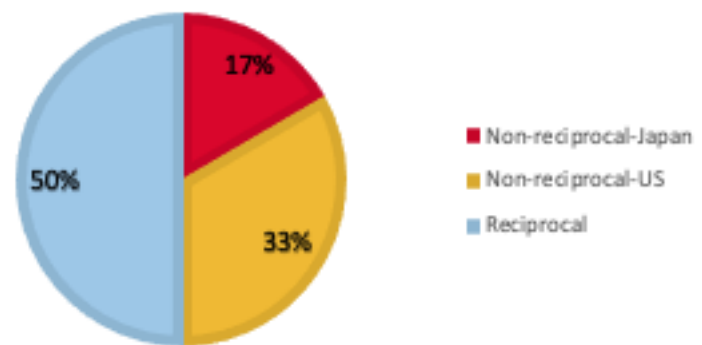
- **Eleven nonreciprocal transfer articulation agreements** that stemmed from existing student exchange agreements, whereby U.S. institutions agree to accept Japanese students either as a 2+2- or as a 1+3-year model.

- **Twelve dual degree programs**, whereby:
  - Five are reciprocal, meaning there are flows in both directions of U.S. and Japanese students pursuing a dual degree with each partner institution serving as hosts.
  - Five are nonreciprocal, with Japanese students having the opportunity to earn a dual degree from their home and U.S. partner institution.
  - Two are nonreciprocal with U.S. students having the opportunity to earn a dual degree from their home and a Japan partner institution.

Of the **12 dual degree programs**, ACE identified the following disciplines (in order of prevalence):

- International relations
- Law
- Japanese studies
- Economics
- Informatics
- Business administration
- Anthropology
- **Only one joint degree program** was found: a reciprocal program for students pursuing degrees in international relations.

**U.S.-JAPAN DUAL DEGREE PROGRAMS**



Of these collaborative degree programs, there are slightly more graduate-level dual degrees offered over undergraduate level programs. Most of the identified dual and joint degree programs are taught in English and require a certain level of language proficiency in English by both the U.S. and Japanese partner institutions (usually a TOEFL score of approximately 100 iBT or IELTS overall score of 7.5).

Of those that are nonreciprocal dual degree programs for Japanese students to enroll in U.S. institutions, in most cases, the Japanese students must pay U.S. tuition rates to their U.S. host institution. Fee waivers and scholarships are offered by many U.S. programs to help offset costs. Conversely, many of the Japanese dual degree programs that were identified required American students to maintain their tuition arrangements with their U.S. home institution.

For the collaborative degree programs that are in the USJP HEES, many are relatively new (created within the last decade) and grew out of other long-standing partnership activities, such as student and faculty exchanges or collaborative research programs.

The following are noteworthy examples of collaborative degree program models between U.S. and Japanese higher education institutions:

**American University and Ritsumeikan University** uniquely offer both reciprocal dual and joint degree programs in international affairs/global studies for their undergraduate students. The creation of the joint degree program stems from the lessons learned from both institution's existing reciprocal dual degree program in international relations.

Despite the long-term partnership, staff and educators from both institutions faced numerous challenges and spent more than three years in the development of the program as it passed through multiple approval and accreditation processes at both institutions and in both countries.

**Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) maintains a nonreciprocal articulation agreement with Temple University, Japan Campus (TUJ)** whereby NVCC students who complete their associate degree program may apply to transfer to TUJ to pursue a bachelor's degree program. NVCC students receive an admissions fee waiver and priority admission, and they are eligible for scholarships and financial aid from TUJ prior to their arrival in Japan.

## CONCLUSION

In the case of formulating a plan for collaborative degree programs, it is particularly important for both partners to consider what they will gain from the relationship. This presents an opportunity for institutions to have to reflect on the strengths and resources that both institutions can bring to such linkages. Discussions with partners are more effective if they are prepared to clearly identify, acknowledge, and be open about the strengths and weakness of the underlying institutional environment, including the teaching and learning cultures.

By establishing such in-depth collaborations, these programs will help U.S. and Japanese institutions ensure mutuality and sustainability in their international partnership as well advance the internationalization of the U.S., Japan, and global higher education enterprises.

We hope that the data, examples, and findings presented throughout this fact sheet will help institutions identify key issues and potential challenges and learn from the experience of others as they consider, design, and implement international joint and dual degree programs. As expected given the complexity of the topic, this project has given rise to additional questions and areas for future research. In particular, given the recent changes to accreditation and quality assurances in Japan, questions about its impact on student's choices of study and enrollment as well as effects on U.S.-Japan partnership collaboration in the long term will need to be explored. ACE and JACUIE/JANU look forward to continued discussion and research on this important topic.

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