

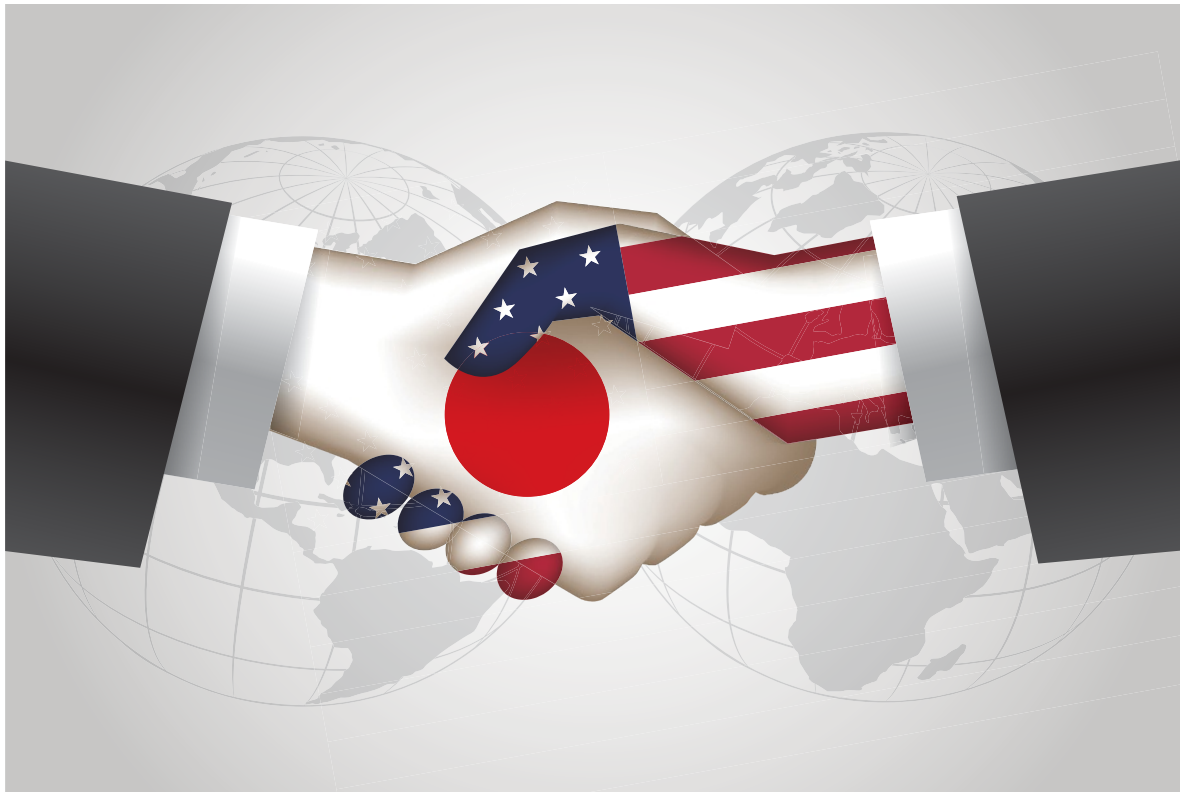
U.S.–Japanese University Partnerships on the Rise

For Syed “Ed” Matin, a year spent studying abroad in Tokyo was both personally and intellectually enriching. Matin’s experience as an exchange student at Waseda University broadened his understanding of U.S.-Japanese relations, as well as Japan’s history, politics, and economy. He pursued an independent research project on democratic consolidation in Japan.

“I underwent a transformation from a student to a scholar,” says Matin, a student at Johns Hopkins University. “Sometimes, strict course schedules and assessments can confine students from pursuing their interests. Students remain students, and never become scholars. Being a scholar means that you take personal responsibility for your own learning, and passionately pursue a topic outside of what the syllabus requires.”

Matin has studied abroad through the Global Leadership Fellows Program (GLFP), a partnership

between Waseda University and six U.S. universities—including Johns Hopkins, Columbia, and Georgetown. The program strives to “identify students of promise in multiple fields of study and promote their development as leaders in a world of ever-changing demands and opportunities,” according to Waseda’s GLFP website. Started about five years ago, the program features Zemi classes—a unique, Japanese approach to education in which students are part of a small cohort studying together under one professor.



“That means there’s a lot of debate and exchange of ideas,” says Matin, who enrolled in the Zemi class on Japanese international relations. “Zemi classes rely on a close relationship between the professor and the students. In my Zemi class, we would regularly have dinner with our professor as a class, and our professor even invited us to his house on multiple occasions for dinner. These [meetings] allow learning to continue outside of the classroom.”

Increasing Student Mobility Between the United States and Japan

Partnerships between U.S. and Japanese universities have been on the rise during the last decade, thanks to the efforts of numerous government and private initiatives in both nations. Japan is the United States’s strongest ally in Asia, and the Pacific Rim nation is a critical economic partner.

During the 1997–98 academic year, the number of Japanese students studying in the United States reached its peak of more than 45,000, according to the Institute of International Education. Around that same time, only 1,800 U.S. students studied to Japan, according to Pamela Fields, deputy secretary-general for CULCON (United States-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange), a binational advisory panel to the U.S. and Japanese governments that was established by President John F. Kennedy. In recent years, however, the number of U.S. students going to Japan has tripled to nearly 6,000 while the number of Japanese students coming to the United States has declined to fewer than 20,000 per year.

“If you’re talking about building a generation that understands the language and the culture, and can build a network of connections, this was distressing to both the U.S. and Japan,” Fields says.

TeamUp, a program of the U.S.-Japan Bridging Foundation, promotes

partnerships between institutions in both countries. The CULCON-inspired initiative is supported by the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo.

While partnerships boost better understanding between the two cultures, there are many practical reasons to set up collaborations between institutions, Fields says. For both U.S. and Japanese students, these initiatives allow both sides to plan how to transfer academic credits, keep tuition costs affordable, and make suitable housing arrangements.

“The idea is that if it’s all figured out in advance, it’s a much smoother process for everyone involved,” Fields says. “Partnerships allow for innovations. They can lead to faculty collaborative research and engagement on an administrative level. We have learned that there is tremendous interest and will to set up partnerships—both to give students an international experience abroad and to internationalize the campus. Everybody is looking to internationalize the way that their students think because of the global environment in which we’re operating.”

TeamUp has helped to facilitate numerous partnerships. Leeward Community College in Hawaii, for example, set up an articulation agreement with Josai International University (JIU) in Japan. Leeward students who earn an associate degree are accepted as third-year students in JIU’s English-language bachelor of arts program. The University of Rhode Island and Kōchi University developed a student exchange program that grew out of the longtime collaborative relationship between two professors at each of the institutions.

One University, Hundreds of Partnerships

Waseda University has been prolific in setting up student and faculty exchanges, as well as double degree programs, throughout the world. The university currently has more than 600 agreements with institutions in 85 countries, according to

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Toshinobu Toyama, Waseda’s regional manager for the Americas and manager for the Global Leadership Program. Out of more than 5,000 international students currently studying at Waseda, 226—just over 4 percent—are from the United States.

According to Toyama, the university’s long-term goals include expanding the internationalization of its campus over the next 20 years. The university is making plans to enroll 10,000 international students (encompassing 20 percent of the total student body) and to ensure that every student has a study abroad experience of some kind. The university also envisions hiring 400 non-Japanese faculty. The university strives to be “Asia’s premier ‘model university,’” as it bills itself, and adaptable to a changing world. Continuing existing partnerships and pursuing new ones will be vital for achieving these goals.

“Though we are the most internationalized university in Japan, we cannot achieve this reputation without collaboration with our partners,” Toyama writes in an e-mail. “Our students are really appreciating being in different countries and different cultures. Understanding the differences and studying together with non-Japanese students when they are studying abroad or here in Waseda are the true value of internationalization, in addition to learning foreign languages.”

The increased number of collaborations worldwide presents a challenge for some of Waseda’s oldest partnerships. Japan Study, based at Earlham College in Indiana and serving member institutions of the Great Lakes Colleges Association and the Associated Colleges of the Midwest, is one

such program. Established in 1963, the student exchange program has about 30 to 40 students from consortium schools involved each year, says Dyron Dabney, director of Japan Study. Students enrolled in the program take cultural and language immersion courses, complete a cultural internship, and take part in student activities and clubs. However, in recent years, only a few Waseda students have come to the consortium schools each year.

“The increasing number of opportunities for Waseda students to go to various institutions around the world has expanded exponentially,” says Dyron Dabney, director of Japan Study. “As more of those options emerge, our campuses in the Midwest are not necessarily their first choice. But we have a strong historical relationship, and part of my charge is to rekindle that commitment.”

Establishing International Partnerships

For colleges and universities interested in setting up partnerships with Japanese universities—or in other countries—Patrick Murphy of George Washington University (GW) in Washington, D.C., recommends learning through surveys which destinations for study abroad would be most popular with students at your institution.

“After you do the survey, you research the universities in those targeted countries and find the institutions that seem to be a good fit with your university,” says Murphy, a program associate in GW’s Office of International Education and Student Services at the Elliott School of International Affairs, which has established a partnership with Waseda University.

TeamUp promotes partnerships in several ways, including “familiarization tours,” which involve taking U.S. university administrators to Japan and introducing them to potential partners. Fields recommends finding partners with compatible missions, cultures, and goals.

Waseda’s Toshinobu recommends patience. When a good match is established, he says, partnerships can enrich the academic experience.

“Collaboration with overseas partners cannot be achieved in one day,” Toshinobu writes. “It will take many years to build and to keep a good relationship. Internationalization of the campus and

[enhancing] the study abroad program will have a positive impact on your students. What they learn while they are overseas and with other international students is truly amazing and will meet your educational aims and goals.” ■

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