



## Establishing Cooperative Education as an Integral Part of the Undergraduate Curriculum at Ritsumeikan University

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Received 29 July 2005; accepted 01 September 2005

While the concept of an internship originated in the United States nearly one hundred years ago, internship programs have only become a part of the Japanese university system in the past 15 years. In the last 10 years, internship programs have quickly become widespread and, according to the latest government data (Ministry of Health, Labour & Welfare, 2005), a total of 100,000 students participated in internships over the one year survey period. As is apparent, the typical short-term unpaid internship that stresses work experience is firmly taking root in Japan. However, those involved with internship programs in Japan are beginning to focus instead on developmental internships, that is, cooperative education that raises the quality of education through a joining of theory and practice, in the spirit of the University of Cincinnati's former president, Herman Schneider, who first introduced the internship to the world a century ago. At the 14th World Conference on Cooperative Education, we presented an analysis of the factors leading to the rapid spread of internship programs in Japan as well as introduce Ritsumeikan University's internship programs and their potential to set the standard for cooperative education in Japan: this paper provides a summary of that presentation. (*Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 2005, 6(1), 7 - 12).

Keywords: Cooperative education; internship program; work-integrated learning; program variation; new program; internship philosophy; Japan

It was not until the early 1990s that Japan was finally introduced to cooperative education, nearly 90 years after the introduction of the world's first cooperative education program at the University of Cincinnati in 1906. Even before Japan's formal internship programs began undergraduate and graduate faculties in the science and engineering fields had offered courses providing practical learning experiences at various manufacturing companies. However, these programs were organized by university professors under collaborative research agreements between academia and industry for the purpose of sending students to assist in experiments and such at cutting-edge research laboratories. As such, these courses differed from cooperative education programs in that they did not have much of a work experience element.

The 1990s saw the spread of cooperative education and internship programs not only in the science and engineering fields, but also in the humanities and social sciences, and eventually throughout all disciplines. Programs were initially introduced at the graduate level and most were connected to studies within a student's major. As they gained in popularity, programs were extended to the undergraduate level and dominated mainly by short-term, unpaid opportunities of 10 days or less. 'Internship' was the sole term used for these programs and as many programs provided only work experience, they could not be

considered full-fledged cooperative education programs.

Recently, there has been an increase in credit-based internships offered as part of the regular curriculum as well as paid internship programs and internships around one month in length. Japan ought to perhaps follow the United States example of distinguishing between long-term programs that offer academic credit as 'cooperative education' and short-term unpaid programs as 'internships.. In Japan, however, the term 'internship' continues to be used to refer to both types of programs, hindering the expansion and development of cooperative education.

In this paper, we will refer to unpaid, non-credit, short-term programs as internships and long-term, credit-based programs that generally provide some remuneration as cooperative education.

### Increased Participation by Students in the Humanities and Social Sciences

During the latter half of the 1990s, internship programs spread rapidly throughout Japan. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (2003) survey, a total of 317 universities (46.3% of all survey participants) offered credit-based internship programs in which 30,222 students participated in 2002. This figure surpassed the 30,000 mark for the first time. Of

the universities participating in the survey, 43.8% of private universities, 24% of public universities, and 77.3% of national universities had established internship programs. When one considers that non-credit programs were not included in these statistics, it can be estimated that most universities in Japan do provide some sort of internship program at present.

With the rapid increase of internship programs, came a change in the type of student participating. Compared to science and engineering students, there has been a steep rise in participation among students in the humanities and social science, accounting for between one fourth of all participants in 2000 and one third in 2002. This rise is attributed to qualitative changes in the nature of internship programs.

Naturally, the sciences, and education in the science and engineering fields, have a direct link to society and economics through technology; this is particularly true in the case of engineering. If a student majoring in mechanical engineering does an internship at a production site, what that student learns on-site is an education in his or her major. However, when it comes to the humanities and social sciences, internships do not always directly relate to a student's major. Because of this, humanities and social science students frequently have difficulty strengthening their education in their major while participating in internships. The result is that the internship does not become anything more than work experience.

Thus, internship programs in Japan have come to involve, in part, the ideas of cooperative education; however, it must be said that the nearly exclusive use of the term 'internship' in Japan has beget some confusion among students regarding the general concept of cooperative education.

### **The Rapid Spread of Internships and Cooperative Education Programs in Context**

That internships have rapidly increased throughout Japan in the past decade is no doubt due to certain changes in the fabric of society, three of which are outlined below.

#### *Changes in Employment Environment and Deterioration of the Job Market for New Graduates*

As is well known, the Japanese economy went through a prolonged economic slump in the 1990s, which is now referred to as the "bursting of the economic bubble." Since then, the economic situation has failed to noticeably improve, with many commentators lamenting the 'lost 10 years', a period that actually spans fourteen. However, the system of seniority pay, which had been accompanied by rapid economic growth through the 1980s, is gradually being overhauled in favor of a performance-based wage system. At the same time, many Japanese companies have made changes to their general employment policies in order to emphasize the employment of highly specialized professionals, who are capable of performing multiple roles, over that of generalists.

Such changes in the employment situation have affected

the way in which new graduates are hired each spring. These changes have led to a system of proactively hiring university graduates who have already completed three years of work experience. In addition, there has been an increase in the recruitment of mid-career employees who have the skills and experience to immediately contribute to the company.

The result is that the employment situation for new graduates with no working experience is grim—a factor that seriously influences education at both public and private universities. University educators and administrators are now concerned with training students who will be immediately effective on the job, a factor which has facilitated the spread of internship programs.

#### *Diversification of Participating Organizations and Companies*

Internships place a large structural burden on participating organizations and companies. Objectively speaking, in order to accept untrained students who are not immediately able to work unsupervised as interns, the company must expend both economic and human resources. During the first phase of internships in the early half of the 1990s, the number of students and universities taking part in internship programs was limited, and companies (mostly industrial firms) were not concerned with whether or not student internships led to employment at their company. Instead, companies often felt they were obligated to provide internship opportunities as a service to society, or as part of corporate social responsibility. Furthermore, companies understood that students were accepted as interns as part of their university education.

However, as both the number of universities offering internships and the number of students taking part in internships increased during the latter half of the 1990s, there was a gradual drop in the quality of interns, and as a result companies were forced to review their internship policies. One method was to create special internships designed as a step to recruit future university graduates. During the internship period—usually a period of two weeks to a month—a recruitment officer would evaluate an intern's performance and recruit interns considered capable for employment upon graduation. After Panasonic (Matsushita Electronics) initiated this practice in 2001, for example, it was quickly adopted by other companies.

On the other hand, we have also seen an increase in the participation of companies deemed 'undesirable' by universities. During the prolonged economic slump, there was a tendency for Japanese companies to employ increasing numbers of part-time workers, primarily for the purpose of cutting human resource costs. Because interns receive even lower wages than part-time workers (and indeed, often work for free), some companies save money by hiring student interns to take on duties that would normally be done by full-time employees. Many companies took these policies one step further, 'employing' students nearly full-time under the pretense of an internship. Students who have to work under such conditions, with heavy workloads, long hours and little pay, and who are

given more responsibility than they should perhaps have, will no doubt have little time to use the internship to the advantage of their studies. Instead, such programs place the student under an unfair amount of stress. Although this is obviously an abuse of the internship concept, it is unfortunate that some companies do take advantage of the system. However, the practice of employing interns as short-gap solutions to save labor costs is indeed a major factor in the increase in the number of students participating in internship programs.

#### *Transformation of Higher Education: Increasing Access*

It is now agreed that in 2007, all high school students in Japan will be able to advance to the tertiary education stage. Due to a continuing decrease in the numbers of young people and a continuing increase in the number of universities, university capacity is expected to exceed the number of applicants for the first time. In other words, it will be possible for any student who desires a college education to receive one; a student need only choose where to apply. It is also predicted that a drop in student numbers will have a negative effect on the overall quality of tertiary education in Japan. Decreasing enrollment will no doubt have a negative impact on university revenue, a particularly poignant issue for private universities (the majority of some 800 universities in Japan) whose income primarily stems from course fees. With their very survival at risk, educational institutions must make concerted efforts to improve employment prospects for graduates, just in order to attract potential applicants. Many of these efforts have concentrated on the enhancement and expansion of internship programs as part of the university curriculum.

#### **Cooperative Education at Ritsumeikan University: Philosophy and Results**

##### *Ritsumeikan University: One Thousand Students Gaining Experience Every Year*

Ritsumeikan University considers itself one of the universities in the forefront of cooperative education in Japan. The first program introduced at Ritsumeikan University was in the Graduate School of International Affairs in 1992. The program was unusual for its time as it was a genuine cooperative education program that provided credit for participation. At that time in the Kinki region of Japan, there were very few work-experience internship programs available, and even fewer cooperative education programs offering credit.

Additional credit-based internship programs were introduced in 1997 by the undergraduate Colleges of Law, Economics, International Relations, and Policy Science at Ritsumeikan University, with the College of Letters following in 2001. In 1998, the university began taking part in an internship program run by the Consortium of Universities in Kyoto, a collective body of just over 50 universities in Kyoto.

In 2003, a portion of the internship programs that had been developed independently by each of the colleges was

integrated into the Inter-College Internship Program, a program open to 2nd through 4th year students in all colleges. Through the All Ritsumeikan Inter-College Internship Program, students are able to participate in one of four types of internship programs. Partnership A internships have been established within a particular college and therefore limit participation only to students within that faculty or a few superior students from other colleges. Partnership B internships are inter-college programs open to students from all undergraduate colleges. Students also have the option of applying to an Independent Internship on their own or applying to the Consortium of Universities in Kyoto internship program. Ritsumeikan University students are thus able to choose from a wide-range of options to meet their individual needs.

The Internship Academic Affairs Committee, also established in 2003, is responsible for administration, credit recognition, and the finalizing of partnership agreements with receiving companies and organizations; while the Internship Office, jointly established by the Office of Academic Affairs, the Career Center, and the Office of International Affairs, promotes the program among students, provides counseling services, and otherwise ensures the smooth functioning of the program.

Fall 2003 also marked the hiring of a full-time faculty member specifically to oversee the internship program, Professor Toshiaki Kato, Director of the Internship Office.

#### *Expanding Opportunities for Internships Abroad*

Ritsumeikan University has also begun to expand and develop opportunities for students to participate in internships abroad. The university has taken part in various overseas internship conferences such as CEA and WACE in 1999, 2001, and 2003, with the goal of increasing the visibility abroad of Ritsumeikan University's efforts in cooperative education. The paper presented at this year's conference in Boston is related to the paper given at the Fifth WACE Cooperative Education Asia-Pacific Regional Conference held in New Zealand in December of 2004.

The university has been vigorously working toward establishing agreements with overseas partners. In 2003, Ritsumeikan University entered into a comprehensive agreement of internship and student exchange with Simon Fraser University in Canada. This complements the existing agreement for a student exchange internship program with the University of British Columbia (UBC), further expanding the opportunities for students to go abroad for international internships. With UBC, Ritsumeikan has enjoyed a successful student academic exchange program since 1991, with the reciprocal internship program being initiated in 2003. Ritsumeikan University is also looking at further developing international internship partnerships in the North American and the Asian-Pacific regions in the very near future.

Through improvements to the organization and structure of our internship program, we have been able to steadily increase internship opportunities both in Japan and overseas. For the past several years, we have been able to place around 1,000 students each year in internships,

statistically placing Ritsumeikan University second in the nation.

*Guaranteeing Both Quantity and Quality through Ritsumeikan University's Internship Philosophy*

Ritsumeikan University established a campus-wide Internship Academic Affairs Committee in 2003 as well as an Internship Office which functions under this committee. Not many other universities in Japan with student populations of 35,000 or more offer similar university-wide internship programs managed by a single, dedicated internship office. Ritsumeikan University is unique in this aspect.

Since students participate in internship programs voluntarily, schools often limit their responsibilities to the dissemination of information on internship opportunities, guidance (application procedures, insurance requirements, etc.), and protocol training, leaving most of the work up to the individual and receiving companies. In cases where academic credits are awarded, students are generally required to submit a final report post-internship to be evaluated by a designated professor.

Though Ritsumeikan University considers internships to provide students with a valuable independent learning experience, internship programs in and of themselves are not without structural flaws. Firstly, internships place a burden on the participating company or organization. Secondly, if the university neglects to instill in the students the proper motivation for learning, the internship may become merely an opportunity to find employment. Thirdly, as discussed above, there is always the possibility that the organization or company itself may combine the internship with the companies recruiting practices. To help avoid these pitfalls, and in order to provide full-fledged cooperative education opportunities in the near future, Ritsumeikan University has developed and put into place the strict administration and management policy detailed below.

**The Ritsumeikan Internship Philosophy**

The Ritsumeikan internship philosophy consists of three underlying themes, which can be summed up as follows:

1. The University's internship programs should be part of an academic curriculum that promotes student growth, development, and learning
2. Through work experience in economic society (broadly defined as industry, government, school, and community), internship programs should provide students with an awareness of the societal value of their education as well as the social demands placed on that education, and
3. Internships should equip students with the practical skills to resolve issues and problems in the workplace, thus developing their sense of social responsibility and enabling them to become more capable individuals overall by strengthening their self-reliance and motivation to improve.

Item (1) actually falls under the basic educational philosophy of Ritsumeikan University and specifies an academic program based on the concept of connecting a student's major with work experience that ties into future career development. Items (2) and (3) further define the aims presented in item (1). Item (2) defines the type of education students should be receiving through an internship; while item (3) depicts the type of character development aimed for through an internship program. Finally, society, as mentioned above, is defined as international organizations, industrial corporations, government agencies, schools, community organizations, local NPOs, NGOs, and other civic organizations.

**Innovations Based on the Internship Philosophy**

Several changes were made to the internship program in 2004 based on the finalization of Ritsumeikan's Internship Philosophy.

One of these innovations was the introduction of a system of pre- and post-internship workshops. After a student has been accepted as an intern by a company or organization and paid the registration fee at the Internship Office, he or she is required to participate in preparatory and post-internship workshops (students participating in internships through the Consortium of Universities in Kyoto are not required to attend these workshops). Coordinating professors are selected from each of the nine undergraduate colleges to conduct the workshops. Prior to the student workshops, these professors take part in a leadership guidance session to undergo comprehensive training related to internship education based on textbooks designed for educators. The pre-internship workshop for students is held over a two day period for a total of 16 hours, while the post-internship workshop covers one day with an actual total time of four hours. In order to receive the two academic credits offered for participating in an internship, students must 1) attend both the pre- and post-internship workshops, 2) clock a minimum of 40 hours as an intern, and 3) submit a final report and other required documents.

Improvements to the make-up of the workshops have also been made. The most prominent of these improvements is the development and introduction of the 'Major Identification Worksheet'. In Japan, most students work part-time while enrolled at university, gaining what can be valuable work experience. In order for students to not confuse internships with part-time work, the university has them take part in several group work sessions during the pre-training and post-internship workshops in which they must seriously consider and discuss the relationship of their undergraduate major to work experience. For example, the experience gained while interning at an accounting office or department is of obvious value to a student majoring in accounting. Similarly, it also makes sense to assign students studying corporate law to an internship in the legal department of a corporation. In the cases above, it is expected that the students are able to grasp the importance of their college education as a basic accomplishment within the business world. However, if a philosophy major, for example, participated in an internship in the sales

department of a department store, the relationship between the work experience and the major of the student involved may not be immediately apparent (see Jones & Linn, 2004 for a discussion of this issue).

It is expected that both types of students will gain valuable insights from the group work sessions regarding the relationships between their academic studies and their internship experiences. If a student's major directly relates to the field of his or her internship, the student may hold a narrow perception of the possibilities. The groups these students work in during these sessions will be comprised of students from different colleges at various points in their education who are not from the same specialized background. During group work these students will participate in a question and answer session with their peers, a process which will allow the internship students to logically sort through what they have learned in their major and broaden their perspective regarding worksite experiences. The exchange of ideas in group work should also allow students whose internships, at first glance, do not relate directly to their fields of study to view their worksite experiences from a broader perspective. For example, a philosophy student might realize the value of philosophical reasoning and analysis as it relates to a work environment.

Students will complete the Major Identification Worksheet based on the results of these earnest discussions during the pre- and post-workshops. The worksheets are then used by the coordinating professors to evaluate the development of internship students.

Additionally, as students enter into the full-swing of their internship work, the Internship Office offers a newly revamped risk management seminar focusing on basics such as the protection of privacy rights, preservation of trade secrets, confidentiality, and so on.

### **Ritsumeikan University and the Move from Internships to Cooperative Education**

The development of a full-fledged cooperative education program of the sort Ritsumeikan University is pursuing is still not widely seen in Japan.

Ritsumeikan University takes pride in fostering student individuality and providing an unquestionable educational foundation. To cultivate individuality, for example, the university offers a group of unique Career Design courses, available for students in the second semester of their first year through to the second semester of their third year, with related work-integrated learning courses offered within that series. In 2004, the following courses were established: Introduction to Work-Integrated Learning, in the Fall Semester for second year students and Career Design Part III and Work-Integrated Learning Practice, for third year students in the Spring and Fall Semesters, respectively.

Using these courses as a foundation, the university plans to introduce a new work-integrated learning program in 2005, consisting of four connected components to run over a period of four to six months. As part of this pilot program, teams of three students (both graduate and undergraduate) will address a series of issues raised by companies related to the current state of internship

programs. Over the four to six month period, these students will conduct research and an independent evaluation, culminating in the presentation of a project proposal on how to resolve these issues. The program will consist of an initial two-week internship component at a corporation in order to gain an understanding of the company organization as well as become familiar with the work flow at the company. This will then be followed by a special practical training component (up to four months) during which students work towards their final project proposal. Teams will then present their proposal to company management, student peers, and Ritsumeikan faculty followed by a question and answer session to provide each team with feedback. Finally, the program will culminate in a company-paid project implementation component (up to two months) during which students will attempt to apply the principles of their proposal in the real world. During the program, students will participate in a seminar on project planning that covers the necessary research methods and logical thought for issue resolution as well as a seminar in presentation skills. Students from all disciplines will be able to apply to the pilot program.

### **Ritsumeikan University's Internship Programs as a Model of Internship and Cooperative Education for Japan**

In Japan, three governmental authorities are responsible for promoting internship programs. The Ministry of Education oversees the management and implementation of internship programs at universities and higher educational institutions. The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare is responsible for implementing employment policies for young people, and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry promotes economic activities within local business communities, such as venture businesses for young people. Though these three authorities may not always see eye to eye regarding issues of policy, they share the common goal of revitalizing Japanese society in the 21st century through the cultivation of capable young people. The active promotion of internship programs is the cornerstone of these efforts.

Internships were first officially recognized in Japan as part of the Ministry of Education's January 1997 Educational Reform Program. The concept was again mentioned in an ordinance by the Cabinet on May 16 of the same year in its Action Plan for Structural Economic Reform and Development. This action plan officially defines internships as programs that "provide students with work experience in their current field or discipline that will assist in their future career design" (MoE, 1997) Although the length of the internship period, system of credit recognition, and payment conditions still differ from that of the United States, the concept itself is very similar to that of existing cooperative education programs.

In 2000, the Ministry of Education expanded its definition, classifying internships into three categories: (1) Internships designed to motivate students to explore further learning, (2) Internships required as part of a degree program, and (3) Internships that prepare students to select their future careers. The Japanese government had thus

broadened its original definition to add two new types of internships, namely programs that require students to do an internship as part of their degrees and programs that lead to possible future employment. Indeed, as mentioned in its own Internship Philosophy, Ritsumeikan internship programs clearly follow the guidelines set forth by the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education has held an annual event on topical issues in education since 2000. The 2005 event, Forum on the Development of Cooperative Education, was held in Tokyo last February and attended by educators from Japan and abroad, including Sujeet K. Chuadhuri of WACE. The director of Ritsumeikan University's Internship Office was elected to speak as a panelist at the forum based on a selection made by the Higher Education Bureau. An official from the Bureau commented on the selection as follows:

Now that internship programs have been established nation-wide, we must advance to the next stage of development. We have examined the efforts of universities throughout Japan and have come to the conclusion that Ritsumeikan University's programs serve as a model of internship and cooperative education for Japan. In addition to having developed a university-wide integrated learning program open to all students, the educational results of the program support its effectiveness. (Takahiro Matsuzawa, Administrative Official Planner, The Ministry of Education).

Indeed, all three relevant authorities, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, had very favorable impressions of Ritsumeikan's Internship Program from the broad perspective of human resources development.

## Conclusion

Although internship programs in Japan have become firmly established as a part of university curriculum over the past 15 years, the structure of these programs must continually keep pace with changes in society, such as the prolonged economic slump of the 1990s, changes in company recruiting practices, and changes in the very fabric and structure of Japanese universities.

Ritsumeikan University is a large university with over 35,000 students enrolled in the nine undergraduate colleges and eleven graduate schools that span over two campuses and cover the fields of computers, science, engineering, social sciences, and humanities. Out of roughly eight hundred universities in Japan, Ritsumeikan University is ranked highly in terms of student academic achievement, and the university faculty and administration feel a strong sense of social responsibility as a research, undergraduate, and professional educational institution. As a research institution, the university nurtures talented scholars through a variety of specialized research centers; while as an undergraduate and professional university, the university educates students to become competent and practical future

employees ready to take on the challenges of the business world.

To this end, Ritsumeikan University has a responsibility to develop and improve its own internship programs. Providing professional level education to future generations is its ultimate objective. In this respect, we are well aware of the importance of the upcoming work-integrated learning program, particularly in the context of a joint program where undergraduate and graduate students work together as a team. However, the university has an obligation to continue to expand its existing campus-wide internship programs, ensuring that all students may take advantage of the opportunity to gain invaluable work experience and a head start in today's cutthroat environment.

Ritsumeikan University would like to develop a Japan-wide standard for cooperative education and internship programs, learning from the precedents set by other WACE members, as well as through a re-examination and analysis of its own programs. Ritsumeikan University will continue to work toward ensuring that its chosen internship model is a success and hopes to implement work-integrated learning throughout its entire curriculum in cooperation with WACE and its member universities.

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