

U.S.-Japan Virtual Mobility Consortium: An Innovative Educational Approach and Model

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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.

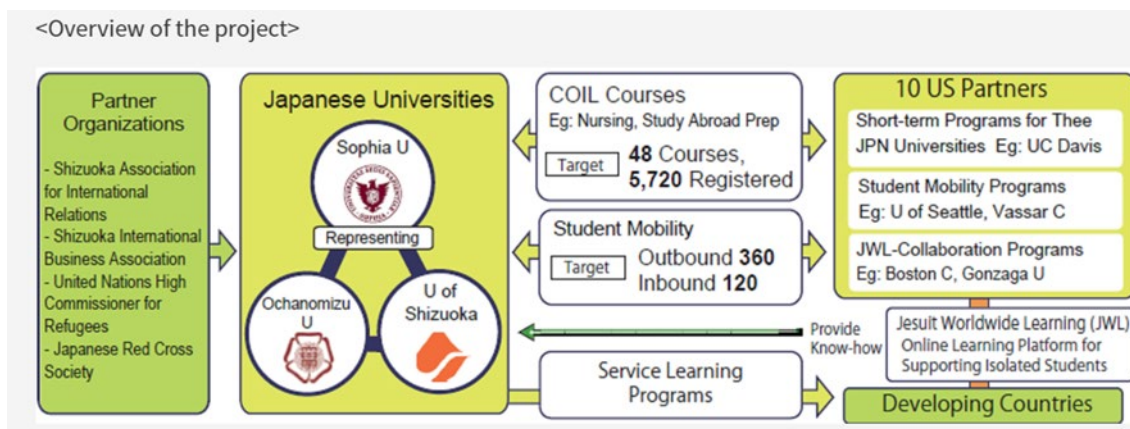
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Visit www.acenet.edu/usjp-hees to learn more about the project.

Starting in 2018, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan (MEXT), selected Sophia University, Ochanomizu University, and the University of Shizuoka to participate in Inter-University Exchange Project to promote virtual mobility and virtual exchange partnerships with the United States. All three institutions had agreed to jointly partner with the following 10 U.S. higher education institutions: The University of Portland, Gonzaga University, Boston College, University of Seattle, Vassar College, the University of California-Davis, Loyola Marymount University, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Marquette University, and the University of San Francisco.

The idea of the project originally started when Sophia University approached Ochanomizu University and University of Shizuoka to work together in collaboration with select U.S. institutions on developing virtual mobility courses. All three Japanese universities recognized they could mutually benefit from capitalizing on their particular institutional strengths: Sophia has well-regarded international education programs, Ochanomizu has a strong advanced Japanese studies program, and Shizuoka has an internationally recognized nursing program. The shared goals of the consortium are to:

1. Provide global educational opportunities for faculty and students;
2. Enhance multi-faceted student exchange; and
3. Contribute toward U.N. Sustainable Development Goals on the delivery of quality education and elimination of health education inequality.



Although the project is still in progress (as of March 2021), there have been some promising outcomes from the piloted virtual mobility (VM) and virtual exchange (VE) programs worth noting. For example, Sophia University and University of Shizuoka collaborated with the University of Portland (OR-USA) and Dornogobi Medical School (Mongolia) on providing a synchronous online course, Sex Education in Youth. The course included participation from 59 nursing program students and four lead faculty instructors. Prior to the start of the course, faculty instructors from each of the four participating institutions jointly planned structured course activities. This included six weeks of peer learning, where students actively led discussions on reproductive health issues, including birth and abortion rates, contraceptive methods and costs, sexually transmitted diseases, related laws and regulations, and sex education. Outside of the classroom, students worked on individual oral presentations to present to their peers at the end of the course as part of a virtual international academic conference by the four institutions.

Nursing programs have a reputation across the world for having very rigid course schedules and stringent licensing requirements, so very few nurses are able to participate in traditional study abroad programs. The pilot virtual mobility-nursing course proved an extremely valuable opportunity for the nursing students at all four institutions to engage with peers from other cultures. Across all four institutions, the nursing students expressed appreciation for their collaborative work experience as part of a self-reflection activity at the end of course. A student from the University of Portland wrote, “I really appreciated the opportunity to talk about important topics with other nursing students from geographically different places.” Another commented, “In spite of differences in language, geography, and culture, we were still able to communicate through the universal ‘language of nursing’ to understand the challenges each of us face in our local communities. This kind of exchange provides a rich opportunity for us to challenge our assumptions and better understand our own systems and processes as well as those from other countries.” A student at Sophia University expressed similar sentiments: “Being in a nursing program, it is difficult for me to spare time to study abroad. I found it to be a precious time to have this international experience with other nursing students from across the world who also have similar hopes for the future as me” (Negishi and Watanabe 2020).

Given the consortium’s successful pilot, all four institutions have agreed to continue to work together on infusing additional virtual mobility course programs into each of their nursing programs. In addition, the virtual mobility-nursing consortium has expanded to include Marquette University (WI-USA), the University of California, Los Angeles, and Boston College (MA-USA). In addition to enhancing nursing programs, the virtual mobility consortium also is piloting interdisciplinary courses within the social sciences. For example, Gonzaga University (WA-USA), Sophia University, the University of Shizuoka, and Ochanomizu University collaborated on providing a virtual mobility course series focused on topics within gender studies during the fall 2020 semester. Each of the three Japanese universities took turns hosting three synchronous classes, which included online lectures on different gender studies themes: family and gender in the Japanese society, family and gender equality in Korea, and LGBTQ in Asia. The classes were taught in Japanese, as the Gonzaga students were Japanese language and cultural studies majors. Both the Japanese and American students also had opportunities during the class session for group discussions, comparing and contrasting each other’s cultural contexts as well as other Asian cultural contexts.



The second phase of the virtual mobility course series involved Japanese students participating in an intensive course at Gonzaga's School of Leadership Studies. The academic course included a focus on developing students' intercultural competences and inclusive leadership with reflective self-study and co-curricular activities. At the conclusion of the course, both American and Japanese students joined in Gonzaga's School of Leadership Studies Inclusive Leadership program, which concentrated on strengthening students' skills in communication, teamwork, creativity, and emotional intelligence. The program combined theory with practical insights from invited lecturers, professionals, and local leaders in and around Gonzaga's campus in Spokane, Washington.

Though the current project is still in progress, going forward all three Japanese institutions are already looking ahead at working with their U.S. institutional partners on developing more interdisciplinary virtual mobility programs that will also include a physical mobility component. For example, U.S. students as a pre-departure would first participate in online courses with students from each of the Japan partner's campus before embarking on the physical exchange to each of the partner campuses in Japan. While in Japan, U.S. students would take courses in advanced Japanese language at Ochanomizu University, followed by a study tour of local Japanese businesses and cultural activities organized by the University of Shizuoka. As a contribution to the Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) network, Sophia University will then host a study tour for both U.S. and Japanese students to Myanmar to visit another Jesuit institution as well as government and non-government international organizations. The goal of this part of the U.S.- Japan institutional partnership will be to provide a shared immersion experience between U.S. and Japanese students where they equally can learn to become global citizens by jointly learning about another third country's educational development and inequality issues.

With more evidence-based research and strengthened collaborative approaches amongst this U.S.-Japan higher education, there is great promise for virtual exchange and mobility will continue to grow and strengthen innovative and inclusive internationalization in both the U.S. and Japan.

Reference

Negishi, Mayumi, and Yoriko Watanabe. 2020. "Ibunka no kango o musubu COIL gata jugyo (*COIL-based classes connect nursing across cultures*)." *Kango Kyoiku* 61 (5): 408–415.