

Shimane Nursing College: Its Present and Future

— To be a socially responsible college with uniqueness and appeal —

Tokugoro TSUNEMATSU

Abstract

Japan is characterized by its aging society and with a decreasing birth rate and, as a consequence, a decreasing number of 18-year-olds - the age of moving up to higher education. There has been a push to establish new schools of nursing (associate and baccalaureate degree programs) throughout Japan. It is thus anticipated that there will be severe competition in the recruitment of applicants for these schools. The report of the Education Council submitted to the Minister of Education required all universities to undertake a distinctive development program with diversification and individuality. The same requirement is also considered to apply to nursing colleges. In light of these reform measures presented by the Council, Shimane Nursing College is making every effort to be a socially responsible college through a unique and attractive program. An overall review is being carried out in areas including the entrance examination; the National Examinations for Nurse, for Public Health Nurse and for Midwife; the improvement of educational content and teaching methods through student evaluation; the securing of employment; and, our contribution to the community. The enhancement of such activities is undeniably important, requiring an untiring effort. The key phrases of the Ideal and Objectives of Education at Shimane Nursing College are Human Understanding (Love for Human), Development of the Roles of Nursing Profession, and Contribution to the Health and Welfare of the Community ("Open-door College"). These must serve as our philosophical guidelines for the future development of a unique and inspiring socially responsible college, and for an enjoyable academic life which is both challenging and inspirational.

Key words : University reform, Education Council, fewer 18-year-olds, entrance examination applicants, improvement of education

I. Introduction

Social trends in Japan nowadays are characterized by a progressively aging society, a declining birth rate and a subsequent decrease in the population of productive workers. These trends are and will be exerting strong influences on the socio-economic structure and employment. As is

well known, there was a bubble economy in this country in the 1980's which collapsed in the early 1990's. The Japanese government has, since then, been unable to effect a turn-around of this economic decline. Japan now faces the challenge of creating a new socio-economic order, including such areas as deregulation in official and private sectors of administration, industry, and business, and of making educational reform in order to meet fast-occurring and drastic changes in globalization and internationalization in the world.

As for the educational reform, the University Council¹⁾ submitted to the Minister of Education, Science, Sports and Culture (Monbusho) in October, 1998, a report entitled "A Vision for Universities in the 21st Century and Reform Measures ~ To Be Distinctive Universities in a Competitive Environment". It stressed the establishment of such characteristics as diversification and individualization in institutions of higher education, and unique development in each of the national, public and private universities in accordance with the proposal of "the Basic Philosophies of University Reform ~ To be Distinctive Universities". (Table 1)

Table 1 .

Basic Philosophies of University Reform - To be Distinctive Universities

Four Basic Philosophies:

1. Cultivation of Ability to Pursue One's Own Ends
- Qualitative Enhancement of Education and Research -
2. More Flexibility in the Educational and Research Systems
- Securing University Autonomy -
3. Responsible Decision-Making and Implementation
- Improvement of the Administrative Structure -
4. Establishment of a Plural Evaluation System
- Individualization of Universities and Continuous Improvement of Education and Research -

The higher education system should be changed into a new system in which individual universities can stimulate one another and grow together with the aim of further improvement. At the same time, it is important for higher education institutions to secure the international currency and commonality, promote individualization and diversification based upon their autonomy and fulfill the social obligation as public organs.
(University Council Report)

There was a marked shortage of nurses in 1980's and at the start of the 1990's throughout Japan. Shimane Prefecture, too, had a shortage of nurses in the various nursing settings, not only rural but also urban areas ; it was also anticipated that there would be a 1,000 - nurse shortage in 2000. In an attempt to cope with the situation, a number of nursing courses were established in Japan including the three-year program (associate degree) and the four-year program (baccalaureate degree). Shimane Nursing College was established in April 1995 in Izumo City, Shimane Prefecture, with the purpose of not only supplying quantitatively sufficient numbers of nurses to meet increasing social demands but also producing qualitatively more competent nursing professionals. As Shimane Nursing College is still young, it faces many challenges in the competitive environment of developing a college that is clearly unique with the ability to attract the younger generations : a unique and appealing college for the 21st Century. In order to achieve this purpose, the Faculty Meeting of the College ordered the Standing Committees of Self-evaluation, Academic Affairs, and Entrance Examination, and the Directors of Nursing and Specialty Courses to review the current status and to offer new proposals for measures to be a unique and appealing college.

II . Prospects for the society of higher education at the beginning of the 21st Century

The report of the University Council states that the social environment for higher education is expected to have undergone great changes from its current state by the beginning of the 21st Century. Although it is very difficult to exactly predict what our society in the new era will look like, the Council's report describes the following characteristics : (1) Opaqueness because of being more changeable and complicated ; (2) Global cooperation and co-existence required in the situation of reinforcement of international competitiveness ; (3) A graying population with a declining birth rate resulting in a marked decrease in productive population ; (4) Change of the sense of value in life including increased needs for lifelong learning ; and (5) Rapidly advancing science and research conducted in an interdisciplinary and comprehensive fashion. In its effort to lead the development of society, higher education will need to take into consideration not only the quantity of knowledge but also the comprehensive "intelligence" from various points of view and will have to advance its structural reform to further strengthen intellectual activities in preparation for the new era of "intelligence" restructuring. The University Council first presented four basic philosophies for educational reform of higher education and then proposed comprehensive and practical reform measures to be taken in accordance with these philosophies.

Junior colleges are also expected to develop the necessary diversity and individuality as educational institutions for giving students quality liberal education and cultivating their specialized professional skills.

III . Nursing education in Shimane Prefecture

1 . Demographic characteristics with reference to a decline of 18-year old population

Shimane Prefecture is located in the western part of the main island (Honshu), and has as of 1998 a population of about 766,000, and an area of about 6,710 square kilometers²⁾. Japan has a population of about 126,486,000 and an area of about 378,000 square kilometers. The percentage of the Shimane Prefecture population aged 65 or above is 23.8% as compared to 16.2% overall in Japan, ranking at the top of the 47 prefectures. It is characterized by the highest per capita ratio of the elderly and a decreasing birthrate. The birth rate (the number of live births in a year per 1,000 total population) in 1998 in Shimane Prefecture was 8.5 as compared with 9.5 overall in Japan. In consequence there is a steady decrease in the population of 18-year olds, the age for entering colleges and universities, as shown in Fig. 1 .

The general tendency observed among young people in Shimane Prefecture as well as in Japan is (1) a diversified sense of life in terms of marriage, occupation, and education ; (2) an eagerness to have a high level of education ; (3) a preference for a license in a health-related occupation or profession ; and (4) a preference for attending higher education facilities in urban areas rather than those in the rural areas although, on the contrary, there are some who have strong attachments to their native towns and wish to stay. It is difficult to precisely predict at present which determinants will positively or negatively affect the number of applicants to Shimane Nursing College. Regardless, the need to ensure a sufficient number of applicants each year for the College is an obvious necessity.

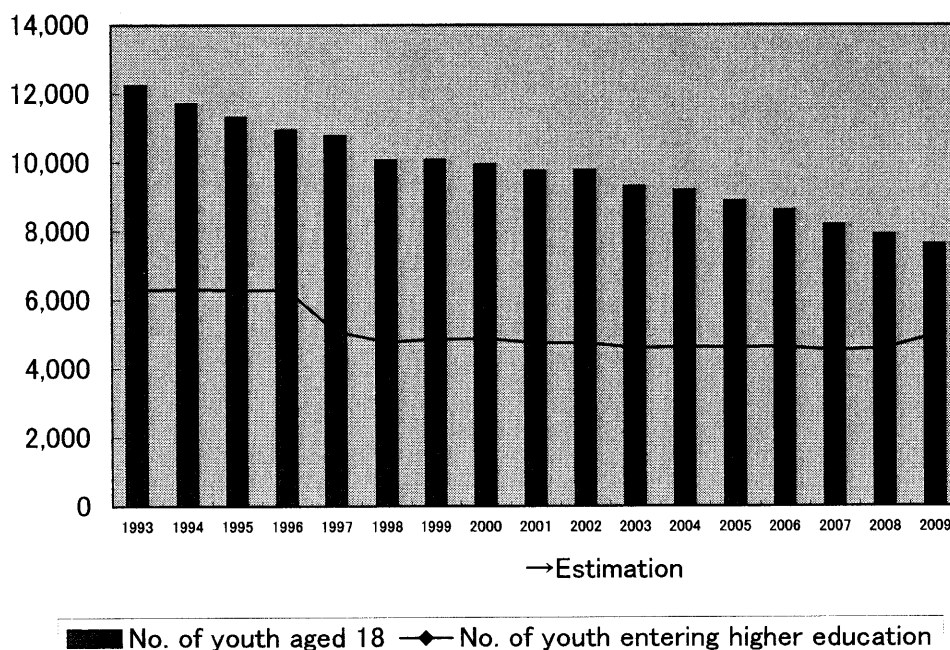


Fig 1 Annual figures for the total number of youth aged 18 in Shimane Prefecture and those entering higher education institutions

2. Current status of nursing education

There has been an increased demand for nurses in the various nursing settings such as hospitals providing medical advanced services and home-care nursing services for the elderly living in communities. But the number of nurses in active service has become markedly insufficient, likely due to unfavorably severe working conditions. The Ministry of Health and Welfare estimated at the beginning of the 1990's that the prospective demand for nursing professionals in 2000 would be 230,000 greater in number than for 1991. This estimate was based on such national policies as the Ten Years' Strategy of Promoting Health and Welfare Care for the Elderly, the improvement of working conditions for nursing professionals, and promotion of home-visit nursing for the elderly. For purpose of coping with the situation, the Ministry of Health and Welfare promulgated the Law of Promotion to Secure Nurses and Others in 1992³⁾.

There is an article within this law regarding the improvement of nursing education. Previously, the majority of nursing schools had been hospital-based diploma programs and college-based associate-degree three-year programs, following graduation from senior high school. There had been very few college- or university-based baccalaureate programs, not to mention masters and doctorate programs. Since the promulgation of the law, a remarkable change in nursing education has occurred. There has been a rush to establish new schools of nursing baccalaureate programs, either independent of or in affiliation with medical colleges or universities. Also, associate degree programs have been converted to baccalaureate programs. As shown in Figs. 2-1, and 2-2, the shift is apparent in the number of nursing schools for associate degree and baccalaureate degree programs and in the total annual enrollments from 1991 to 1998. In Shimane Prefecture, it was anticipated in 1991 that there would be a serious shortage of nursing personnel amounting to 1,000 in number within ten years. At the time, there were four nursing schools with three-year diploma programs and a total annual enrollment of 153.

To meet an increase in social demands for nursing professionals, the Shimane Prefectural Government decided to establish a new nursing college with a three-year associate degree program, having an annual enrollment of 80, to replace the existing Prefectural Integrated Nursing School three-year diploma program with an annual enrollment of 35. Shimane Nursing College was thus completed in 1995, to become the first institution of higher education for nursing in this Prefecture. In 1999, a nursing school with a baccalaureate program was established at Shimane Medical University in Izumo City, with an annual enrollment of 60. It is anticipated that there will be a good partnership between the College and the nursing school, on one hand, and strong competition in terms of recruitment of applicants, on the other.

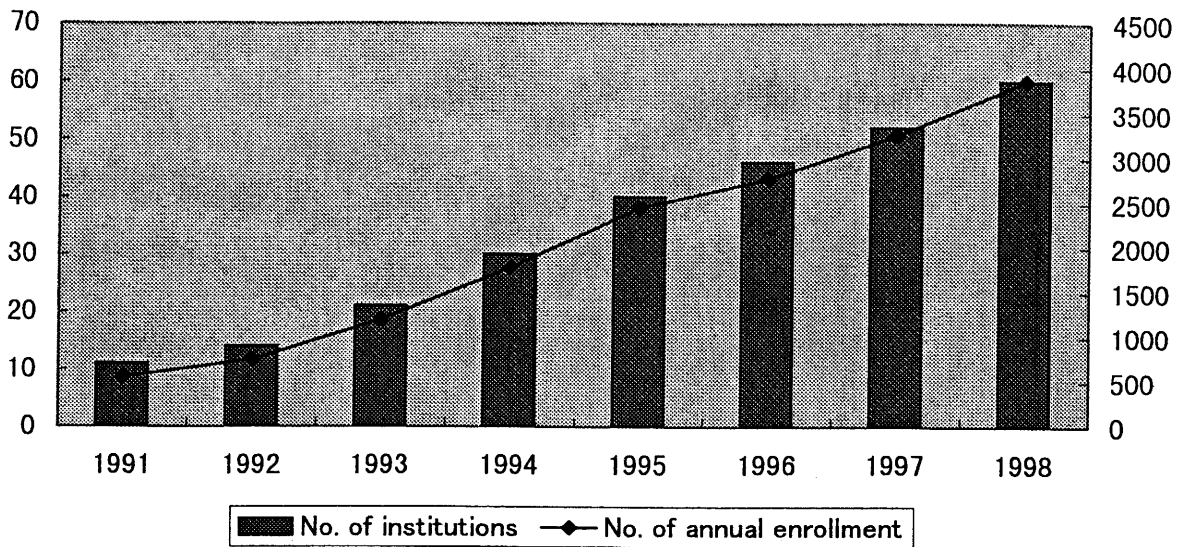


Fig 2-1 Annual change in numbers for baccalaureate degree programs of nursing (4-year course) in Japan

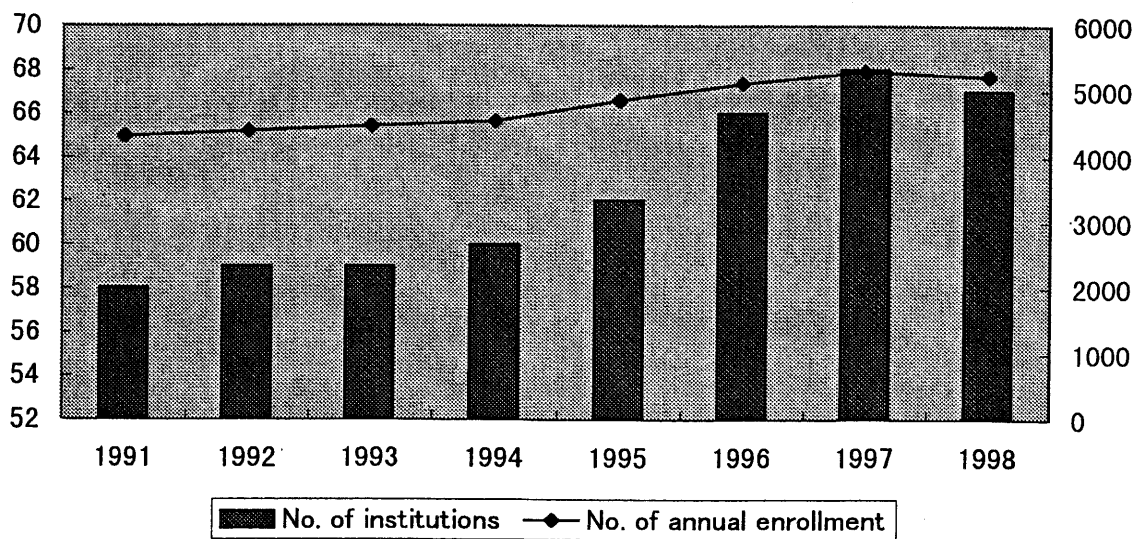


Fig 2-2 Annual change in numbers for associate degree programs of nursing (3-year course) in Japan

IV. Shimane Nursing College

1. Ideals and objectives, and a motto guiding the college towards the 21st Century⁴⁾

When the Shimane Nursing College opened, it publicized the college's Ideals and Objectives of Education. The philosophy underlying these Ideals is briefly expressed in three key phrases : (1) Human Understanding (Human Love) (2) Development of the Role of Nursing Profession and (3) Contribution to the Health and Welfare of the Community (Open-door College) (Table 2)

Table 2 .

Ideals and Objectives of Shimane Nursing College

1. Human Understanding (Love for Human)
2. Development of the Role of Nursing Profession
3. Contribution to the Health and Welfare of the Community
(Open-door-College)

In accordance with the University Council Report, Shimane Nursing College in 1998 planned to reinforce and enhance further the quality characteristics, and proposed a motto leading the college towards these goals : " To be a socially responsible college with a unique and appealing character " and " To create an enjoyable academic life which is both challenging and inspirational " . (Table 3)

Table 3 .

A Motto Guiding Shimane Nursing College into the 21st-Century

- "To be Socially Responsible College with Uniqueness and Appeal"
"To create an enjoyable academic life that is both challenging and inspirational "

2. Entrance examination

The entrance examination of Shimane Nursing College is characterized by the various ways of widely selecting applicants which contributes to making the college unique and appealing, including the general exam and special exam process. In the general exam, high school graduates and high school seniors take written-examinations in four subjects including Japanese, English, mathematics, and either biology or chemistry. The scores of the written examinations and those obtained by rating the reports sent from the applicant's senior high schools are evaluated. Fifty applicants are selected annually in this manner.

The special exam includes : (1) a recommendation exam in which two students per senior high school in Shimane Prefecture with their Principal's recommendation are eligible applicants ; (2) an exam for people in society aged 23 or above ; (3) an exam for Japanese returnees from abroad ; and (4) an exam for foreign students. Results are based on the total score of an interview, a short essay and the certificate of the student's records in senior high school. The number of applicants enrolled annually in this manner is 30.

The number of applicants for the general and the special exams for the past six years is shown in Fig. 3⁵⁾. The total was 645 in 1995 and gradually declined to 400 in 1998. But there has been an upward trend in the total number in 1999 and 2000. The change was parallel with that for the general exam. The totals for applicants for the recommendation exam and the exam for people in society are also shown. This upward tendency has encouraged this college to move

forward with measures described below in order to increase the number of applicants in the years to come.

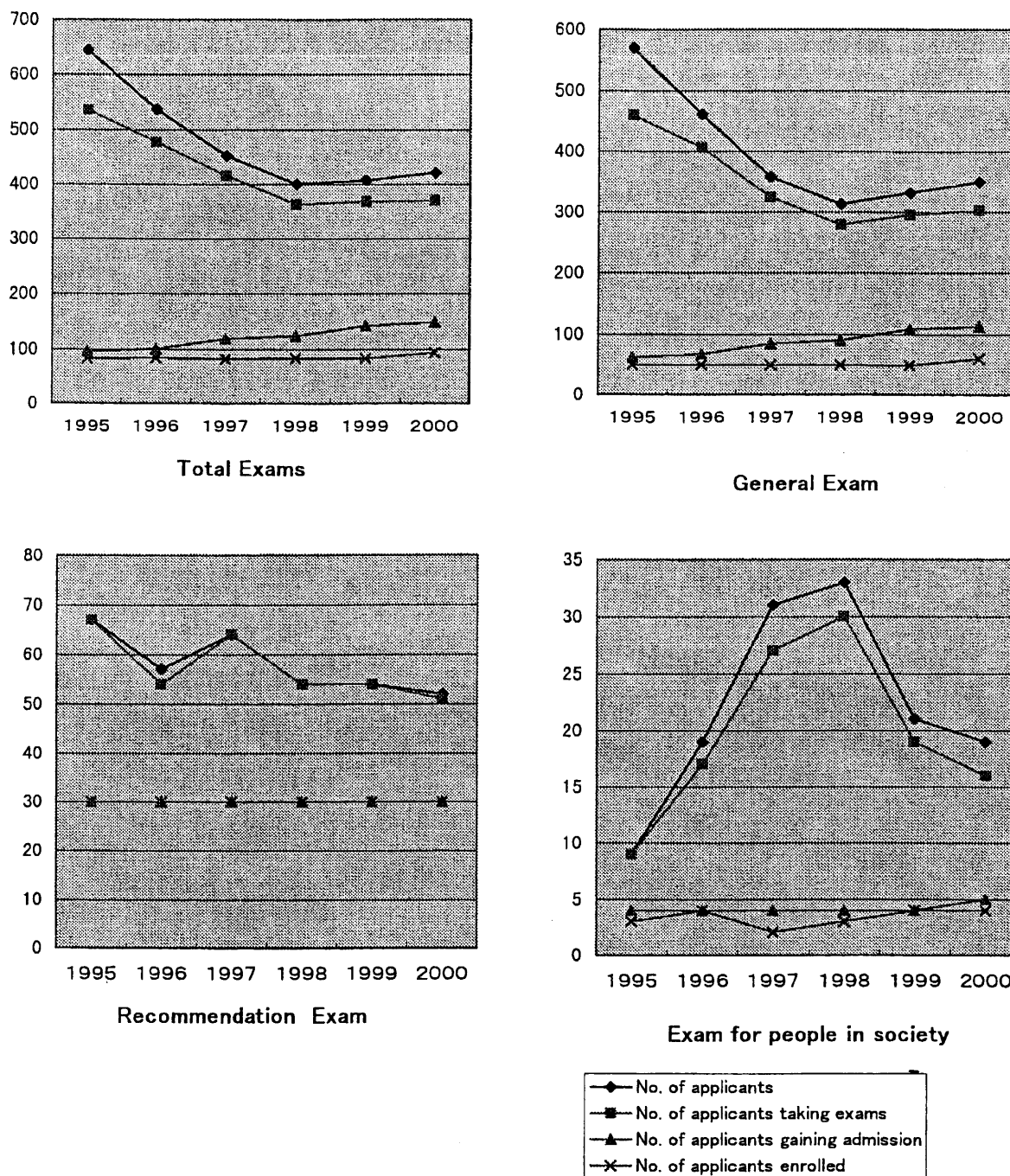


Fig 3 Entrance Exams at Shimane Nursing College

V. Measures to be a unique and appealing college

1. Making the entrance exam a unique and appealing process, and securing a sufficient number of applicants for admittance

As previously stated, the entrance exam at this college is characterized by the various ways

of selecting applicants which we feel are distinctive and attractive. Because of the changing number of applicants over the past six years, it is difficult to predict exactly the number of applicants in the future.

Senior high schools are now undertaking reforms such as the introduction of integrated courses in place of general and vocational courses, and the establishment of joint courses between junior and senior high schools. Such reforms are important factors in reviewing the College's existing entrance exam system and creating an innovative exam process most suited for future senior high school students.

Until the high school reforms have been completed, the following activities⁵⁾ have been instituted to aid in recruiting as many applicants as possible : (1) The event entitled "A Day of Experience as a Nursing Student for Junior-High-School Students" carried out in this campus under the sponsorship of Japanese Association of Nurses and Shimane Prefectural Government ; (2) the event entitled "A Gathering of Campus Visitors" for senior high-school students ; and (3) the College faculty's visits to senior high schools to explain the Ideals and Objectives of Education and curriculum of Shimane Nursing College.

2. Making the educational content and teaching methodology unique and appealing

The curriculum at this college was revised in 1998 following the amendment of the Ministerial Ordinance on the Designation of Schools for Public Health Nurse, Midwife and Nurse in April, 1997⁴⁾. The revision took the following matters into consideration : The spirit of the Ideals and Objectives was to be more clearly reflected in the new curriculum ; and, flexible arrangements for the subjects taught should be made to impart uniqueness and appeal to this college's educational process. The following are representative examples in the College's curriculum.

(1) Early start of the on-site practicum course

The Basic Nursing Practicum I Course⁶⁾ is an on-site practicum for the home-visit in a nearby community named Tobisu, a suburb of Izumo City with a population of about 1,600. Most of the people living there are engaged in farming and also have other unrelated jobs. Forty pairs of students make visitations once a month during a period of four months to the homes in which family members include a healthy senior(s). The homes are selected by the Senior Club in the Tobisu Public Community Center. The students are able to have useful communication with family members through conversation on various topics and especially on health-related problems. Upon completion of the practicum, a great deal of satisfaction with a feeling of accomplishment is expressed from both the students and host families. Students are able to observe and learn about the family members leading a daily life in the community environment. The students learn that there are many factors contributing to good health in the environment besides the health system. The students are expected to learn to have sincere consideration for the integrity of the living environment through realization of the importance of establishing a healthy community. A close human relationship with host families will be of great value to the students. This practicum is the so-called early exposure education to help the students foster at the start of study the sense of Human Understanding (Love for Human), Development of the Roles of Nursing Profession, and Contribution to Health and Welfare of Community. This program imparts a unique and appealing character to out curriculum.

(2) Placement of great importance on Gerontological Nursing in the curriculum

As mentioned above, Shimane Prefecture is characterized by being the most advanced in Japan in terms of the graying society. More weight of importance was added to the gerontological nursing courses in the revised curriculum. The course credits for classroom lectures and on-site practicum were increased to a greater number than those designated in the Amended Ordinance. A variety of facilities are utilized for the on-site practicum including the Special Care Facilities for Elderly People, the Care Facilities for Elderly People, and the Medical Care Facilities for Elderly People. The placement of great importance on gerontological nursing is one feature which makes this college distinctive and attractive in terms of education content.

(3) Development of global awareness among students

Learning foreign languages is very important in the climate of internationalization or globalization in the world. In the curriculum at this college three languages are included : English, Korean and Chinese. English is a required subject, and Korean and Chinese are optional. In order to encourage students to acquire a global awareness, the College entered into an Academic Exchange Agreement with both Wenatchee Valley College and the School of Nursing at Seattle University, Washington State, USA. Under this agreement, the College carries out the English and Nursing Study Abroad Program each summer vacation. A group of about twenty students and two faculty members participate in the program. They spend approximately three weeks at the two institutions, participating in programs that include learning English and Nursing, a home-stay with an American family, visiting medical and nursing institutions, and outdoor recreation. The students participating in the program make it a practice to publish after the study a brochure entitled "Summer Crossed Over the Pacific Ocean"⁷⁾ in which stories of their cross-cultural experiences in the United States are often expressed with strong feelings of happiness and excitement.⁸⁾⁹⁾ This program is recognized as a subject course (English IV). Students who have participated in the program are given one course credit. Development of global awareness is one of the important policies that makes this college distinctive and appealing.

(4) Enhancement of computer education

There are two excellent information networks at the College, jointly named "Network Systems of Shimane Nursing College Connecting Domestic and Worldwide Communities". One is a combined computer system of LAN (Local Area Network in the College) and Internet. The other is an audiovisual network system using cable television. The computer system is widely utilized by all students and faculty to carry out their study and personal communication. The audiovisual system is now being considered for wider use. This college places great importance on the enhancement of students' computer literacy for the following reasons. Shimane Prefectural Central Hospital, which is affiliated with this college and oversees the students' on-site practicum, has recently introduced an advanced and internally-developed management system named "Integrated Intelligent Management System" which handles all matters of administrative operations of the hospital. In this system, an electronic health-care record is used in the daily medical and nursing services in place of a traditional paper record¹⁰⁾. Being prepared in advance for and training in the innovative system gives the students greater confidence in the practicum and fosters the development of unique and appealing skills in the students for use in hospital

workplaces in the future.

(5) Students' evaluation of lecture classes

Following instructions of the Faculty Meeting, the students' evaluations of lecture classes have been done for almost all course subjects at the end of each semester since 1996. The Self-evaluation Committee organized under the Faculty Meeting makes a questionnaire including 20 general and 5 instructor-specific questions and is delivered to each student upon completion of the relevant class or after the regular examination at the end of the semester. The responses obtained are individually and collectively analyzed statistically. The results are referred back to each instructor (full-time faculty or part-time teacher) for their reflection on his / her own course and course content as well as teaching style and strategies in order to make the class the very best possible. The results collectively analysed are published every year in Annual Report⁵⁾. The students' evaluation is considered as one of the important ways to enhance the quality of the instructor's education activities. Thus the student-oriented education carried out by an individual instructor as well as by the faculty as a whole lends to the concept of being a college that is "socially responsible with uniqueness and appeal", and of creating "an enjoyable academic life which is both challenging and inspirational."

(6) Maintaining the highest rate of success for passing examinations such as the National Examinations for Public Health Nurse, for Midwife and for Nurse ; and, employment examinations and for entrance to advanced education facilities after graduation.

These are very important factors in our efforts to make the College a socially responsible institution with a unique and appealing character. Every effort has been made for the graduates' successful passing of the National Examinations, employment examinations and the examinations for entrance to either the specialty courses at this college or another university's baccalaureate program. Meeting our expectations, all graduates from the nursing course and the specialty courses (community-based nursing and midwifery) successfully passed the National Examinations in March, 2000. Our graduates also achieved highly successful results in transfer examinations and employment tests for private and public hospitals. As for employment, all the graduates obtained jobs of their choice, primarily in Shimane Prefecture, this year. Every effort should be made to continue to maintain the highest level of success in the various examinations.

(7) Contribution to the health and welfare of communities as an open-door college

The Ideals and Objectives of Education of this college have previously been described. One of the underlying philosophical phrases is "Contribution to the Health and Welfare of the Community as an Open-door College". Various activities are carried out including the opening of courses to elective-course students, extension lectures by both visiting professors and faculty for members of the community for life-long learning ; the opening of the library to health-related professionals from other workplaces ; the International Academic Exchange Agreement with Wenatchee Valley College and School of Nursing, Seattle University, Washington State, USA ; and the faculty's participation into social activities as a committee member or instructor. It is worthy of special mention that engagement by students in volunteer activities is becoming more popular year-by-year. The following statement in an article entitled "A Profession in the Twenty-

First Century”¹¹⁾ is cited here with a slight modification : Contribution to the Health and Welfare of the Community is : 1) to act in accordance with the Goal of Health for All in the world ; 2) to engage in administrative work for establishing a system for better health for all in each country ; 3) to contribute the fruits of academic teaching and research to the promotion of community development ; and 4) to be active as a citizen to improve the health and welfare for all in the local community.

VI. Summary

Japanese society is characterized by its progressively aging population and a declining birth rate related to the decrease in the number of the 18-year-old population - the age for starting higher education. This trend is bringing about various changes to education at universities and colleges. One example is the entrance examination geared to find graduates from senior high schools suitable for a nursing career. Although there is nowadays a high demand for nurses in the medical and nursing settings, it is anticipated that much effort will be needed in order to secure a sufficient number of applicants, mainly due, first, to the decrease in the 18-year-old population and, second, to severe recruiting competition stemming from the number of new colleges and universities of nursing which have recently been established. The University Council submitted to the Minister of Education, Science, Sports and Culture in 1998 a report entitled "A Vision for Universities in the 21st Century and Reform Measures ~ To Be Distinctive Universities in a Competitive Environment". The report was instrumental in realizing the importance of taking unsparing measures to make this college unique and appealing. A motto "To be a socially responsible college with uniqueness and appeal" and "To create an enjoyable academic life which is both challenging and inspirational" was set in 1998 under the Ideals and Objectives of the Education at Shimane Nursing College. For the purpose of fulfilling the motto, measures taken so far and to be taken in the future have been reviewed by various faculty sub-committees appointed at this college.

The measures regarding how to deal with such matters as the entrance examination, the National Examinations, improvement of course content and teaching methods, securing graduate employment, and community contribution have been presented here. These are involved in all the College activities of administration, education and research. Every effort should be made by the faculty, staff and students to enhance the quality of the College's performance in these areas, both individually and collectively. Fulfilling the motto step-by-step will make this college a socially responsible college, different from others and attractive to young high school graduates. This is an assured way to realize the Ideals and Objectives of Education at this college : Human Understanding (Love for Human), Development of the Role of Nursing, and Contribution to Health and Welfare of Community (Open-door College).

Acknowledgement

Grateful acknowledgement is made to all members of the standing committees at this college for their great efforts of proposing measures to be a unique and appealing college.

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