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# The Asian Studies Consortium: An Innovative Approach to Study in Japan

SUSAN COLEMAN, JAMES NARDUZZI, JONATHAN LAWSON, GUY COLARRULI

## I. Introduction

### A. *Study Abroad Programs in Japan*

Japan's dramatic re-emergence as a world power in the '80s led a number of U.S. colleges and universities to incorporate courses on Japanese history, politics, culture, management practices and language into their curricula. Simultaneously, there has been a flurry of activity to develop study abroad experiences in Japan to expose American students to Japanese culture and language. Chambers and Cummings (1990) document approximately 90 programs involving a U.S. school and a Japanese partner. For a variety of reasons a number of these ambitious ventures have not been entirely successful (Li, 1993).

One of the major impediments to launching a successful study abroad program in Japan has been the "language barrier" (Li, 1993). Most U.S. students do not speak Japanese and those who do may not speak it well. A second impediment has been incompatibility of curricula between U.S. and Japanese universities. A third stumbling block has been lack of faculty support and accompanying concern about the degree of academic rigor (Li, 1993). Finally, financial concerns and constraints have prevented most small colleges and universities from developing programs in Japan.

The Asian Studies Consortium (ASC) sought to overcome these barriers through various means. First, classes were taught in English by American faculty using the same or comparable courses to those offered at their home campuses. This strategy recognized and allowed for the fact that most U.S. students are not fluent in Japanese. Opportunities are provided, however, for students to learn Japanese on-site. In addition, the ASC program involved member school faculty, thereby easing concerns about curricular content and academic rigor. Finally, financial concerns and constraints were partially eased by using the consortial or cost-sharing approach. Major costs such as faculty participation and the rental of on-site facilities and services were shared by Consortium members. This allowed member schools to offer an international alternative that none of the members could have supported adequately alone.

In essence, the Asian Studies Consortium has allowed a group of small to mid-sized U.S. colleges and universities to provide an exciting study abroad and faculty development opportunity offering exposure to Japanese culture and language while simultaneously accommodating the capabilities and needs of U.S. college students.

*B. Program Objectives*

Program objectives for the development of the Asian Studies Consortium included the desire of the member schools to expand upon their range of study abroad options in a cost effective fashion. In addition, member schools sought to develop an opportunity that would expose students to a non-Western culture and language. Finally, the desire to develop and "internationalize" faculty was a key motivation. Each of these objectives will be addressed in turn.

Cost effective expansion of study abroad opportunities was a critical consideration for all of the member schools. Three of the initial member schools were private institutions with enrollments of fewer than 5,000 undergraduates. One was a public institution with an enrollment of approximately 10,000. All were seeking to internationalize their curricula and course offerings, and all were struggling with the financial pressures that plague most institutions of higher education today.

The consortial approach allows members to share program costs and risks. In addition, it allows for a larger pool of interested students and participating faculty. The Consortium provides for a built-in level of diversity simply by drawing upon students and faculty from different schools. In sum, by pooling resources and capabilities, the Consortium has allowed for the development of a program in Asia that none of the member schools could have developed and implemented successfully on its own.

A second objective was to expose students to a non-Western culture. In spite of the tremendous impact that Japan has had on U.S. business and the economy in the last ten years, very few U.S. students have had the opportunity to study in Japan and learn about its culture and language. According to Koester (1987) over 80% of students who study abroad still do so in the traditional Western countries, including England, Italy, France, and Germany.

The Asian Studies Consortium allowed member schools to provide a non-Western educational and cultural experience to their students. During their stay in Japan, the students live and attend classes with Japanese students, learn Japanese language, have a class on Japanese culture, and also have opportunities to travel throughout Japan and other East Asian countries. Through these types of activities, a culture that seems very foreign to most U.S. students becomes less foreign and less threatening. There are opportunities to develop enduring international friendships and understandings (Abrams, 1965; Adelman, 1988; Hansel, 1988).

A third objective behind the development of the Asian Studies Consortium was the desire to provide faculty development opportunities. Faculty in all of the member colleges are working aggressively to upgrade their own international capabilities through teaching and research. The Consortium program provided another avenue to aid them in their international teaching and research objectives. Prior research indicates that faculty can at times be an impediment to study abroad, particularly if they

are not involved in the program and convinced of its academic rigor (Abrams, 1960; Audas, 1990; Lambert, 1990). By using faculty from member schools to teach in Japan, the Consortium achieved a fairly high level of faculty involvement and support. Faculty appreciated the fact that the program provided them with an international professional development opportunity. They were also comfortable with the academic quality of the program, because courses were taken from the curricula of the Consortium schools.

## II. The Development of the Consortium

### *A. Historical Background*

Shimotsuke Gakuen, referred to as the International College of Academics and Business or ICAB, was founded in 1988 by a Japanese businessman and local politician as a way to leave a legacy to the people of his province. ICAB is located in Kanuma, about 70 miles north of Tokyo. And one of the unique features of its two-year program is that English is the language of instruction. Desiring to increase its exposure to English language and teaching, ICAB sought a U.S. "partner" to deliver portions of its curriculum. The Laurasian Institution was contacted for help in this regard.

Founded at about the same time as ICAB, the Laurasian Institution (TLI) is a U.S. based not-for-profit agency created to foster educational opportunities for U.S. students in Japan. The institution's mission reflects a commitment to redress the huge imbalance in U.S.-Japanese student exchange. As recently as 1987, over 30,000 Japanese students were studying in the U.S. while fewer than 1,000 Americans were opting for study in Japan (Mashiko, 1989). Versed in the many difficulties experienced by U.S. branch campuses operating in Japan, TLI sought and gained approval from ICAB to establish a consortium of U.S. colleges and universities interested in establishing a program in Japan. Having worked with a number of U.S. institutions, TLI brought several potential members together in December of 1991 to propose the concept and seek members.

### *B. The Players*

Four U.S. colleges and universities subsequently agreed to become founding members of the Asian Studies Consortium. In many ways, the initial members represent the breadth of U.S. higher education today. Included are:

- \* A comprehensive community college;
- \* A regional comprehensive university;
- \* An historically black comprehensive university;
- \* A small liberal arts college.

Each member had a desire to provide study abroad opportunities for its students as well as international opportunities for faculty development.

Moreover, each had programmatic interests in operating in Japan but also recognized the many constraints to doing so. As proposed, the ASC appeared to provide a relatively low cost, low risk alternative to operating independently.

### *C. Forming the Consortium*

Having achieved consensus on mission and fundamental objectives, the members set about the task of organizing themselves as a consortium. This involved three tasks:

- \* agreeing on "articles of incorporation" as a non-for-profit corporation.

The document covers such items as the purposes for the corporation, membership, and governance.

- \* establishing bylaws to govern the activities of the corporation and its component parts.

Unlike the "Articles of Incorporation," the bylaws contain detailed and specific guidelines relative to membership and member responsibilities, selection and responsibilities for officers and directors, committee structure, and financial operations for the corporation.

- \* filing for 501(c)(3) status with the Internal Revenue Service.

This step involved completing the appropriate forms and sending them to the IRS with copies of the "Articles" and bylaws.

### *D. Contracting with Shimotsuke Gakuen*

The final stage of the process was to negotiate and sign a "letter of agreement" with the Japanese partner. Typically, this process would have taken considerable time and energy. Because the Laurasian Institution served as broker for both parties, however, each side entered the final negotiating period with a sound understanding of respective needs and desires. As a result, final terms were agreed upon during a two day series of meetings held in Kanuma. The agreement contained the following key elements for the ASC:

- \* access to housing and instructional and recreational facilities;

- \* access to Japanese language instruction.

And for Shimotsuke:

- \* access to 40% of the available seats in ASC classes for qualified Japanese students;

- \* provision of two full-time ASC faculty members per academic year to teach at the Japanese-based program.

The agreement also covered fees for various services, including those identified above, payment schedules, ground rules for publicity and public communication, and a means to settle disputes through arbitration.

Under the terms of the agreement, each participating student was to pay tuition, a student activities fee, and an apartment and utilities fee to

his or her home institution. The student activities fees and apartment and utilities fees were then forwarded to Shimotsuke Gakuen with a portion of the tuition to cover language instruction. The balance of the tuition payment remained with the home institution.

As indicated, the Consortium was responsible for supplying two faculty members each semester. Thus each Consortium member supplied on average one faculty member for one semester each year. During that semester that institution paid the salary of its faculty member. Faculty housing costs were shared by the Consortium members.

Through this arrangement the Consortium was able to avoid the purchase of costly "bricks and mortar" overseas. Furthermore, the Consortium members were able to retain a large portion of the tuition paid by students participating in the program, thereby enabling them to fund faculty participation as well. Having laid the necessary groundwork, the ASC was ready to begin operations.

### III. The Asian Studies Consortium in Operation

As with other aspects of ASC, the management of the Consortium has gone through an evolutionary process. At the outset there were three key players: the Consortium Board of Directors, the Laurasian Institution, and the Japanese partner school, Shimotsuke Gakuen.

The Board of Directors included representatives from the four U.S. member schools who met twice yearly to set policy and monitor the progress of the program. Each Board member was also responsible for designating a person or persons on campus to recruit for the program, process student applications, and advise and counsel students wishing to participate. In addition, the Board was responsible for identifying courses to be taught and faculty to participate in the Japanese program.

The Laurasian Institution, which is involved in a variety of educational ventures throughout Asia, was responsible for a number of operational activities of the program, including communications with the Japanese partner, course scheduling, visa issues and travel arrangements, marketing, and recruitment of non-Consortium students.

Shimotsuke Gakuen, the Japanese partner, was responsible for providing housing, classroom space, and logistical support, extra-curricular activities and Japanese language instruction. For Shimotsuke Gakuen, one of the primary motivations for involvement in the Consortium has been the opportunity to expose Japanese students to visiting U.S. faculty and students.

As ASC progressed through its first year of operation, the Board was called upon to deal with a number of operational issues that distracted it from a more strategic and long term focus. Board members' time was consumed with issues like shipping textbooks and debating departure dates as opposed to recruiting additional member schools that could have strengthened the Consortium.

Simultaneously, the focus of the Laurasian Institution was divided between operational issues and the need to market the program beyond the Consortium. As a result, marketing efforts external to the Consortium were short-changed and few non-Consortium students were recruited. Communications with the Japanese partner were fragmented and at times inconsistent because the Laurasian Institution, members of the Board, and individuals at member colleges all became involved at various points.

By the end of the first year it became evident that a different organizational structure was necessary, and with it a clearer definition of the roles and responsibilities of the various players. Organizational components that addressed strategic issues needed to be separated from those that focused on operational issues. At one of the bi-annual Board Meetings, the Board designated a new structure consisting of a Board of Directors with a President, an Operations Group with a Chief Operations Officer, the Laurasian Institution and Shimotsuke Gakuen.

The Board's primary responsibility was to deal with strategic issues and long range planning. Major responsibilities included the recruitment of additional member institutions, the selection of participating faculty and review and approval of the curriculum. The Board was also responsible for the identification of other types of activities appropriate for the Consortium, such as collaborative grant writing and curriculum development to support the program at the home campuses.

Operational issues were shifted away from the Board and to a large extent away from the Laurasian Institution to become the responsibility of the Operations Group. Many of the day-to-day operational issues were handled by the Chief Operations Officer, who was a representative of one of the member schools. Marketing, publicity and recruiting became the primary focus for the Laurasian Institution. Finally, communications with the Japanese partner on operational issues were conducted primarily through the Chief Operations Officer rather than through individual Board members or member college representatives. The new structure resulted in more effective implementation and follow-through. Most tasks and communications were handled by the Chief Operations Officer, with the result that fewer of them fell through the cracks.

The new organizational structure has enabled the Board to focus more on strategic issues while simultaneously strengthening the marketing focus of the Laurasian Institution. In addition, clearer lines of responsibility regarding operational issues have simplified communications with the Japanese partner. Each of the four key areas of responsibility, including strategy and planning, marketing, operations and implementation, now has a clearly defined locus of control. This has resulted in more effective management and greater accountability.

#### IV. The Program of Study

##### *A. Curriculum*

As indicated above, a frequently stated faculty concern about study abroad programs has been lack of control over the host school's curriculum, including the level of academic rigor (Abrams, 1960; Audas, 1990; Lambert, 1990). The Asian Studies Consortium addressed these issues by selecting courses directly from member schools' approved curricula. Each semester two faculty participants are chosen from among the member schools. Initially each faculty member selected three courses that he or she would teach in Japan for a total of six possible course selections. This approach created problems for recruiting, however, because different courses tended to be selected each semester. As a result, students trying to plan their study abroad experience a year in advance (the ideal) could not be told which courses would be taught.

To remedy this situation the Consortium developed a core curriculum that consisted of a fall social sciences semester and a spring liberal arts semester. Four content area courses were chosen for each semester and became the "permanent" course offerings for that semester. Each of the content area courses dealt with Asian or Japanese topics. In addition, each content area course had a comparable course in each Consortium member's catalogue so that transfer of credit would not be a problem. Faculty desiring to teach for the ASC were informed of the core curriculum well in advance so they would have time to prepare for the course offerings. This change did not appear to dampen faculty enthusiasm for participation in the program.

Japanese language is offered each semester and is taught by a faculty member from Shimotsuke Gakuen. An additional course selection, *Discovering Japan*, was developed after the first semester of operation and is also offered each semester. Although students are exposed to Japanese culture and customs throughout the program, *Discovering Japan* offered a more systematic approach to learning about and experiencing Japanese culture, history, politics, music and art. Japanese language and *Discovering Japan* were both made required courses for all students participating in the program. Students also have the option of registering for an independent study project if they wish to do so.

##### *B. Extra-curricular activities*

A variety of extra-curricular activities is planned to accompany the academic program of study. ASC is not a total immersion program in that classes are taught in English by U.S. faculty, but it does have elements of an immersion experience in that students live, attend classes and socialize with Japanese students and members of the community.

Upon arriving in Japan, students are provided with a three day orientation program to the school, its facilities and Japanese customs and culture. ASC students are housed in Japanese style apartments, as are Japanese



students attending Shimotsuke Gakuen. This arrangement provides many informal occasions for shared activities. In addition, Shimotsuke Gakuen is located in a relatively small town, so there are ample opportunities throughout the semester for ASC students to participate in community events, including dinners, concerts, holiday celebrations and other activities.

Students are encouraged to take weekend trips to explore the country, much of which is easily accessible by rail. Many venture into Tokyo, which is only 70 miles away. During the one-week semester break, a longer excursion to Korea is planned. Highlights of that trip are incorporated into the academic experience provided by the course on Discovering Japan.

## V. Conclusions

U.S. institutions of higher education seeking to develop study abroad programs on their own face a series of challenges ranging from developing a sufficiently broad curriculum to recruiting a large enough group of students to sustain the program and cover costs. In many ways, these issues are compounded when the program is to be based in a non-western country like Japan where the educational system and culture are very different from our own.

The consortial approach described above offers an alternative that has allowed a collection of fairly small and diverse institutions to join forces in the design and delivery of programs for their respective students and faculty. In the process, this resource-sharing and cost-sharing approach has also served to avoid many of the problems associated with branch campuses bearing high fixed costs for facilities, faculty and service providers.

The specific strengths of this approach for the member institutions are indicated below.

- \* Financial risks are minimized. Four schools are responsible for recruiting the critical mass of students needed to drive the program. In addition, by working with a Japanese partner, the U.S. schools did not have to acquire or manage "bricks and mortar."

- \* Course options and alternatives can be provided. By providing two full-time faculty each semester and having language instruction and co-curricular activities provided by the host, a minimum of six distinct courses can be offered each term.

- \* The opportunity to teach abroad is an excellent faculty development opportunity. This opportunity is enhanced by the necessary collaboration required among institutions in the design and particularly the delivery of the core curriculum.

- \* The student development opportunities inherent in the experience of studying abroad is maximized by the opportunity to live and study with students from other U.S. colleges and from the host school.

These objectives are only achieved through willingness to commit the substantial amount of staff time required to achieve the necessary levels of coordination. As systems become routinized, however, this commitment is likely to be reduced.

For the Japanese partner, the model offers unique advantages as well:

- \* Students are exposed to English language as spoken by Americans and to the American style method of classroom instruction;

- \* Students are exposed to a considerably broader array of courses than would otherwise be possible;

- \* Financially, the ASC fills unused beds and provides an additional revenue stream;

- \* Participation in the ASC provides an unique competitive edge in terms of marketing the school to prospective students; and

- \* Access to and knowledge of institutions of higher education in the U.S. is facilitated through a variety of articulation arrangements.

In summation, this type of partnership allows all parties to maintain control over their activities without compromising educational goals or integrity and without incurring high start-up and operating costs. The model is replicable in other settings and worthy of consideration as an alternative to the "island program" approach, which may not be realistic for small colleges and universities.

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