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Fieldwork and Research Note

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Learning the Art of Negotiation: Reflections on the Global Negotiation Program at the University of Tsukuba

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Abstract

This short note gives an overview and evaluation of the interdisciplinary Postgraduate Certificate Program in Global Negotiation at the University of Tsukuba. The curriculum offers a wide variety and choice of courses that are relevant and appeal to a broad spectrum of students from all disciplines in the University.

Keywords: negotiation, University of Tsukuba, curriculum, interdisciplinary

要旨

本稿は筑波大学が実施する履修証明教育プログラム、国際交渉力強化プログラム (GNP) を紹介する。このプログラムは新しい異分野融合型教育を特徴とし、様々な研究分野を専門とする大学院生から成り立つ。

キーワード：交渉力、筑波大学、カリキュラム、学際教育

Introduction: what is GNP?

The Postgraduate Certificate Program in Global Negotiation (GNP) is an interdisciplinary program at the University of Tsukuba that draws on faculty and courses from three disciplines¹ to train students “to be able to assume leadership in international negotiations and dialogue [by imparting]... negotiation skills as well as specialized knowledge and techniques to solve global issues”, otherwise known as global negotiation (Global Negotiation Program 2011). The curriculum

offers a wide variety and choice of courses that are relevant and appeal to a broad spectrum of students from all disciplines in the University.

The program offers learning opportunities through multiple learning channels including classroom-based instruction, video conferencing², video-on-demand, and field work through project practices. It also offers flexibility in sequencing of courses to accommodate the interests and schedules of students from different faculties.

The program is extra-curricular in that it affords a qualification in Global Negotiation that is separate from, but complementary to a student's core degree programme. Notably, it does not have any pre-requisites for participation, and thus students from any of the graduate schools are eligible to apply.

1. Motivation for joining GNP

The key motivation for our signing up for GNP was based on our understanding of two realities gleaned from our respective working experiences:

1. Real world issues do not give us the courtesy of neatly fitting into any one discipline of academic enquiry or professional pursuit. Issues are never just about economics or politics or the environment. The complexity and intertwined nature of the global problems that command our attention today - poverty, economic stagnation, climate change, terrorism, conflict, and others - demand diversity of skill and comprehension as well as specialization.
2. Policy formulation premised on consensus, along with implementation, whether in business, science and much more so in the public sector, is as much a political as it is a technical process. Adoption of 'good ideas' as policy is never a foregone conclusion and any change to current policy or practice requires good communication skills and the ability to convince a range of stakeholders with different, and sometimes divergent interests, to give up a familiar if not comfortable status quo and accept a redistribution of burdens and benefits.

The GNP curriculum offered to broaden our learning through its unique menu of courses from three different faculties. It also promised to impart the valuable skill of negotiation.

2. The GNP learning experience

The GNP affords a stimulating learning experience replete with:

- Interactions with peers and faculty from different departments and universities
- Intense discussions of contemporary issues as diverse as human rights, environmental conservation, and project management in developing countries
- Opportunities to interface with experts with ‘field’ experience
- Hands-on experience through simulations
- Field visits

The opportunity to interact with subject experts who have field experience is particularly motivating. Students have the chance to hear first-hand about real world problems and practical solutions as well as to share their own ideas with practitioners who are not only knowledgeable but also passionate about their work. We both enjoyed exchanging ideas in class discussions as well as through simulations, field work and assignments with conservation activists, international development practitioners, business leaders, diplomats, ODA project managers, and of course academic experts.

More generally, the program provides opportunities for the student to learn a variety of know-how, all of which underscore and enhance a key skill transferable to most work and personal situations - how to work with people. These competencies include, among others:

- Acquisition and practice of public speaking skills
- How to build consensus
- How to mediate
- How to negotiate and how not to negotiate
- How to manage meetings
- How to organize and manage conferences

The GNP provides the student with a multicultural learning environment that lends itself to the University's concept of providing an educational experience that is highly international in character and rich in diversity (University of Tsukuba 2014). Coupled with the interdisciplinary program design, it provides the student with a potent kaleidoscopic context for exchanging views and ideas and learning from different perspectives. This is good practice for developing communication skills across cultures as well as across disciplines.

There does, however, remain some room for improving the program. One issue that requires attention is delivery of the video-on-demand courses. The challenge is to enhance some of this material so that it can afford the same high level of interactive stimulating learning experience as the other delivery channels.

3. Key lessons: what do we understand negotiation to be?

Before joining this program, our understanding of the concept of negotiation was rather obscure. The GNP has sharpened our grasp of the concept in four important ways.

First, we understand that negotiation is all about communication. However, communication is more than just language ability, be it Japanese, English, or whatever language. Good communication is also about the ability to listen to and to convey thoughts and ideas cogently to audiences of varying language abilities and different academic, professional, and in an increasingly global society, different cultural backgrounds.

Second, negotiation is about bringing two or more parties with seemingly divergent interests to a mutual understanding such that all parties are satisfied with the outcome. Thus negotiation is synonymous with solving problems, and successful negotiation requires creativity which involves expanding the solution choice-set to enable a win-win situation. The ability to define one's own wants, listen to the other parties to elicit their needs, demonstrate empathy and communicate thoughts clearly, forms the essential ingredients of any successful approach to negotiation.

Third, negotiation is a matter of perception and attitude, and therefore can be learned. Exposure to diversity is good practice for learning negotiation.

Last, but perhaps most important, negotiation is actually an everyday activity, one that we practice consciously and sub-consciously as we interact with other people. The skills that GNP imparts are applicable in daily life whether at home, school or at work.

Conclusion: learning practical skills

The GNP is a useful opportunity that adds much value to the graduate student's research regardless of academic affiliation. The course offerings provide a good balance between theory and application with a deliberate bias towards the latter. The program's orientation towards sharpening problem-solving and analytical skills with emphasis on application through first-hand testimony of experts with field experience as well as opportunities for field visits, equips participants with valuable street skills for the real world as part of a comprehensive, well-rounded and well-grounded graduate learning experience. We would highly recommend the GNP to any student who has a keen interest in global issues and wants to develop skills for a global workplace.

¹ Humanities and Social Sciences, International Business, and World Heritage Studies

² Video conferencing enables real-time interactive distance learning connecting the Tsukuba and Tokyo Campuses of the University of Tsukuba

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