

A Comparative Analysis of the Administrative Goals and Aims of the UW-L and UTEF Short-Stay Program

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Abstract

This paper examines and analyzes the general administrative goals and aims of a three-week short-stay program between the University of Teacher Education Fukuoka (UTEF) and the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (UW-L). Many studies have been conducted in recent years on the efficacy of such programs related to student motivation and the language learning aspect that such an exchange offers to Japanese students. These include English skill improvement, overall study achievement, and general participatory or motivational benefits to students when enrolled in these programs. However, little research has been done on what the institutions themselves want to provide or achieve in offering exchange opportunities for students other than the obvious one, which is to allow students an opportunity to have an exchange experience abroad. Some of the questions that are focused upon in this study are related to the administrative goals and aims of the institutions. For example, specifically, what are the long- and short-term goals for a short-stay program? What sorts of markers for success do the institutions strive for within the program, and is there any measurable success that is demonstrably and tangibly apparent? Other than having an international experience and the expected language improvement, what additional learning outcomes, if any, would be considered beneficial or necessary for the program participants? From an administrative viewpoint, what are some future goals and aims currently not being achieved that would be desirable to the institution? This paper concentrates on the viewpoints of both participant institutions (UTEF and UW-L) in order to ascertain more clearly if the short-stay program does achieve its desired goals from an institutional or administrative perspective.

Introduction

The formerly ubiquitous study abroad trend that was prevalent in Japan post-WW II through the early 2000s saw a gradual increase in students wishing to study abroad over a period of many decades. Then around 2004, this trend started to reverse¹ (Matsumoto, 2012) to the point that, today, many fewer

¹ “The number of Japanese studying abroad increased every year from 1986 until 2002. In 2004, more than 82,000 Japanese studied abroad. However, the number of Japanese studying abroad has been decreasing since 2004” (Matsumoto, 2012, p. 2).

Japanese students seem motivated or interested in living and studying abroad as compared to their counterparts of yesteryear.

There are a number of contributing factors that possibly suggest why the interest in overseas experience among Japanese university students have markedly decreased over the years, especially for programs that are considered “long-term,” involving a semester or year abroad. Matsumoto (2012) offers the following reasons:

In addition to the economic depression all over the world, as well as in Japan, there are many reasons why recent Japanese, especially Japanese college students, do not want to study abroad. One of the reasons may be attributed to the early start of job hunting for college students. Japanese college students, who want to find jobs before graduation, seem not to have enough time or money to study abroad. Another reason for the decline of the number of Japanese college students studying abroad would be attributed to an inward-intention of recent Japanese.² Benton (2012) points out that recent Japanese do not have a longing for the West, compared to the young Japanese just after the Second World War. (Matsumoto, 2012, p. 1)

These reasons are quite interesting when considering how much more globalized the world is today and how increasingly important it is to have good language skills in order to be more sought after in the job market, both domestically and internationally. Certainly, college tuition has risen exponentially in both the United States and Japan, as well as the cost of living, when compared to the prices back in the 1960s and 1970s, and even 1980s. So, it does make sense that families on tight budgets who must pay tuition and room and board prefer that their children get their degrees as quickly as possible and not prolong their education. In addition, the cost of attending exchange programs has risen considerably in the past few decades making it more financially difficult for some students to participate in an exchange program due to familial budgetary considerations. Studying abroad, from Japan to other countries, usually does mean an extension of the student’s academic career as few Japanese universities have very effective exchange systems of accepting foreign earned academic credits. It is sometimes the case where credit is only transferred if the class in the foreign institution matches the class at the home institution exactly.

Japanese students today are much more connected to the world through technology and social media than their former counterparts ever were, hence that yearning to experience study abroad is not as strong as it was in the past (Leonard, 2019). International travel and sightseeing are more prevalent today among all generations, and not as unique or fantastic as it once was, so what Matsumoto refers to as “inward-intention” suggests that students today do not feel the need to have an extended international study experience when they can benefit from an overseas experience on their own through travel.

Undoubtedly, then, institutions that offer a study abroad experience have had to adapt to this recent trend of students not wanting to study abroad for an extended period of time by opting for a “short-stay” program that can be done for academic credit during the normal vacation time of the university for a nominal amount of money. Certainly, UTEF felt the need to offer such a program that would appeal to students who did not wish to get behind in their studies on campus by studying abroad for a semester or a year, yet wanted to have some sort of international exchange experience that gave them some academic credit that is automatically transferable toward the credits needed for graduation.

The conundrum facing universities in Japan of offering programs that students are interested in applying to has undergone huge changes in recent years, with some universities losing opportunities to develop programs that appealed to students because they kept the long-term programs available in the hopes the trend would change once the economy began to recover and students realized the benefits of studying on longer programs. In some examples, the foreign institutions canceled the exchange agreement

² It is these authors’ impression that the term “recent Japanese” refers to “younger” Japanese people.

after several years of no Japanese students participating in the long-term exchange program. This certainly has been the case for some of UTEF's exchange agreements that suddenly were canceled or not renewed due to a lack of interest or equitable exchange between the two institutions.

In recent years, many Japanese higher education institutions have been actively developing what has become popularly referred to as "short-stay" programs that run normally for 3 to 4 weeks and usually have some sort of language component and homestay option to give students as authentic an experience as possible while in the foreign country. The UTEF short-stay program to UW-L is an example of one of these shorter program options.

This paper focusses on the goals and aims of the two institutions that sponsor a short-stay program to La Crosse, Wisconsin. Traditionally, study abroad programs had four primary objectives: 1) improving the students' language and communication skills, 2) making students' future employment prospects more attractive, 3) encouraging growth on a personal level through the international exchange experience, and 4) making students more cross-culturally aware by expanding their international perspective (Anderson, et al., 2006, as cited in Kashima and Kato, 2020).

At first glance, these objectives seem to be practical and relevant to a "short-stay" program as well, so one of the purposes of this paper is to ascertain whether or not the goals and aims of the short-stay program featured in this study are in fact being met by the institutions' desires for the program. The first section pertains to the UTEF program's Japanese administrators, specifically to see how well the program's design has met the expectations of the university's administrators. The second section focusses on the American counterpart institution, UW-L, and how it regards the program in relation to its goals and expectations and how these are being met accordingly.

Objectives and Goals of the University of Teacher Education Fukuoka

When asked, "What is the purpose of the short-stay program to UW-L for the University of Teacher Education Fukuoka?" the administrative staff at UTEF offered some very thoughtful and practical answers:

The purpose of the short-stay exchange/training program is threefold.

First, to give our students a cross-cultural educational perspective comparing it to their own ideas about what education is and the roles of teachers by exposing them to the local US students and the American educational system. This is, in part, to nurture them as future teachers who will be responsible for international education. The program also provides opportunities for students to experience various aspects of the American educational system through in-person exchanges with local teachers and students in the American schools through classroom observations at the various levels of education from kindergarten to university.

In addition, by our students teaching traditional Japanese culture while visiting Wisconsin, the participating Japanese students will actively give the local American students an international learning experience in cross-cultural understanding.

Third, this short-stay program aims to offer motivation to students to seek out and hopefully participate in a long-term study abroad program in the future, as well as to encourage them to further engage in other international exchange activities here in Japan.

As evidenced in the above response, the administrative staff at UTEF have a three-pronged approach for the Japanese students for their participation in this exchange program. It is interesting to note that "learning English" specifically is not a primary objective, but instead, the cross-cultural aspect of learning

about a different educational system is the overriding focus of this program's goal. All Japanese student participants on this program are education majors, and the vast majority will become licensed teachers in the future. While the language component is no doubt beneficial to the Japanese students, it is more of a "bonus" in that the exposure to, participation in, and observation of functioning American schools is believed to be more beneficial from a cross-cultural perspective than merely attending some sort of English as a Foreign Language class to better their language skills.

Perhaps because there are so many "language" programs already available to students in Japan to study English abroad if they wish to improve their language skills, the purpose of this program is to expose Japanese students to more intercultural communication situations through education-based activities that give them actual hands-on experience teaching and interacting in the American schools and classrooms with US students and teachers. This is perhaps one of the main attractions of this program for the Japanese students: They actually get to visit every level of educational institution in the US, from kindergarten to university, and they actively interact with the American students in actual lessons.

This leads to the second point the UTEF administrative staff made regarding the program's aims: the Japanese students have an opportunity to introduce the American students to Japanese culture through previously prepared activities that they create in Japan before departing for Wisconsin. The UTEF students are divided equally into three Japanese cultural groups: 1) traditional *origami*, 2) traditional *shodo* (calligraphy), and 3) traditional Japanese dancing (*odori*). In addition, two UTEF students are selected to create a PowerPoint presentation that is given on several occasions throughout the short-stay program that introduces their American audience to details about Japan, Kyushu Island, Fukuoka, Munakata-shi, and the university. The cultural groups present lessons on these topics in the form of activities to the American students, which are completely interactive.

Since the Japanese students actually teach the American students, as instructors, on how to do and perform these traditional arts (which, in essence, serves as a mini-internship by teaching the American students about Japan), the UTEF students get in-class contact hours which will be beneficial to them when they must do their own teaching-practice program in Japan to graduate. Normally, the UTEF students prepare some sort of easy explanation of the cultural activity in English, then they demonstrate the Japanese art form, and then the US students fully participate in making or doing the presented activity.

No doubt, as an education-based university, the UTEF administrative staff are quite pleased that the focus of this program is not only on education, but also allows the UTEF students an opportunity to instruct material in an American classroom. This configuration serves as a form of practice teaching that undoubtedly helps to build confidence in their own abilities to instruct on topics in a foreign language that they may not be completely familiar with before participating in the program.

Frequently, it has been the case that once this short-stay program finishes, some of the UTEF participants are extremely motivated to study abroad further, and they often seek out other long-term programs to apply to that are offered by the university, and even programs not affiliated with the university. A number of former UW-L Short-Stay Program participants have enrolled in foreign or domestic graduate schools after completing the short-stay program in order to continue their studies or to improve their English, opting for majors in international studies, or TESL Education, or another internationally focused area of study.

Furthermore, one personal observation that Professor Leonard has made as the designated coordinator and UTEF chaperone for the Japanese students who participated on the short-stay program, and which was confirmed by participating students in a short study published in 2022, is that they gain a much more pronounced air of confidence and are much more likely or eager to seek out foreign students on the UTEF campus to befriend, assist, support, and interact with after participating on this program. (Leonard, 2022) He feels that this is in large part due to the fact that the UW-L administrators had the foresight and ingenious idea to pair an "American UW-L buddy" with each of the UTEF students. The

UTEF students seemed to be grateful for having this instant friend and support while in Wisconsin that it gives them a “pay it forward” attitude of wanting to do the same after returning to Japan for another student who may be new to Japan and who may be struggling and in need of assistance in their daily life here. Having experienced being in a foreign culture gives them more of an understanding of what it must be like for others who are new to Japan.

When asked, “What does UTEF gain from this program?” and, “As a staff member, in what ways do you feel that the program is working well or what activities are most beneficial to the UTEF students?” the response echoed and mirrored some of the points from the previous question:

The point is that students who have participated in this program are motivated to study abroad for a longer period of time later.

Participants talk to other students who have never been abroad about their experiences on the program, and this fosters interest in overseas study among other students.

Due to the current nationwide trend of Japanese students choosing not to study abroad for long periods, the short-stay program is great motivation for students to seek out other exchange programs to study abroad further, as reported by a number of past participants. (Leonard, 2022). The three-week short-stay program to Wisconsin is a good opportunity for students to test the “going abroad waters” because it is a short-commitment where students receive credit for their participation, and they are very well taken care of while abroad. Students have reported to me that their participation in the UW-L Short Stay Program is just enough to whet their appetite for more, and once they return, they often immediately look into other programs because they realized that living and studying abroad was not nearly as daunting or scary as they thought it would be, and they want to continue that experience by trying to find another program that offers them an opportunity to study abroad for a longer period of time.

In addition, the “word of mouth” component is a huge benefit of this program because UTEF is a relatively small university, and students are in close contact with one another on a daily basis. One cultural difference, also, is that US universities actively promote and offer many types of “goods” that feature the university colors and insignias. UW-L has a huge bookstore/shop that the UTEF students love visiting while there, and they purchase scores of things that proudly advertise UW-L and La Crosse. Once they return, it becomes a sort of “badge of honor” to wear these exclusive items on the UTEF campus. Their fellow students observe and take note of these things, hence piquing their interest in wanting to have similar items by expressing this interest verbally in having these things. They are then motivated to apply for the program, not only for the possibility of acquiring UW-L “goods” while there, but for the experience and exclusivity of being a UW-L program alumna that may carry a bit of cachet socially upon returning to campus.

The UTEF Administrative staff were asked, “What do you consider to be the most important outcomes for the program participants?” and the immediate response was, “Increased motivation to learn English and a more in-depth idea of cross-cultural understanding.” In addition, “Financial Assistance for Short-Term University Study Programs JASSO Scholarship” until FY 2019 (2020 implementation) is a huge motivating factor for not only the participants but also for the university administrative staff. Universities that receive additional funding from governmental agencies have their stature raised within the educational community, so any opportunity for universities to receive additional funding for such programs is a benefit to the institution, as well as to the students.

The UTEF administrative staff felt that the most important aspect in keeping the program running smoothly and efficiently is to foster and maintain a good working relationship with the other institution that includes mutual cooperation between the faculty and staff at UW-L. One huge hindrance to nurturing a mutually beneficial relationship between the two institutions is the Japanese system and

custom of switching out staff from positions every two or three years. Often is the situation where the foreign institution develops a positive working relationship with their Japanese counterpart to only suddenly be confronted with a new person in early April who may or may not have any idea of how the programs function or work. Of course, staff changes occur in the foreign institutions, as well, which can be frustrating to the Japanese counterpart, but as a matter of course, Japanese offices tend to change out staff regularly after a very short time compared to overseas offices where a staff member may stay in that position for years.

Regarding any barriers the UTEF Administrative staff felt were apparent in conducting the short-stay program with UW-L, it is interesting that they noted that they did not have enough general knowledge about UW-L nor personal contacts or visits from the UW-L staff. It is important to note, however, that more UW-L staff, faculty, and dignitaries have visited the UTEF campus over the years than any UTEF staff or faculty have visited the UW-L campus, with the exception of the UTEF coordinator/chaperone. On one occasion, a staff member from UW-L came to give a presentation about UW-L to our student body; on another occasion, an ESL teacher from UW-L came and gave a demonstration lesson to our students as a way to generate interest in study abroad to UW-L. On yet another occasion, the Dean of Education and the Director of International Programs at UW-L visited the UTEF campus to meet with the international exchange committee staff to discuss how to expand exchange opportunities between our two institutions. And a former UW-L Short-Stay Program intern made a personal, non-official visit to our campus to meet students and to attend a graduate student thesis presentation.

Other than the UTEF coordinator/chaperone that accompanies the UTEF students to UW-L, only two faculty members and one staff person has visited UW-L in order to promote or learn about the exchange program possibilities between our two institutions (these visits occurred over ten years ago).

As a parting thought, the UTEF administrative staff reiterated that participation in the short-stay program primarily should further increase student interest in foreign languages and motivate them to study abroad for a longer period of time, as well as to contribute to the development of our future teachers with a deeper sense of international knowledge and understanding.

Objectives and Goals of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Representing UW-L as an institution is specifically assigned to the International Education & Engagement (IEE) office, which oversees both inbound and outbound study abroad programs through the university as well as “English as a Second Language” (ESL) programs on campus. When asked, “As UW-L administration, what are your goals for the UTEF program?” UW-L IEE staff addressed this question from both a wide lens and a narrow focus. Firstly, they identified the mission of the department:

[Our mission is] facilitating equitable access to global experiences for students, faculty, staff, and the community. We strive to support and engage cross-cultural understanding through programming, teaching, learning, research, partnerships, and service opportunities.

As the international wing of the institution, fostering global experiences is their overarching aim. Thus, by hosting the UTEF Program, IEE is able to further their mission as a department within UW-L. Through the UTEF program, IEE is able to provide UW-L students, faculty, staff, and community members with an opportunity to learn from and to exchange perspectives with the Japanese students and accompanying faculty. Meanwhile, the UTEF students experience US culture, learn about the American educational system, and have one-on-one interactions with a variety of individuals both on- and off-campus.

As for specific goals within the program itself, UW-L identified both long- and short-term goals. Looking toward the future, UW-L hopes that by hosting the UTEF program, they are able to create long-

lasting partnerships and friendships between both the institutions and participants.

In the short-term, UW-L wants to provide a high-quality experience that maximizes the educational outcomes for students. UW-L identified four distinct desired learning outcomes for the UTEF program participants: 1) cross-cultural exchange, 2) enhanced global awareness, 3) leadership skills, and 4) language acquisition. Both cross-cultural exchange and enhanced global awareness are expected learning outcomes for a short-term study abroad program, and with good reason, as they are both valuable skills on an increasingly globalized world stage. Furthermore, UTEF students are able to demonstrate all four of the outcomes while participating in their small-scale ambassadorial work by giving presentations to various audiences, including local schools, UW-L students, and community members.

Beyond distinct program goals, UW-L was also asked, "In what ways does UW-L/IEE benefit from hosting the UTEF program?" UW-L staff responded enthusiastically, "UWL/IEE benefit in many ways from hosting the UTEF program!" before listing eight different ways that UW-L benefits, ranging from enhancing the academic learning on campus to advancing career outcomes and, of course, enhancing global awareness. However, a few of these benefits stood out as being of particular interest.

Although an implied part of the departmental mission is to provide an opportunity for as many students as possible to have experiences abroad, it is also the case that studying abroad is simply not something all students will have an opportunity to do. Whether it be for financial reasons, familial or other obligations, or even just a lack of interest, it is not practical to assume every student, even if given the chance, would study abroad. Thus, one such benefit of the program is that, "Many of our students will not be able to study abroad, and by hosting the UTEF program we are able to bring a small piece of the world to them." There are in fact several opportunities for UW-L students to engage with the UTEF students and gain cross-cultural perspectives without ever leaving campus. One such opportunity is the "buddy" program, which has already been explained from the UTEF viewpoint, but provides many of the same benefits to UW-L students who participate. However, it should also be noted that the students who participate in the buddy program are volunteers who likely already have an interest in seeking out intercultural relationships.

Another opportunity for UW-L students to learn from the UTEF students is the Cultural Coffee Hour that takes place during their stay in the US. Cultural Coffee Hour is an event put on by IEE five times a semester where both international students and domestic students who have studied abroad lead small group discussions on a topic relating to the theme of the specific coffee hour. This theme can range from art to sports to wellness. During the UTEF program, the Cultural Coffee Hour that takes place always has the theme of education and features a presentation by UTEF students. Faculty within the School of Education at UW-L will often require attendance of their classes for credit, thus encouraging participation by students at UW-L who would have otherwise never sought interaction with the UTEF students, or even students from abroad for that matter.

Another benefit of hosting the UTEF program is establishing relationships. As said by the UW-L administration, "Students will not only make friends with local students and professionals, but also with international students from other parts of the world." Firsthand relationships are a means for students to create personal connections abroad. Furthermore, "Some of these connections can also help students find further international opportunities." UW-L likewise has a vested interest in encouraging students to seek out further international experiences. Thus, helping to encourage personal connections may be a means for generating intrinsic motivation for studying abroad. After interacting with the UTEF students, UW-L students may be more motivated to venture abroad themselves. For some students, this may mean they seek out studying abroad during their time at UW-L. However, even if students are simply more encouraged to travel or even move abroad following graduation, UW-L would still be improving their global reach.

As the hosting institution, UW-L also identified several beneficiaries of the program beyond university students, staff, and faculty. Most directly, the host families, the local and regional school districts, and

other community partners can be included as shareholders in the continued success of the program. UW-L is undoubtedly an integral facet of the La Crosse, Wisconsin community. It should also be noted that UW-L is part of the University of Wisconsin (UW) system of public universities throughout the state of Wisconsin. The UW system is the largest employer within the state of Wisconsin, further demonstrating the impact that UW-L has within its community and within the state as a whole (Comen & Sauter, 2020). By engaging with UW-L, UTEF students are not only sharing Japanese culture with the campus and the La Crosse community, but also the state of Wisconsin. By hosting students from Japan, UW-L is able to demonstrate within the community and the state of Wisconsin their commitment to globalized efforts.

However, this is not to say there are no other barriers to the success of the program. The first barrier identified by UW-L is the ability to obtain necessary visas and the physical ability to travel abroad. The uncertainty of travel during the height of the coronavirus pandemic has created much difficulty in studying abroad. This is especially true for Japan which has had, and continues to have, some of the strictest policies for being able to return to Japan from abroad. Another barrier UW-L mentioned is the increasing cost of services. It is a goal of UW-L's to provide a high-quality experience; however, they must also contend with providing an experience that is affordable. Both of these barriers are obstacles facing study abroad programs as a whole and are not necessarily unique to the UTEF program. The only barrier mentioned that is more specific to the UTEF program is the finding of suitable host families.

Host families are required to have a separate bedroom in which students can stay. Preferably students would stay in same-sex pairs, and it is required that each student has their own bed. Additionally, the host families must be able to provide transportation to and from UW-L throughout the duration of their stay. Simply finding families willing to take on students, let alone families that meet the space and time requirements, is always a laborious process. Staying with local families is an incredibly impactful part of the program. Thus, creating relationships with new host families and maintaining previous host families is an integral aspect for the continuation of the program.

UW-L also seeks to continue creatively and innovatively to improve upon their goals for the program in pursuit of their institutional aims. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, study abroad providers throughout the world have had to reevaluate their procedures and programs. UW-L and the UTEF short-stay program are no exception. Although the program has been on hiatus for the past two years due to coronavirus concerns, moving forward will require both institutions to collaborate in offering a program that is desirable and feasible for students. For the UW-L administration, continued success requires two things. The first is open and clear communication between the institutions. Second is continuous open feedback from UTEF as to the efficacy of the program.

Conclusion

Although short in length, short-stay study abroad programs still manage to create an invaluable international experience. Through their successful collaboration, UTEF and UW-L are both able to benefit mutually. In the case of UTEF, the institution is able to offer a study abroad experience that meets students' needs and encourages further interest in studying abroad both among participants and amongst their peers. For UW-L, hosting the UTEF students provides the opportunity to bring global perspectives directly to their campus and community.

In terms of aims and goals of the short-stay program, the two institutions seemed to largely align. Both universities want to provide an opportunity for personal growth and global learning for participants and those involved in the program. Albeit the two institutions have different sides of the program and therein different after-effects of the programs as desired outcomes, the means and measures are much the same. Most interesting is how the perceived barriers between the two programs are very demonstrative of being on opposite ends of the program. UTEF feels what can best be described as a disconnect from UW-L and would likely benefit from more opportunities to engage administratively. Meanwhile, as host of

the visiting students, UW-L has more barriers in regard to the logistics of hosting the students, specifically the finding of host families. Fortunately, both universities seem to have a predominantly positive experience in regard to the short-stay program.

The UTEF short-stay program at UW-L certainly checks all the boxes when it comes to the primary goals of study abroad. During their stay in the US, UTEF students are provided ample opportunities to practice English, learn cross-cultural perspectives both personally and as educators, and grow on a personal level as they expand their global awareness. Moreover, the institutions are able to achieve the ultimate goal of fostering an attitude of positive engagement as global citizens amongst participants and those they impact during their program and afterwards.

As of now, the partnership between UTEF and UW-L seems to fit both institutions' goals and aims as to the nature of the short-stay program. However, moving forward it may be interesting to see in what ways the program and relationship may change. Perhaps UW-L might someday send students to visit UTEF? As the world resumes global travel, how might the program need to shift in order to accommodate the new world order? And as for further research into the efficacy of the program, perhaps the garnering of more participant feedback could prove fruitful?

Regardless, as of yet, the UTEF short-stay program has proven to be an example of what an institutional partnership can be. Both institutions are able to benefit mutually and can easily note the positive effects for both participants and their overall student body. It is invariably true that international experiences are beneficial for students, but students must ultimately weigh the cost and time against their degree program and expected graduation date. As interest in study abroad fluctuates to match trends in preference, short-stay study abroad programs prove to be a viable option for both students and institutions.

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