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# Building International Educational Partnerships to Advance Internationalization and Global Competencies

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## Abstract

Working toward internationalization of an educational unit involves planning, partnership, and consistent formative evaluation. This article highlights the development of a strategic partnership, that began before the COVID-19 pandemic, between the academic departments of comprehensive psychology in a university in Japan and social work in a university in the U.S. The partnership began with building connections between faculty to share research and teaching updates and grew to include a collaborative research conference, a shared online class following the COIL model, joint faculty research presentations, and an ongoing study abroad exchange program. Perspectives from faculty at both institutions are presented to provide a holistic picture of how to use strategic actions to bring about mutually beneficial international educational experiences that can be sustained through a global health crisis.

## Abstract in Japanese

教育単位の国際化に向けた取り組みには、計画、パートナーシップ、一貫した形成的評価が含まれます。この文献では、新型コロナウイルス感染症のパンデミック以

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前から始まった、日本の大学の総合心理学部と米国の大学のソーシャルワーク学部との間の戦略的パートナーシップの発展に焦点を当てています。このパートナーシップは、教員間のつながりを共有することから始まりました。研究と教育の最新情報が双方に提供され、共同研究カンファレンス、COIL モデルに従った共有オンライン授業、教員による共同研究プレゼンテーション、継続的な海外留学プログラムなどが含まれるようになりました。両機関の教員の視点は、世界的な健康危機を通じて持続可能な、そして相互に有益な国際的な教育経験をもたらすために戦略的行動をどのように活用するかについての全体像を提供するために提示されています。

## Keywords

Education abroad; global competencies; internationalization; Japan; United States

## 1. Introduction

Internationalization of any educational unit, faculty, and students is a daunting effort, irrespective of whether the overall institution is supportive and committed to internationalization. There are multiple approaches for internationalization, though creating opportunities for students and faculty to visit a foreign nation are often the most direct and authentic. This can be an especially significant experience to enhance one's cultural humility, a commitment to learning about another's culture that begins with an intense examination of one's individual beliefs and cultural identities (Yeager & Bauer-Wu, 2013). This paper will share the experiences, processes of knowledge accumulation, and development of mutual understanding of faculty members from two universities in the U.S. and Japan based on a sustainable, holistic, and authentic relationship including the evolutionary stages of a study abroad exchange program. The collaboration has spanned nine years, including the global pandemic, and the experiences and events are examined and justified with pedagogical literature. The purpose of this paper is to inform and guide faculty new to the area of global collaboration about how to design and implement collaborative work and exchange programs with universities in a foreign country, including strategies to adapt to unexpected events due to geopolitical conditions, diplomatic relations between nations, and global health problems such as a pandemic. The contextual background of internationalization of institutions of higher education is examined first and followed by the pathways we took toward successful department-level collaboration. To illuminate the details of their work, we share notes from both the U.S. and Japanese sides.

## 2. Importance of Internationalization for Institutions of Higher Education

Comprehensive Internationalization is a “strategic, coordinated framework that integrates policies, programs, initiatives, and individuals to make colleges and universities more globally oriented and internationally connected” (American Council on Education, 2017, p. 1). In recent decades, comprehensive internationalization has become more significant because, as Helms (2015) states, “[a]ctive engagement with the rest of the world has become fundamental to a high-quality education” (p. 3). This concept of comprehensive internationalization can be applied at the institution level, as well as the college and/or department level. As migration across borders continues to grow in the twenty-first century (Batalova, 2020), the need for global citizenship and internationalization to improve cultural awareness and sensitivity will continue to grow. In addition, in an American society where inequalities and injustices exist across different groups of people, the commitment by institutions of higher education (IHEs) to educate students with diverse backgrounds, multiculturalism, and culturally responsive contexts is crucial (Cantu, 2013).

### 2.1. Internationalization of IHE’s during the Global Pandemic

Every five years, the American Council on Education (ACE) undertakes its signature research project titled *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses* to assess the progress of global engagement among colleges and universities in the U.S. and to determine future priorities. ACE (2022) engaged 903 IHEs in its 2021 findings report, which were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that close to 40% of IHEs listed “creating partnerships with institutions abroad” (p. 11) as a priority during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 64% of doctoral programs and 41% of master’s programs increasing their efforts for internationalization of their educational unit (ACE, 2022). The survey also revealed that perceptions of the internationalization of IHE’s have shifted in recent years (ACE, 2022). From 2016 to 2020, there was a 3% decrease in IHE leaders’ rankings of internationalization as “high” or “very high” and between 2020 to 2021 there was a more dramatic 15% decrease of the respondents viewing institutional internationalization as “high” or “very high.” (ACE, 2022). There is a similar reduction in students on campuses who believe that internationalization is “accelerating,” with only 21% of respondents believing that internationalization is increasing on campuses in 2021 in comparison to the

72% that believed it was accelerating in 2016. Students still believe that internationalization is an important aspect of the educational process, with most students stating that it “improves preparedness for a global era” (ACE, 2022, p. 8). The pandemic caused a wider gap between student demand for internationalization and opportunities for internationalization provided by IHEs.

## 2.2. Partnership-Building Strategies for Department Level Internationalization

Technology use was one of the renewed strategies among IHEs in the COVID-19 pandemic to enhance internationalization of their programs and achieve their strategic goals to stay competitive in this globalized world (ACE, 2022). IHEs are offering more on-campus student events about global issues, updating curriculum with international competencies, hosting visiting scholars and international students, encouraging faculty connections and partnerships with international IHEs (Soler et al., 2022) and integrating shared learning through innovative programming like the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) model (Ward, 2016). The main tenant of the COIL model is the collaboration between faculty at IHEs in different countries designing and co-teaching a class or module and students working online to complete assignments. A key feature of all COIL classes is the faculty leadership and partnership in developing the curriculum and learning outcomes for the students. Though institutional and administrative support is important for successful implementation of a COIL class, faculty are the leaders in this process from initial planning through implementation (Ward, 2016).

Comprehensive Internationalization of IHEs requires institutional support, faculty governance, and individual faculty member engagement and leadership. For example, faculty involved from the initial contact with an international partner tend to be more invested in the success of the program and more in tune with effective teaching methods. Faculty led programs are centered around learning objectives, partner relationships, and culturally and justice-oriented lenses into the experience (Keese & O’Brien, 2011). Additionally, faculty engaged in internationalization and study abroad grow as teachers and are better equipped to bring a global focus to their classroom teaching (Hulstrand, 2009). Faculty from the United Kingdom and China engaged in international partnerships identified the human relationships that they forged

upon the foundation of “shared interests and ethical qualities” were of particular salience in the sustainability of their partnerships (Ma & Montgomery, 2019, p. 11).

### **3. Internationalization in Action: Pathways of Collaborative Work**

The following example of internationalization of an academic unit (Noyori-Corbett et al., 2023) outlines the process of a faculty-led international partnership and curricular development between the University of Oklahoma (OU) in the U.S. and Ritsumeikan University (RU) in Japan. Creating an environment of internationalization within the authors’ school of social work has been a goal for many years. This work has involved strategic partnership development, cultivation of learning activities, and faculty engagement. As for long-term goals, the authors set multiple stages of internationalization: internationalization of individual courses, academic programs, degree programs, research activities, and disciplines (Noyori-Corbett et al., 2023). These goals were to be achieved strategically by researching resources and outcomes of the educational unit, faculty, and students.

#### **3.1. The Birth of International Collaboration**

RU was selected as a potential partner for the following reasons: 1) OU and RU already had an institutional level MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) 2) the departments shared similar values 3) many faculty at RU are bilingual and have international teaching and research experience, and 4) the RU faculty were receptive to partnering. To begin the work of internationalization, one of the authors requested information from OU’s College of International Area Studies about IHEs in Japan that have a social work or similar degree. The list included RU, one of the largest private universities in Japan with 16 undergraduate and 20 graduate schools. The values stated in RU’s mission and vision statements that aligned with OU’s School of Social Work are: “emphasis of valuing peace and democracy of diverse society members,” “application of the global and local perspectives,” “solution of the problems facing human society,” “individual roles in society,” and “lifelong learning” (Ritsumeikan University, 2023). Though some IHEs in Japan have social work programs, RU does not. However, the College of Comprehensive Psychology (CCP) at RU covers a wide range of psychological fields, from basic human understanding to practical application,

and is committed to educating students to acquire comprehensive grounding as mature, independent persons through holistic education and learning. Additionally, the program includes the humanities and social sciences which is similar to OU's School of Social Work that is part of the College of Arts and Sciences and includes a liberal arts curriculum. Faculty members in OU became more confident regarding the official development of a collaborative relationship after extensively reviewing the RU program and faculty backgrounds.

One of the authors, Dr. Noyori-Corbett, contacted faculty at RU and initiated a visit in 2015 to meet directly with faculty in their College of Comprehensive Psychology. Dr. Noyori-Corbett is a native of Japan and has extensive international research experience. This Japanese faculty member employed by OU played a significant role in building a trust-relationship between the two universities. Japanese culture emphasizes the importance of humility and modesty in multiple ways, especially in business settings: dress code, body languages (e.g., various degrees of bowing), age status and hierarchies, the method of exchanging business cards or 名刺, and punctuality (Asialink business, n.d; Yamamoto & Loyd, 2019). Most importantly, Japanese etiquette is much more formal than the Western one (Export to Japan, n.d.). Use of the utmost respectful language and conservative dress code are important when visiting a business partner, especially if they are senior in age and position. There is also a well-known concept in Japanese culture called "honne and tatemae" or "本音と建て前," the duality of what Japanese people really think and how they behave in public to conform to social expectations (Yamamoto & Lloyd, 2019)). Not knowing these unique characteristics of the way of business in Japan can be fatal and even block the start of an initial conversation.

One of the RU authors, Dr. Tani, who participated in the initial 2015 meeting accepted the role as associate dean of the College of Comprehensive Psychology. His leadership enabled this internationalization work and partnership to develop quickly and steadily. Additionally, one of the OU authors was serving as the associate director of the School of Social Work. They both functioned as administrative "boundary spanners" who could navigate the administrative hurdles of establishing a formal partnership in concert with the formation of an interpersonal relationship across multiple faculty members in both departments. (Ma & Montgomery, 2019, p. 12). The authors remained in

contact over the next few years using email and video conferencing and facilitated introductions between faculty at both institutions. This author, Dr. Noyori-Corbett, being native Japanese, served as a cultural “boundary spanner” (Bordogna, 2019) and could provide specialized knowledge, understanding and insight. She was cognizant of the importance of taking sufficient time to build a trust-relationship or 信頼関係 with a Japanese entity, which is significantly different from the American culture of instant connection. To continue to build a vital, mutually beneficial partnership, a visit to RU was planned.

### 3.2. Advancement to In-Person Exchanges

In the summer of 2019, two OU faculty members, Noyori-Corbett and Miller, visited the RU to participate in detailed discussions regarding the program. The in-person discussions included academic leadership, faculty, and administrative staff, resulting in an agreement to move forward with internationalization and development of a student exchange program. The OU faculty visited cultural and historical sites of interest and toured the RU campus which helped them create an itinerary for a future study abroad class.

In return, the following spring, two RU faculty members from Japan, Tani and Sawano, visited OU. These visits served as an opportunity to further build our collaborative relationship and plan the upcoming student exchanges. The Japanese faculty visited sites of interest and toured the OU campus. The two programs moved to formalize their partnership by implementing a MOU signed by the college deans. Unfortunately, immediately upon departure of the RU faculty, the COVID-19 pandemic led to worldwide restrictions on international travel and stay at home orders. This unprecedented global health event necessitated a complete revamping of the proposed student exchange program.

## 4. COVID-19: An Obstacle Turned to an Opportunity

OU moved all in-class sessions to an online format in March of 2020. Because of the pandemic and related travel restrictions, plans for the exchange program to bring OU students to Japan were postponed. The students who had registered for the study abroad exchange class had to take another class, as some of them were planning to graduate in the summer semester.

## 4.1. Virtual Symposium

After canceling the 2020 exchange program, the faculty members from both sides met online with the goal of developing a strategy for continuing the partnership and creating a way for faculty and students to connect. We decided to offer a virtual symposium that would bring together multiple researchers, practitioners, and students interacting through Zoom. Our goals for the two-day symposium were to learn about disaster response interventions in both the U.S. and Japan and provide students with an opportunity to talk about their experiences of the pandemic and compare and contrast both the cultural and governmental responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the time zone differences, the symposium was held in the evening in the U.S. and morning in Japan. U.S. social workers earned continuing education credits for participating in the symposium and the OU social work students earned practicum credit.

The department chair at RU in Japan and the OU faculty member originally from Japan (author) opened the symposium with welcome messages in both Japanese and English. The remainder of the symposium was held in English. A faculty member from each university shared their research on the use of picture books to teach about social support and historical trauma. Then professionals from social work and human services in both countries shared about their work in disaster response.

Day two was focused on student interactions and again opened with faculty welcome messages in both Japanese and English. Students from Japan provided information about social service agencies in Japan and service adaptations they were making because of COVID-19. Two OU students shared about their practicum at an agency serving unhoused people and the COVID-19 adaptations that agency had made. Then the students were put in breakout rooms to discuss their experience with COVID-19, lockdown, and adaptations to their college experience. Discussion questions were provided to students in advance which allowed the Japanese students to write their responses in English which they could read during the breakout time. Additionally, a bilingual faculty member was placed in each student breakout room to help with translation if needed. RU has many international students and offers some classes in English, though they primarily use Japanese. They shared cultural differences and how that influenced the reaction of citizens to the pandemic and related public



policies. They also found similarities in their experience as college students moving to zoom classes and feeling isolated.

The OU and RU faculty have plans to offer another virtual symposium because it allows a higher number of students and faculty to interact with people from another country and practice their intercultural communication and diversity practice skills. The symposium provided an opportunity for the two departments to maintain connection, collaborate through knowledge dissemination, and build international communication experience between students. The symposium was well attended with around 50 U.S. professionals and students and 20 Japanese students and five faculty members. The OU faculty wrote learning competencies for student participation that could be added to a social work student's practicum learning contract, allowing social work students to earn remote practicum hours for participating. This was an important incentive because the school needed to develop more remote practicum experiences for students during the pandemic. The free continuing education credit for practicing social workers was another tactic utilized to encourage registration and participation in the symposium. The RU students were given class credit for participating in the symposium. The faculty were also mindful of selecting a time for the symposium that would be comfortable for participants from both countries. The virtual symposium provided a step toward internationalization by providing an opportunity for students and faculty from both countries to learn from each other and share their experiences of the pandemic from their culture and context.

#### 4.2. COIL Model Class

The success of the research symposium and the ongoing pandemic led the faculty to continue to innovate to create more international learning opportunities. One of the Japanese faculty proposed a shared class between the two campuses. Her class was focused on international communication competencies. The U.S. students were enrolled in their social work practicum and created work plans to meet educational policy and accreditation standards 2, "Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice" and 3 "Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice" (Council on Social Work Education, 2015). The Japanese faculty member created a class website that was accessible to both campuses and provided a platform for the students to interact. All students were assigned to post an introduction and picture and then

comment on other students' posts. The U.S. students created short videos about their practicum agencies and Japanese students created short videos about social service agencies in their communities. Students were required to watch the videos and then meet for a zoom meeting to interact and ask questions about each other's presentations. The OU students learned about communicating with people from different cultures and social services in another country. The RU students learned and applied competencies related to international communication. This course followed the COIL model (State University of New York Center for Collaborative Online International Learning, 2015). One unexpected and unique outcome of both the virtual symposium and COIL model class was the cultural and academic knowledge diffusion between Japanese and U.S. students through the use of the "Chat" function on Zoom. Japanese students usually do not utilize this function; however, they watched how U.S. students encouraged and praised Japanese students' presentations on Chat. Later in a faculty level meeting, a Japanese faculty member (author) indicated how Japanese students appreciated it and started to use the Chat function for similar purpose in other classes.

## **5. Faculty-Level Internationalization: Scholar Visiting During Sabbatical**

Our next strategy to enhance internationalization and to continue building our partnership was for OU University, prior to student exchange, to host a Japanese faculty member (one of the authors), Michiko Sawano, during her sabbatical. Internationalization of both students and faculty members had to occur simultaneously to achieve internationalization of the educational units. She had an office in the School of Social Work, presented to social work classes, engaged with several campus activities and clubs, and developed new research partnerships. She also spent time with U.S. faculty during holiday celebrations to learn more about U.S. culture. As noted in the work of Spencer-Oatey (2012), there is great value in international collaborators "getting to know each other socially." (p.10). The Japanese faculty member visited cultural sites of interest to prepare for bringing Japanese students to the OU campus. During her visit, she faced some difficulties as a foreigner, and it brought her deeper understanding of the U.S. culture. These experiences helped her not only make plans for the students' visit, but also enabled her to provide detailed advice to her students about how to prepare for and enjoy the OU campus as well as how to avoid risks.

Her experience living in the campus dormitory during her sabbatical provided helpful training for risk management. For example, while leading the RU student visit to OU, she was able to call the campus police/security immediately when a group of U.S. students were very loud during a nearby fraternity party in the middle of the night.

## **6. Implementation of Student Exchange Programs**

### **6.1. First Japanese Exchange Students Visit**

In September 2022, RU brought one faculty member, a teaching assistant, and four undergraduate students to visit OU campus in the U.S. for one week. The faculty were planning to bring more students; however, the exchange rate between the Yen and the U.S. dollar made travel very expensive for the Japanese students. The students joined the English learning classes on the OU campus and stayed in campus housing. They also visited a social work class, the Japanese club, two sororities, an indigenous people's museum, a natural history museum, a public middle school, two social service agencies, and went shopping at an outlet mall and Wal-Mart. When they visited sororities, American students provided them with a glimpse into their daily lives. They also enjoyed observing the cultural differences at campus, restaurants, and public bathrooms. They made friends with American students immediately by exchanging their accounts for social networking services.

Creating a student exchange of short-term, faculty-led study abroad experiences was a goal of the partnership and the faculty from both universities were happy to have the opportunity to travel and connect in-person. By focusing on short-term, faculty-led study abroad experiences, the partnership can engage a higher number of students over time than with an individual semester abroad experience. Both universities emphasize short-term study abroad experiences. Additionally, as a faculty-led trip, the faculty from both universities were able to work together to curate specific learning experiences for students that will achieve the learning objectives for the course. Another benefit of the faculty-led trip is to provide support to students as they navigate a new environment and engage in collective reflection about their experiences in a new country.

The goals for RU's class trip to the U.S. were to gain knowledge about their own cultural perspectives and acknowledge different ways of thinking,

acquire basic knowledge and skills for communication with people from different cultures, and consider their individual areas of research from different perspectives. The goals of the trip were met during the field trips and interactions with U.S. students. The RU students deepened their understanding of racial diversity and indigenous people. The English as a Second Language classes on campus deepened the RU students' ability to communicate with OU students. The faculty from OU arranged field trips that aligned with the RU students' research areas (i.e., after-school program, elementary school, juvenile justice center, and people with disabilities) which led the students to reconsider their research questions in the context of a different culture and built connections for their future work.

## 6.2. First U.S. Exchange Students Visit

The U.S. university took 20 undergraduate and graduate students to study abroad in Japan in May 2023 for two weeks. The week before the visit to Japan, OU held an orientation on U.S. soil with the resources and support of faculty members in the History and Japanese Language departments, along with the coordinator of a local Japanese association. OU professors who have lived in Japan as foreigners helped prepare students with a basic introduction to Japan and Japanese culture. The learning objectives for the class included: 1) comprehending the service systems related to natural and man-made disasters in Japan; 2) comparing and contrasting social services of Japan and the U.S.; 3) demonstrating knowledge of international social work; and 4) demonstrating knowledge of culturally sensitive perspectives. The study abroad program included a stay on RU campus, orientation presentations by RU students, lectures by faculty and community practitioners, interactions with students, and visits to an elementary school, shrines and temples, and a disaster training center. Students from both universities traveled for a weekend trip to visit the Peace Memorial site of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima as well as Miyajima Island. The highlight of the study abroad exchange trip was the joint presentations by student groups on a variety of topics of cultural interest. The learning objectives were met as demonstrated by the student reflection papers, the joint presentations, and the graduate student research papers. The partnership between OU and RU was enhanced during the trip because the students and faculty spent time together every day in both formal class settings as well as informally during shared meals and shopping trips. The faculty had

opportunities to discuss research and teaching innovations and made plans for a joint conference presentation in Hawaii.

## **7. Comparative Notes of Exchange Program: Process of Merge and Share**

Experiences from both sides towards the implementation of exchange programs were naturally different, especially as systems in physical spaces and culture were distinguished from each other in several regards. The faculty members from both sides intentionally wanted to share a theme for this exchange program, as programs on both sides planned to continue with student exchanges. This comparative note is made to highlight differences and identify the communication and strategic approaches developed to overcome issues. The following discussion is comprised of three factors highlighting both advantages and disadvantages of short-term faculty-led study abroad and exchange programs: 1) policies and budgets, 2) student recruitment methods and 3) logistics.

### **7.1. Budgets and University Policies**

#### **7.1.1. US Perspective**

The OU has experienced a period of administrative upheaval with the retirement in 2018 of a long-serving president who was an ardent supporter of international education, the appointment of an interim president for one year who drastically cut funding for international programming, followed by the appointment of yet another president in 2020. Thus, the policies and procedures for study abroad programs changed annually. Study abroad scholarships for students were cut by more than half. These cuts were especially harmful to the success of the program because many social work students are first generation college students who come from families with limited financial means.

To help offset the high cost of participating in a study abroad course, the authors worked with the local Japanese American community to fundraise for scholarships and create opportunities for cultural exchange for both students and the local community. This emphasis on community-based support has helped build mutual respect and cultural understanding between social work students and the Japanese American community.

### 7.1.2. Japanese Perspective

The College of Comprehensive Psychology at RU offers several international exchange programs, and the visit to the OU is one of such programs. Students participating in the program received subsidies from the college, but most of the participation fees must be paid by the students themselves. Particularly, the travel expense to the U.S. increased significantly in the summer of 2022 due to the depreciation of the yen and the steep rise in fuel surcharges. These situational factors increased the burden for students to participate in the program. Another problem RU addressed is reducing the burden of the faculty member leading the program. To address these issues, the college decided to offer additional scholarships to students and hire TAs who will assist faculty during the study abroad program.

## 7.2. Recruitment

### 7.2.1. US Perspective

Recruitment started in June 2019, one year prior to the planned trip to Japan. Recruitment methods included: distribution of an electronic flyer, class visits, study abroad fair, and word of mouth between interested students. Recruitment for the 2023 class followed the same model, but with the addition of a promotional video that was distributed to other colleges and departments. The course was approved for upper-division general education credit and social work graduate elective credit. The recruitment goal was 12-15 students. The cost of the 2023 trip was less than the 2019 trip because OU approved the faculty proposal to manage the course and travel logistics with the support of RU instead of an educational travel company. RU provided free housing on campus, which afforded additional savings for OU students and enhanced their connection to the students and campus of RU. Additionally, the current exchange rate between the yen and dollar was beneficial to the OU students. As a result, student interest in the study abroad class has increased since 2019 and we recruited 20 students. There is strong interest among U.S. students to learn about Japanese culture and history.

### 7.2.2. Japanese Perspective

In 2022, the impact of COVID-19 became less severe, and Japanese students were able to go abroad with some limitations. The College of Comprehensive Psychology started to recruit students to visit OU in June 2022. Nearly 10 students were interested in the program, but many of them had

concerns. One concern was the COVID-19 situation because PCR tests were still required to enter Japan, and there was a chance their return home would be delayed. In addition, the expenses for travel to the U.S. had risen significantly because of the weak yen and rising fuel surcharges. Many students found that it was difficult to prepare the participation fee. In order to encourage student participation, the college decided to subsidize part of their travel expenses (80,000 yen or about 600 U.S. dollars per person). Finally, four undergraduate students decided to attend the program.

For the RU class shared with OU that was held in Japan in May 2023, the recruitment started in early April which is the beginning of an academic year in Japan. A flyer for this program was distributed at the new student orientation, and via an online academic resource system of RU. The RU department also held an information session that explained more details about the program including the overall schedule and assignment expectations. Particularly, RU students were concerned with how to manage their class schedule as this 10-day intensive program would be held during a normal semester and students were enrolled in other classes that met during some of the activities for the shared class. The faculty explained that some lectures and activities of this program were elective, and students could be absent if they conflicted with other classes. However, students were required to catch up with the classes by watching recorded videos and communicating with their fellow students. This arrangement eased students' concerns about attendance, and 18 RU students decided to participate in the program with OU.

### 7.3. Logistics

#### 7.3.1. US Perspective

After the faculty members established relationships with the Japanese University, they worked through multiple administrative approvals at the department, college, and university levels. The faculty were strongly encouraged to utilize a professional study abroad vendor to manage travel logistics. The use of a vendor increased the price for students by over 30%. For the 2023 trip, the faculty successfully advocated to manage travel logistics with the support of the RU in Japan and have negotiated an MOU outlining this work. The U.S. university required several supporting documents from the Japanese University including certificates of liability for campus housing. The burden to produce documents translated into English was challenging for the faculty and

staff at the Japanese University. The process for OU to host Japanese students was much simpler because RU did not burden the U.S. campus staff and faculty with requests for legal and liability paperwork. The authors attribute this to the litigious culture of the U.S. and the need for U.S. IHEs to prepare for liability when traveling with students.

### 7.3.2. Japanese Perspective

The planning process to bring students to OU was initiated by the international education committee within The College of Comprehensive Psychology. In the planning process, much authority was given to the college. The instructors were empowered to build the syllabus by themselves, and there was no need to get approval from the university's study abroad office. However, given that the program was executed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the college needed to adhere to university rules regarding travel safety and risk management. In terms of making travel plans, the college used a travel agency for purchasing airplane tickets. The students and instructors were able to use a dormitory at OU, which helped to save the cost and trouble of looking for hotels.

The process of hosting U.S. students includes getting approval from the department, booking on-campus residences, and planning for site visits. One of the obstacles that the authors faced was ensuring that the on-campus residences met the safety criteria required from OU as mentioned above. The faculty of the Japanese university communicated with several administrative departments to acquire a copy of liability insurance for campus housing as the university was not accustomed to sharing a copy of liability with other schools. Also, making sure that students who have special dietary needs can get adequate meals at Japanese restaurants was another challenge. Japanese restaurants are not accustomed to preparing a vegetarian diet and an allergy elimination diet, and the ingredients are not often specified in the menus. The faculty who was leading this program at RU, Xue Dou, communicated with restaurants several times to confirm the ingredients and special arrangements. Student participants from RU were also informed to help U.S. students with special diets to avoid foods that they cannot eat. Overcoming these challenges itself was a great cultural experience for faculties and students. These experiences will also help the Japanese university to accommodate international guests more smoothly in the future.



## 8. Conclusion

One of the key elements that has led to the success and longevity of the partnership between OU and RU is the faculty leadership and commitment. By utilizing a faculty-first model for internationalization, the focus stays rooted in student learning outcomes, cultural awareness, and mutually beneficial interactions. Taking time to build a strong relationship for collaborative work has led to trust between participants and served as an expression of our shared values. Trust developed over time by observing the steadfast commitment to the partnership by both universities that continued to grow during the challenges presented by the global pandemic. When many campuses were canceling their international work, our partnership continued to grow. This foundation of trust was tested when five of the OU students and one RU student tested positive for COVID-19 during the Japan-based class. The faculty were able to work together to obtain medical care for the students and ensure compliance with RU policies about masks and testing as well as adjust field trips and learning activities by adding a virtual component to one lecture and virtual participation in the final group presentations for the sick students and changing a museum field trip to an outdoor cultural center. Consistent with Anderson and Narus' (1990) work and that of Morgan and Hunt (1994), we found that communication and trust was crucial to our collaboration. The strong trust-based relationship that was established was instrumental in creating the atmosphere needed for the faculty to make these immediate changes. By sharing our campuses, resources, faculty interests, and classrooms, we have established a foundation for mutually beneficial work that is withstanding the challenges of administrative upheaval and a global pandemic.

Another activity that has helped nurture the partnership has been the relationship between the OU faculty and the local Japanese American community. The support of this community has enhanced the cultural understanding of the OU students before they traveled to Japan. The Japan Winter Festival is a celebration of Japanese culture co-hosted by the OU faculty and the local Japanese American community. The festival includes a variety of cultural demonstrations and classes including Japanese calligraphy or 書道, anime drawing (Iaido or 居合道, Taiko or 太鼓), flower arrangement or 華道, a tea ceremony or 茶道. By engaging with these cultural experiences prior to travel to Japan, students were better prepared for their cultural immersion

experience. The partnership between OU and RU is enhanced by this support from the local Japanese American community in two key ways: first is the important foundation of cultural sharing that is provided and second is the tangible resource of fund raising for student scholarships. Their support lends cultural validity and meaning to the ongoing work of implementing the study abroad exchange and partnership with RU. An important element of partnership is respect, and by investing time and energy into learning about the culture of our partner university, we can contribute to the partnership.

Though the global pandemic delayed our ability to travel with students, it also forced the faculty to innovate and build opportunities for engagement between students and faculty at both institutions. Utilizing technology to create low-cost symposiums and shared classes helped promote internationalization without the burden and barrier of travel expenses. These innovations supported not only student learning, but further enhanced the ongoing partnership and friendship between the two universities. The pandemic led us to reimagine our pathway to internationalization and partnership; however, all the activities included in our journey (i.e., virtual symposium, COIL class, hosting faculty, and faculty research collaboration) can be done outside the context of a global pandemic. The authors anticipate many years of educational and cultural exchange.

## **9. Implications for Higher Education**

Seeking cultural competencies is an important aspect of a liberal arts education and couched within a framework of internationalization and international collaboration, it can be addressed through the educational context, planned administrative procedures, and communication dynamics. Both faculty and staff, by going through different stages of planning and implementation of internationalization of an educational unit, will experientially learn the influence of cultural factors on decision making, communication methods, legal matters, and relationships between faculty and students. In the globalized era in which we live many college graduates may find themselves working in different cultural settings. For faculty members to have immersed themselves into different cultural contexts prior to helping students learn cultural competencies will make their teaching more authentic and convincing.

The experience of OU and RU to build a sustainable and productive collaboration has implications for other higher education departments and programs. There are many benefits of internationalization and exposure to other cultures and places for university students. By starting with a faculty-focused lens, the partners ensure the educational integrity of the learning experiences by tailoring all in-country lectures and field trips to the specific learning objectives of the visiting university's course.

Faculty interested in beginning the work of internationalization can begin with a logic model developed as a decision-making tool for the developmental stages of internationalization (authors, 2023) and build a strategic plan for internationalization within their unit, grounding the work in educational competencies. The matrices and logic model can guide them through the process of partnership building with a foreign IHE and provides them with a framework for assessing their program's areas of strength. Programs committed to internationalization of their unit must be prepared to invest years of time and energy in effective communication (Lanford, 2020) and trust building (Larsen & Tascón, 2020) into the work of internationalization. The initial investment of time will bring forth a rich and productive friendship that opens the hearts of both the faculty and students as they integrate their shared cultural knowledge and understanding into their daily lives and professional careers.

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