

Japan-Australia Higher Education Quality Assurance Seminar
“Initiatives toward Internationalization and the Enhancement
of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education”

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Universities in Japan have traditionally made use of a faculty system where students study specific disciplines from the beginning of their first year; meanwhile, it is viewed that general education has not received sufficient attention. However, following the release of a report, entitled “Towards the enhancement of undergraduate education” by the Subdivision on Universities of the Central Council for Education in late 2008, universities have come to a shift in undergraduate education focusing on *Gakushi Ryoku* (Undergraduate Competencies)—the learning outcomes that every student in an undergraduate program is expected to acquire during their four-year studies.

Gakushi Ryoku refers to a student’s comprehensive or total human ability, which covers: (i) knowledge and understanding, (ii) practical skills for various purposes, (iii) attitude and intentions, and (iv) comprehensive experience and creative thinking. University teachers, on the other hand, must have teaching abilities that can cultivate the *Gakushi Ryoku* of students. Generally speaking, the relation between *Gakushi Ryoku* and teaching abilities can be expressed as a functional relation, such as: *Gakushi Ryoku* = f (Teaching Abilities), and this refers to the fact that the degree to which students attain *Gakushi Ryoku* depends on a teacher’s ability to educate them. This functional relation can be particularly applicable to the cases where *Gakushi Ryoku* only includes abilities related to the amount of knowledge gained or the acquisition of skills, such as in the above (i) and (ii). However, in cases where the idea of *Gakushi Ryoku* extends to (iii) and (iv), this is not necessarily so. In other words, if *Gakushi Ryoku* covers attitude, intention, and comprehensive experience, as well as creative thinking, it is a student’s potential ability or life/personal experience that can play an important role in the attainment of *Gakushi Ryoku*. Furthermore, teaching abilities and *Gakushi Ryoku* can be equal in some cases, or they may even be reversed in some other cases. In such cases, the relation can be presented as: Teaching Abilities = f (*Gakushi Ryoku*) (for example, in cases where a teacher listen to a student give a presentation on the off-campus internship he/she attended). The role of a teacher and that of a student will be reversed.

Thus, what class management is effective in helping students attain total human

ability, or “Gakushi Ryoku”, as their learning outcome? To answer, effective class management is the creation of a situation where the abovementioned three types of relations, that is, Gakushi Ryoku = f (Teaching Abilities), Gakushi Ryoku = Teaching Abilities, and Teaching Abilities = f (Gakushi Ryoku), are seen interchangeably and dynamically within each class. This dynamism of class management is made possible through the participative dialogue between the teacher and the students.

Additionally, we need the following two sets of tools to benchmark the educational outcomes.

Benchmark tools for the teacher

1. In order to clearly indicate the goals and levels of learning outcomes and the standards of degrees (diploma policy), allocate courses in a systematic way under a “course numbering system” and organize a curriculum structure. The curriculum can be thus ‘standardized.’
2. Give focus to “dialogue” between teachers and students, or among students, not through one-way lectures in every class.
3. Design a “syllabus” for students to prepare for class, in order to facilitate effective dialogue during class.
4. “Monitor student academic performance” by measuring learning progress and achievement with mid-term and final examinations, mini tests, reports, and/or any other means.
5. Make use of the “GPA” system to record learning outcomes year-by-year.

Benchmark tools for students

6. Introduce a “course evaluation by the students” for teacher improvement.
7. Implement a “year-by-year learning portfolio” as a requirement for students to make individual learning plans and record their academic performance.
8. Carry out a “student satisfaction survey” in which students reflect upon themselves regarding how much they developed their abilities throughout their studies and how they are satisfied (or dissatisfied) with the education they have received. (ICU conducts the “ICU Student Engagement Survey”, which is distributed to third-year university students.)
9. Introduce a year-to-year “alumni satisfaction survey” to see how alumni reflect on the education they received at university. (ICU conducts a “Senior Exit Survey”, which is distributed to fourth-year university students.)

Effective use of the above two sets of benchmarking tools permits enhanced quality

assurance for each subject and the “standardization” of education. What is important here is that universities have autonomy and take responsibility for the development of subjects, the curriculum and thus the diploma policy, with attention placed on respective missions and objectives of the university. By doing this, both uniqueness regarding curriculum and university “diversity” are encouraged and guaranteed. Universities must actively seek “diversity” and differentiate themselves. In this way, both “standardization” and “diversity” in education can co-exist.

Items 1 to 5 above are tools to achieve a “teacher benchmarking” for learning outcomes in which teachers offering education services state how they will foster student abilities taking the characteristics and contents of the majors, curriculum, and eventually the university’s missions and objectives into account. Although the “course numbering system” is the most important of these tools, many Japanese universities have yet to introduce this system. Items 6 to 9 above are tools for “student benchmarking” in which students receiving educational services that were offered by teachers based on course objectives and/or the university’s missions and objectives state to what extent they developed their abilities and in what degree they are satisfied with the services provided. We call the first 1 to 5 “Benchmark tools for universities” and the latter 6 to 9 as “Benchmark tools for students”, and the “Quality Assurance for Due Diplomas” will only be provided with the organized operation of these two sets of tools.

The internationalization of university education is the creation of a system between universities in Japan and foreign countries under which overseas students study the subjects for which quality assurance is given through the use of the abovementioned tools. They then transfer their earned grades to their own universities to use such grades as one of the requirements for graduation.