

New program creates career path to international organizations

Takahiro Shinyo, vice president at Kwansei Gakuin University in Hyogo Prefecture, experienced an act of unexpected kindness in Germany when he was serving as Japan’s ambassador to the country in 2011. It was a food charity event, organized by his fellow ambassadors of Southeast Asian countries to Germany, to raise funds for those that suffered in the Great East Japan Earthquake in March that year. Moved by the generosity of their actions, Shinyo asked one of the ambassadors who organized the event and why they did it. The ambassador said: “We know Japan helped us a lot in developing the economy of our country. Now Japan is undergoing great suffering and we can’t just sit and do nothing about it.” After Japan was hit by the massive earthquake on March 11, 2011, many developing nations all over the world sent the country donations as tokens of their appreciation for what Japan had done in the past to help them develop their economies and infrastructure. The former ambassador now serves as the vice president of the university, and is one of the key members working on its “Global Academic Port” initiative program. The aim of the program is to offer internationally minded aspirants a gateway to work at U.N.-related institutions, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, as well as other international non-governmental organizations.



Kwansei Gakuin University Vice President Takahiro Shinyo



A Kwansei Gakuin University student (right) working as a U.N. youth volunteer in Rwanda KWANSEI GAKUIN UNIVERSITY

“The idea of developing human talent qualified to work at the U.N. and other international public agencies perfectly matches our school motto, ‘Mastery for Service,’” Shinyo told The Japan Times in an interview. “We have a responsibility to nurture such human talent, and we are obliged to meet that responsibility.” Under the program, the university will launch in April a new course in its graduate school, aiming at offering basic education, training and skills designated to produce people specifically qualified to work at the U.N. or as diplomats of Japan. The new course will be open to any students enrolling into the graduate school, regardless of nationality. Participants of the course in principle are required to major in a designated subject at the graduate school, such as economics, law or social studies, for a master’s degree, while taking the new course as a sub-major. Those who have already earned a master’s degree in those subjects will be allowed to take the new course on its own very soon. “If you want to work at the U.N., you have to be a specialist on the issue you work for,” Shinyo said. “Participants of the course should be learning to be specialists in their majors under the normal graduate school program, and the new program will offer them additional skills.”

Practical training opportunities
The program is by no means merely a conventional study abroad program or international student exchange program. Classes offered under the program are specifically designed to educate participants and give them the specialized knowledge and skills necessary to work in an international organization, particularly the U.N. Besides the basic subjects such as international public policy, and global sustainable development, which are offered in conventional lecture-style classes, the program also offers more practical lessons and training, requiring participants to examine and discuss international political issues and subjects. Those include the collective security system of the U.N., application of human rights and humanitarian principles, global warming and climate change and even how to handle media interviews. In the “Seminar in Multilateral Negotiation” class, participants conduct case studies on peacemaking solutions such as negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and judicial settlement. All of the classes will be conducted in English. The subjects to be offered in the classes were chosen in accordance with the U.N. competency framework, the guidelines of standards used for employment at the organization, Shinyo explained. In the framework, the U.N. requires its staff to have integrity, professionalism and respect for diversity as core values. It also requires other elements such as communication, accountability and creativity as core competencies. Faculty members of the program are experts on global issues. They include former U.N. Under-Secretary-General Yasushi Akashi, former Deputy Executive Secretary of the U.N. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Shun-ichi Murata, former Representative of U.N. Children’s Fund Kazakhstan office Jun Kukita, as well as former Canadian Ambassador to Japan Mackenzie Clugston. Current U.N. staff will also be invited as guest speakers. Shinyo is proud of the unique curriculum. “I think no other university in Japan offers such a program,” he said.

Call for more Japanese staff
The Japanese government has been calling for more Japanese staff to work at U.N.-related offices and agencies, as the number of Japanese employees working in such organizations is much smaller compared with other developed countries.



A Kwansei Gakuin University student (right) working as a U.N. youth volunteer in Mozambique KWANSEI GAKUIN UNIVERSITY


According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, citing U.N. statistics, 790 Japanese were working at U.N.-related organizations as of Dec. 31, 2013, representing 2.5 percent of the total number of staff. The figure compares with 2,978 workers, or 9.3 percent, from the U.S., 1,932, or 6 percent, from France and 1,675, or 5.2 percent, from the U.K. The number of Japanese staff at the U.N. Secretariat as of June 30, 2014, was about one-third of the desired level, the ministry said. It has been so partly because there were only limited career routes available for college students to get jobs at those organizations after graduating from Japanese universities, Shinyo explained. The typical career course available at present for a Japanese university graduate to secure such a job is to first earn a master’s degree from a university abroad, and then work at a company for several years to become a specialist in a designated field. The new Kwansei Gakuin program will save time and money for those wishing to work at the organizations. With the recent rise of protectionism all over the world, and politicians looking inward to place priorities on domestic issues over diplomatic ones, it is time for more Japanese to be serving at those international organizations aiming for multilateral cooperation, Shinyo said. “The U.N. is a big mass of bona fides, but has not been fully utilized yet,” Shinyo said in the interview. “We are seeking only students who have serious consciousness of global issues and problems.”

Students are being sought for the inaugural class of the newly established Graduate Course in U.N. and Foreign Affairs Studies.

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