

特集

Diploma Policy, Quality Assurance and Degree Accreditation System of Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University

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Summary

This paper analyses the diploma policy of Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, points out the challenges and issues and provides a number of proposals. First, it examines the diploma policy recommended by the Japan Association of Private Universities and Colleges and the MEXT, by dividing it into four items: the Diploma Policy of College, Department and Course; Diploma Policy from a Global Perspective; Diploma Policy for the Three Areas; and Evaluation of Learning Achievement. In the conclusion the paper suggests the establishment of a Quality Assessment Board.

Key Words

Diploma Policy, Doctoral Program, Master's Program, Undergraduate Program, Assurance of Learning, Quality of Learning Achievement, Quality Assessment Board

1. Introduction

Degrees from Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) have earned a solid and valuable reputation over the years. APU offers high-quality and demand-driven education and training in management, business administration, accounting, tourism, development economics, environment, health sciences and of course in Asia Pacific Studies. Accordingly, APU currently has the full authority to grant undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degree credentials that are widely recognized throughout Japan and overseas.

Increasingly, employers are demanding a more highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce to keep up with the demands of a fast-paced and changing economy which is partly influenced by globalization. Therefore, higher learning institutions like APU are well-positioned to provide the requisite combination of advanced training and education to meet this demand. This type of advanced career training and education would go beyond what is normally provided by college diploma programs and should be appropriately recognized through the applied degree credentials.

Hence, a close and periodic follow-up is required to ensure that the degrees granted by APU maintain their credibility. Moreover, there are still some fundamental issues that are frequently raised by graduate students, especially doctoral students at APU such as: What should degrees from colleges be called? For instance, the doctoral degree program at APU currently offers only a single doctoral degree called “Doctoral Degree in Asia Pacific Studies” that is too general while a number of PhD students are already engaged in a number of topics which include: tourism, development economics, environment, migration, law and legal affairs, business administration and management, etc. Thus, it is critical for APU to recognize the heterogeneity of the research topics and interest of the students and to come up with new proposals concerning the title that should be given to each doctoral specialization. Differentiating the title of the doctoral degrees based on their area of specialization will give students a wider range of degree choices. In other words, allowing APU to offer such specific degrees may create significantly more opportunities and attract PhD students to unique programs that will upgrade their education and training.

This report therefore, will address some of the issues related to the conferral policy of the academic degrees at APU, quality assurances and degree accreditations at APU/Japan and finally highlight application eligibility for admission to APU. To that end, this report will first state the standards of diploma policy that are recommended by the MEXT and the Japan Association of Private Universities and Colleges

2. Diploma Policy Standards¹⁾

2-1. Standards for the evaluation of learning outcomes and diploma policy

This item, which shall be publicized under 2-1-6 Clause 172 of the Enforcement Regulations of the School Education Law, is closely related to diploma policy. An announcement from the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (MEXT) states that the university should clarify the necessary credit hours of each of the required courses, the elective courses and optional courses, and information concerning the available degrees.

However, the necessary credit hours of the groups of courses should be allotted, based on the education and human resource development objectives of the department and course concerned. The university or college can decide the names of the degrees freely, and the information concerning the degrees available should be inseparable from the mission and objectives of the university and the department.

There are four different standards concerning the information disclosure of diploma policy as follows:

2-1-1. Diploma Policy of College, Department and Course

Diploma policy clarifies what kind of human resources the university or college should provide society with. In other words, it is one of the important obligations to society. Diploma policy should

be specific; it must say the graduates who have studied about a certain area possess a particular knowledge and skill. It is also expected to say what they can do.

The University Establishment Standards, 2008 Revision states that the university should decide the mission, objective and diploma policy of each college, department and course.²⁾ This is called, “purpose of human resource education.” Diploma policy is a more concrete concept of the purpose of human resource education. The diploma policy should be closely related to the assurance of learning. The assurance of learning is, of course, the most crucial challenge to all the universities and colleges in Japan. To this end, what the students acquire at the time of graduation should be described in detail. The diploma policy of the whole university is without doubt important, because it embodies the spiritual legacy of the establishment. At the same time, universities and colleges need to have a diploma policy for each college, department and course that is in line with the related contents of learning.

2-1-2. Diploma Policy from a Global Perspective

Diploma policy should not be established based on a self-righteous attitude within the college, department and course. We are promoting “assurance of learning” in order to globalize our higher education and establish a global standard.

In Europe, the European Higher Education Area³⁾ has implemented and promoted the sharing of the global standards of the master and doctoral degrees obtainable within Europe. Other countries and areas have also been seeking ways of sharing the globalized AOL⁴⁾. Under these circumstances, diploma policy should not be applicable within the university or college only, and should not be available only within Japan either.

Global standards cannot be obtained overnight. Diploma policy should be developed based on the education purpose of the university, college and course, but it should be globally shared. The Japan Science Council has planned to benchmark the AOL of each discipline, but it has only just started discussing the areas of linguistics and literature. At this stage, it is advisable to refer to the definitions and benchmarks of the QAAHE.⁵⁾ International benchmarks would be useful for a unique college, department and course which had been established in line with the particular establishment mission of the university and college.

2-1-3. Diploma Policy for the Three Areas

Diploma policy for the three areas of perspective-based education goals should be described based on the three areas, knowledge/understanding (recognition), general-purpose skills (application) and attitude/orientation (emotion)⁶⁾. The achievements of learning are divided into the measurable and the non-measurable. The measurable achievements can be measured quantitatively, and the non-measurable ones should use clearly expressed evaluation criteria. The comprehensive area of the above three, in other words ‘integrated learning experience and creative thought,’ should be evaluated by creating particular subjects, such as ‘Graduation Research’ or ‘Thesis.’

It is important to establish a structure and implementation policy according to the diploma policy. The structure and implementation policy should break down into required, elective and optional courses⁷⁾. These classifications should be described and publicized. Universities and colleges cannot fulfill their obligations simply by showing the lists of courses but must refer to the background diploma policy of each group of courses.

2-1-4. Evaluation of Learning Achievement

Many Japanese universities and colleges have already implemented the GPA⁸⁾ system. As of August 2008, 186 universities and colleges out of 436 utilized this system⁹⁾. Another survey¹⁰⁾ shows that 44% of private universities and colleges have adopted the system. Although GPA is generally considered to be objective, grades for deciding GPA could be subjective since the course grade may be subjective depending on the faculty member in charge. Hence, unless there is a consensus concerning the criteria for grading, GPA may not necessarily be objective.

It is obligatory that each grade be connected in some way. However, this is not enough. It would not mean that one had fulfilled one's obligation. It is more important that all faculty members abide by such criteria. Japanese universities and colleges should pay attention to the fact that some universities in Britain have introduced a relative evaluation system.

Some areas need to take advantage of objective standards and qualifying tests that are objectively approved, such as the portfolio analysis and rubric analysis. This is especially true with an emerging study area where objective criteria have not been established.

3. Policy for the Conferral of the Academic Degrees at APU

3-1. Doctoral Program

1. The doctoral degree will be awarded after a student has experienced research guidance, attended the school for the designated number of years and successfully passed the examination and doctoral thesis judgment.
2. As a general rule, the following requirements must be satisfied before completing the doctoral programs.
 - A) Students must have in-depth educational experiences and possess a high level of analytical ability and experimental techniques within the respective areas of specialization.
 - B) Students should also have educational experience, technique and ability as a foundation in order to establish their own subject and theme, and be able to individually decide and develop a solution. In addition, he/she should have the ability to turn the results into a thesis.
 - C) Students must have acquired the ability to organize and implement shared research with other research institutions when deemed necessary.

3-2. Master's Program

1. A master's degree will be awarded after students have experienced research guidance and obtained the required number of credits within the designated number of years, as well as successfully passing the examination and master's thesis judgment.
2. As a general rule, students must satisfy the following requirements before completing the master's/doctoral degree programs:
 - A) Attain a high level of specialized knowledge and understanding of research techniques with regards to problems related to his/her area of specialization.
 - B) Maintain a high level of scientific originality within each respective area of specialization.
 - C) Have the communication and presentation skills necessary for in-depth mutual understanding as well as the ability to appeal for personal research advancements within the respective areas of specialization.
 - D) Acquire the linguistic level necessary for disseminating research advancements to the rest of the world.

3-3. Undergraduate Program

1. An undergraduate degree will be awarded upon obtaining the required number of credits within the designated number of years of the degree course.
2. As a general rule, students must satisfy the following requirements before completing an undergraduate degree program:
 - A) Be able to acquire knowledge of 'International Management' or 'Asia Pacific Studies' along with other applicable related courses designated by each department.
 - B) Be able to attempt to make a contribution to society in the field and understand the importance of the specific studies.
 - C) Have the ability to communicate smoothly with people of other cultures and acquire the broad view necessary to address the problems he/she may face in day-to-day activities.

4. Accreditation of Degrees in Japan and Other Experiences from the United States

Accreditation is a form of peer review of an educational program. Accreditation of an institute guarantees that the learning offered by that institute is of uniform and sound quality. Hence, accreditation for a university is important as it provides assurance to the public, in particular to prospective students, that this university has been found to meet the quality educational standards and criteria.

Likewise, students receive the following benefits with an accredited university:

- Assurance that the institution is meeting certain educational quality standards.
- Reasonable grounds for believing that the institute will continue to meet them.
- Assurance that their degrees will be widely accepted by employers, professional associations,

other colleges and universities.

- Belief that their degrees will reap the benefits associated with sound and high-quality educational standards.

There are a number of accrediting institutions in Japan that evaluate universities in terms of their mission, educational practices, administration, financial stability, policies and student services. Only the universities fulfilling accreditation requirements under these headings are granted accreditation.

In 2004 a new quality assurance and accreditation system was introduced in Japan, with the MEXT designating which organizations are qualified to implement the system and are in compliance with MEXT requirements. The following organizations were so designated:

- Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA)
- The National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE)
- The Japan Institution for Higher Education Evaluation (JIHEE)and
- Japan Association for College Accreditation (JACA).

These organizations have all been issued with the same tasks. Moreover, professional organizations such as the Japan Law Foundation, Japanese Institute of International Accounting Education and Japan Institute of Midwifery Evaluation also play an important role in assuring the quality of education in their own disciplines. The new system comprises various aspects, designed to assure the quality of education:

- A) **Certified evaluation and accreditation:** the evaluation of education and research at higher education institutions by the organizations designated by the MEXT as of April 2004. Higher education institutions are obliged to undergo this evaluation at least once every seven years, while professional graduate schools are obliged to do so every five years.
- B) **Authorization system for the establishment of universities:** the MEXT will have final say, based on the institution's structure, academic staff, student admission policy, student capacity, facilities and administrative organization.
- C) **Evaluation of the national university corporations:** the universities were previously part of the MEXT rather than independent institutions capable of making independent decisions, rendering them unable to respond to social changes with any degree of flexibility. Since they have been allowed to operate with a greater degree of independence, the MEXT assesses the quality of their education from a distance.
- D) **Self-assessment:** self-assessment has been mandatory for higher education institutions since 1999; the institution assesses the quality of its own education and publishes its findings.

Here it is also important to assess the experience of other countries regarding degree accreditation in order to draw a lesson that might be relevant for our study. Accordingly, it is important to look at the degree accreditation system of the United States. In the United States, higher education is not controlled by the government - instead there are independent regional accreditation agencies. Each university or school has its own policy, which applies only to this particular school, and not to others. Each US educational institution has its own mission of purpose. When institutions are

accredited, they are compared to their own missions.

American admissions officers at universities must decide whether the international student has achieved the level and quality of education that will guarantee his/her success at the university level. This can be demonstrated only by a “document” giving access to the university level. For example, for students coming from Germany - a German ‘Abitur’ is required for undergraduate admission. Some institutions might award credits for this level of achievement, while some might not. Admissions officers need the ‘benchmark credential,’ recognized by the country’s Ministry of Education, in order to consider the student for admission. For graduate admission, they need a document certifying that the student has earned a bachelor’s degree or its equivalent. Admissions officers also consider the student’s own educational objectives.

5. The Establishment of a Quality Assessment Board

It is worth recognizing the importance of ensuring the quality of the degree programs to be offered by private universities and protecting the financial investment of students. In other words, there should be an internal mechanism for APU to ensure that all degree programs in APU offer a high-quality education. Moreover, new degree programs should be offered in areas where there is a demonstrated employer demand for degree-level applied education and training, and where current diploma programs are not fully meeting emerging needs. These degrees will combine a solid grounding in theory and analytical skills with career-oriented, practical education and training.

In doing so, the following points should be taken into consideration:

- There will be a Quality Assessment Board to advise APU how to maintain good quality education and its current good reputation. In line with this, the Quality Assessment Board can also provide some sort of technical contribution on whether proposals for new degree programs are of degree-level quality.
- A Quality Assessment Board is necessary to ensure that degrees granted by APU maintain their reputation. Additionally, the Quality Assessment Board can also play a significant role in advising APU on whether the quality of new degree programs meets current standards compared to similar institutions in Japan and overseas. The Board will assess the academic soundness of program proposals from new degree-granting colleges within APU.
- APU will decide whether to approve new degree programs, taking into account the advice of the Quality Assessment Board on the quality of the program.
- New degree-granting institutions will be required to guarantee that students will continue to have access to transcripts of their academic records after graduation, even if the institution ceases to operate.
- The Board will apply standards and use commonly accepted academic review procedures. The Board will advise on whether the name of the institution and the name of the degree accurately

reflect the education that is offered.

- The Board will also call upon the advice of specialized experts in the proposed field of study and other relevant groups. Recommendations from the Board will be submitted to the APU management.
- The Board will consist of a chair and a part-time board of stakeholder representatives.

Thus, what essential qualities or qualifications should the Board Chair and membership have? How many members would be appropriate? What constituencies should be represented? How can conflict of interest be avoided? All such technical points concerning the Quality Assessment Board will be decided by the APU management.

6. Application Eligibility

A. Bachelor's Degree Program

The bachelor's degree in Japan takes 16 years of formal education including university, which is usually required for enrollment in graduate programs. In principle, a degree from another country should require the corresponding number of years of formal education to be considered as equivalent to a Japanese degree. However, the Japanese government and universities, considering the differences in the educational systems of foreign countries, have established criteria and schemes that allow international students to attain equivalence to the Japanese educational system. Applicants are usually selected by their transcripts in the undergraduate programs and entrance examination.

B. Master's/Doctoral Degree Program

1. International students who hold a bachelor's degree from a Japanese accredited college or university, or equivalent degree from another country, as ascertained by the Admissions Office of APU, may attain equivalence to the Japanese educational system.
2. Those who have been committed to research for more than or just two years in an internationally accredited college, university or research institute after gaining a bachelor's degree from a Japanese accredited college or university, or after an equivalent degree from another country, as ascertained by the Admissions Office of APU.

C. Exchange Students

As exchange students are enrolled at APU as special non-degree students or special non-degree research students, similar requirements for eligibility as non-degree students or non-degree research students, are applied respectively. The special additional requirement consists of a valid academic exchange agreement between APU and the student's home university. In addition, the student must enroll in a regular undergraduate or graduate degree program at the home university.

Since the 1980s, Japan has focused on internationalizing its higher education. International students studying in Japan were formerly required to take a Japanese language test, as all education was provided exclusively in Japanese. This situation is currently changing, with a gradually increasing number of study programs being offered in English. Due to the recent internationalization strategies

at both government and university levels, an increasing number of higher education programs are available in English. For instance, as of 2008, there are 194 English-taught courses, most of which are master courses. However, it should be noted that APU has been the pioneer as well as being the currently leading institution that provides a bi-lingual educational system in Japan.

7. Concluding Remarks

APU offers high-quality, and demand-driven education and training in management, business administration, accounting, tourism, development economics, environment, health sciences and area studies such as 'Asia Pacific Studies.' Accordingly, degrees from Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) have earned a solid and valuable reputation over the years. This brief report suggests that specific policies concerning the doctoral program, master's program, and undergraduate program that recommend not only acquiring the required number of course credits but also attaining a high level of specialized knowledge and understanding of research techniques with regards to problems related to areas of specialization are of paramount importance. Similarly, graduate students, especially doctoral students must make extra effort to maintain a high level of scientific originality within each respective area of specialization.

On top of this, the report also recommends establishing an independent 'Quality Assessment Board' that will be responsible for ensuring that APU maintain its reputation in offering high quality education and also to advise about the launching of new degree programs in APU in areas where there is a demonstrated employer demand for degree-level applied education and training, and where current diploma programs are not fully meeting emerging needs. Last but not least, the report attempts to address the "Accreditation of Degrees in Japan and Other Experiences from the United States" which appear to be relevant for this study.

Notes

- 1) This chapter was compiled based upon the Education Research Committee of the Japan Association of Private Universities and Colleges, "University's Obligation of Information Disclosure and Three Policies" the Japan Association of Private Universities and Colleges, March 2010, pp.11 to 13.
- 2) The Standards of Diploma Policy Article 2-2
- 3) The European Higher Education Area was established in March 2010.
- 4) Assurance of learning
- 5) The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
- 6) The three areas were mentioned in "Report on Bachelor Program" 2008, pp.12-13.
- 7) This is also in the report of the Vice Minister of the MEXT.
- 8) This is an abbreviation for grade point average.
- 9) The data is from "Education Quality Improvement of Private Universities and Colleges" the Japan Association of Private Universities and Colleges, March 2009.

10) The data is from “Status Quo of Education Reforms of Universities and Colleges” the MEXT, 2008.

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立命館アジア太平洋大学のディプロマポリシー、学びの質保証および認証制度

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要 旨

この論考では立命館アジア太平洋大学のディプロマポリシーの持つ問題点や課題を指摘し、必要な提案を行う。まず私立大学連盟と文部科学省が推薦するディプロマポリシーを4項目に分けて分析する。「学部・学科・課程で策定し公表するディプロマポリシー」、「グローバルな視点のディプロマポリシー」、「3領域とディプロマポリシー」、「学修成果の評価」の4項目である。結論の中で、独立した品質評価評議会の開設を提案している。

キーワード

ディプロマ・ポリシー、博士プログラム、修士プログラム、学士プログラム、学びの質保証、品質保証委員会

