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## An Overview of the Overseas Study Program for Japanese Students at the University of Guam

Nakamura Gakuen University

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### 1. Introduction

The Business, Marketing and Distribution Department of Nakamura Gakuen University just completed its first overseas study program to the University of Guam. As this was the first year of conducting this program, the purpose of this paper is to analyze how the program fared, and suggest ways on how to improve the program in subsequent years.

In a unique action for the department, the Guam overseas program will be worth four credits towards graduation, which is twice as many credits for the other overseas programs which are offered at Nakamura Gakuen University. This is an important promotional aspect of the program, and may be a main factor which helps the department procure the minimum number of students required to carry out the trip in future years. As a rule, the University of Guam (UoG) requires a minimum of fifteen (15) students to schedule a program for a university. This year, Nakamura Gakuen University was only able to successfully recruit eleven students to participate in the trip. Thankfully, the University of Guam gave the school a waiver on this minimum student requirement, as it was the first year to send students to Guam

under this program.

However, the Guam staff made clear that this minimum requirement of students was fixed. Since the University of Guam has many visiting schools from Japan, it appears to be very unlikely that they would be flexible with this requirement. Therefore, keeping the program worth four credits would appear to be an essential incentive to be able to successfully recruit the minimum number of students to continue to program on a yearly basis.

In the event that Nakamura Gakuen is unable to secure the required number of students, one option would be to make the program available every other year, instead of yearly. Any students who were unable to participate in the program due to insufficient numbers could be 'carried over' to the following year. More than likely this would be enough to at least continue to program on a semi-regular basis,

Another reason to keep four credits for the course is to provide the students with motivation to take the Guam program instead of another more popular destination provided by the university. Both Delaware, USA and Vancouver, Canada may have a better image as a well-rounded destination to visit for Japanese, so students may be

willing to pay extra for these programs and forgo Guam completely. A prevalent belief that such a close destination to Japan such as Guam would be better served as a short vacation stop instead of a study destination, makes having the program award four credits a good strategy. For this reason, having a good PR program around campus, starting several months ahead of any registration deadline, is a must.

Now that the trip has been completed, feedback from the students who went would be a huge bonus to spread the word about the positives of the program. Ways should definitely be considered on how to effectively use graduates of the Guam program to recruit their peers for future trips.

## **2. Preparation for the trip**

To help justify giving the students four credits for a three-week study program, students were given additional classroom instruction both before and after the trip. Students learned basic survival English expressions, everyday use English, and received training in some of the cultural differences students may encounter between Guam and Japan.

As this extra instruction required much additional time and preparation from teachers, it would probably be a good idea to give the instructor one teaching credit. Giving the teacher an extra credit would help to relieve some of the teaching and preparation of the program, which due to the availability of the participants may have to be conducted at odd times. This is

due to the students having a full load of other classes going on while this training is conducted.

## **3. Consideration of dates to conduct the Guam overseas study trip**

This year the trip to Guam was from August 9<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup>. The reason for this period is that this is an ideal time for the students to go, just after the testing period for the first semester, and right before the start of the second semester. During the trip I met with the university of Guam staff who suggested moving the dates of the trip to March. This would appear to be the cheapest time not only for the tuition in Guam of the program, but for airfare there as well.

Another huge benefit of moving the dates of the trip to March is that it would allow the students to attend the annual Foundation Day festival at the University of Guam. According to the UoG staff, close to around March 12<sup>th</sup> every year the entire university is transformed to represent different aspects of Guam history and culture. Many booths are set up, and special activities and events are carried out. The event closely resembles school festivals in Japanese universities, but on a much larger scale.

An additional bonus to having our students participate in the UoG Foundation Day is that the University of Guam has a special program which will involve the students to help set up, coordinate, and run different aspects of events. The coordinators of the overseas

programs at UoG have commented that this event, more than any other offered at the university, gets the most positive reviews from students.

Another reason to move the trip to March is that the students would have a lot more interaction time with other native students attending classes. Unfortunately, when our students went last August, classes for students at the University of Guam were not in session, so the university was mostly empty. When the UoG students returned to campus at the end of August, I remember how excited our students were to be able to observe and interact with the UoG students. Unfortunately, this interaction was only available to them on the last couple of days on the trip.

In addition, timing the overseas program to coincide with UoG's semester would help to entice Nakamura Gakuen students to practice their English skills with other students as well, which would undoubtedly help to improve their English proficiency. I noticed this firsthand, as the day I first visited the campus was the day the classes for UoG started. The campus was teeming with students. When I attempted to have lunch with our students in the school cafeteria, it was difficult to find an empty table. Instead of being disappointed at this, our students were excited to see so much activity in a lunchroom that just a day before had been empty since classes hadn't started yet. During this lunch hour I noticed firsthand how our students eagerly absorbed all the various human interactions

around them. Several students remarked to me how campus life was totally different when filled with students, and wished they had been together with the other students the whole time.

#### 4. The Program

Below is a table of one typical day for each week NGU students studied at the University of Guam:

8/14/2019 Wednesday	8/22/2019 Thursday	8/27/2019 Tuesday
English Class 9:00-12:00	English Class 9:00-12:00	English Class 9:00-12:00
Hamamoto Farm/lunch 12:00-13:00	Lunch 12:00-13:00	Lunch 12:00-13:00
Island Tour 13:00-18:00	Recess 13:00-13:30	Recess 13:00-13:30
Chamorro Village 18:00-20:00	Experience Activity 13:30-15:00	Guam History & Culture 13:30-15:00

As you can see from the table, students spent the mornings during the weekdays studying English in small conversation classes. Three hours of English classes first thing in the morning seemed to work best with NGU students, and the UoG staff agreed. This left the afternoons free for various activities. I was able to meet with the English instructor for the entire three-week period. In my opinion, having just one teacher for the entire stay works out for the best, as this teacher has plenty of time to evaluate the

language strengths and weaknesses of each student, and conduct the class accordingly. Particularly in such an intensive language program as this, having just one instructor provides plenty of reinforcement of all material learned during the students' stay. A drawback to this system is that the lessons can become stale after a while if the chemistry between the teacher and class isn't right. Fortunately, in this case the teacher was well-liked by NGU students (as seen from their questionnaire evaluations).

In the afternoons, students participated in various activities that were attended by UoG staff. A few of the more memorable activities included:

Guam Culture Dance: While this was a unique cultural experience for NGU students, the group complained that the dance was too difficult to learn and impossible to memorize. This was in stark contrast to how well received hula dance lessons were received on previous overseas trips to Hawaii. Perhaps this event should be eliminated completely from future trips to Guam.

Fitness/yoga classes: This was well received by NGU students. They enjoyed learning new fitness techniques popularized in American culture, which were often quite different from those in Japan.

Bowling Activity: At first glance of the schedule, a bowling activity may seem out of place to belong in a program such as this. According to the UoG staff however,

the bowling activity has proved to be one of the most popular activities offered. The feedback from students also showed that bowling should be kept on the program, as it seems to be a good refresher, especially around the halfway point of the program. The bowling program was held together with students from other schools as well, and students commented how nice it was to be able to interact with them and compare experiences.

Picnic Excursion: On this day, English classes were not held. Instead, students had a picnic lunch at a semi-secluded beach for the majority of the day. Usually, the picnic outing for groups is conducted on the last Friday before students return to their home country. The picnic is considered to be the 'farewell party' This event was also well-received by the students.

## **5. After the trip**

When the students returned from Guam, within a couple of days afterwards a meeting was held with NGU teachers to discuss the trip in detail, including any major problems they encountered. Giving the post-trip questionnaire in a timely manner ensures the most candid responses, as the trip is still at the forefront of their minds. All students were recommended to take the TOEIC test as soon as possible after their return. Students will invariably score higher on the test immediately following any extended overseas trip, especially one like at UoG where intensive language instruction is given. Taking the

TOEIC test at this time provides three benefits:

1. It can provide a good incentive to prospective students in future trips, if scores can be demonstrated to markedly improve due to the intense learning experience;
2. Having a current good TOEIC test score can improve job hunting chances. Since TOEIC scores remain valid for up to two years after the test date, most students will be able to include their TOEIC test results on their resumes;
3. Taking the TOEIC test in a timely manner can help to reinforce to the students the value of life-long language learning, and help to motivate them for even further score increases in the future.

## 6. Conclusion

Basic suggestions that can be applied to all overseas programs:

1. Before departing Japan for a foreign destination, students should be given a thorough orientation of both the culture and history of the country they will be visiting. This includes both lectures, and if possible a government tourism bureau video if possible. Many schools produce their own sales video as well, which can be a very helpful visual aid. The promotional video produced by the University of Guam was professionally done, and is an outstanding recruiting tool for future programs there.
2. Also shortly before departure, students

should be given approximately ten hours of basic/survival English lessons. A vocabulary notebook of class material should be mandatory to be taken along with the trip.

3. In the vocabulary notebook, students should each write a journal of the day's lessons and/or activities. At least 100 words in English should be written for each day the students are abroad. Upon returning to Japan, a class should be held where students can read to the other students and teachers some of their most memorable experiences.
4. The TOEIC test should be taken by students shortly before leaving on the trip, and once again soon after their return to measure their improvement in English.
5. During the trip, it is imperative that a system of a daily communication channel exist which can provide immediate feedback on an everyday basis. The most effective means for this is by creating a LINE group on smartphones. If any problems come up, they can be quickly taken care of. Teachers will need to be active in the group chat as well, to encourage free communication with one another.
6. Upon returning to Japan, students should fill out a questionnaire on all major activities/lessons in the program to help identify ways to make the program better in subsequent years.
7. During the trip, having a "buddy system" in place may provide useful. This is a system where students are

Scott H. McInnes

paired and responsible for one another. Teachers will need to plan ways to make this system work. Sometimes one or two shy members

are in the group, and having a buddy system in place will help more student interactions with one another and increase group cohesion as well.