Paper Title: Globalization of the Elite Japanese University: Student empowerment as an external force for globalization

Brian Berry
University of Tokyo, ITASIA

Proposed Program Stream: Globalization of Higher Education in East Asia

Abstract
Within Japan, the Japanese Education Ministry has been continuing to encourage Japanese universities to increase the number of students studying abroad by offering financial support to the universities based on various criteria selected by the government. This is the latest attempt by Japan to reverse the consistent and significant drop in both participation and interest in study abroad by Japanese native students. (The New York Times, May 4, 2012) Within East Asia, it is often the elite universities that have led the way for major initiatives with financial funding from often the government supported projects. The most recent example is the decision to change the starting semester from Spring to Fall to match US universities and allow for easier arrangements on a variety of levels. As with other attempts to internationalize and globalize both nation and university, other elite universities have stated they will follow the example of the University of Tokyo. While interest in study abroad remains consistent in other countries in East Asia, Japan continues to drop despite such efforts to internationalize and provide incentives for students and admits partner universities as critical as the US abandoning programs with Japan due to the imbalance and lack of Japanese students going abroad. (Daily Yomiuri Online, Jan 9, 2011) This indicates a major disconnect between aims of universities and those of students. As elite universities in Japan seek to internationalize and reach out to the global community, there must be understanding of not only the students’ involvement, but also how they relate or are disconnected from the goals in which the programs are structured.

This research examines a case study of the activities of visiting international students at the University of Tokyo from the perspective of students as an external force for globalization of Japanese elite universities. Unlike many past initiatives that were often initiated at the administrative level, the empowerment of international students themselves presents a unique and previously unconsidered avenue for globalization of universities in Japan; universities that are often deeply entrenched in bureaucracy. However, due to the past protests by student associations in 1960s student empowerment has been feared and suppressed by the threat of expulsion of any students who organize. Yet, such student organizations may provide a valuable avenue for student representation, participation, and oversight of educational institutions in which the university and governmental administrative components may be largely disconnected. This case study will focus primarily on the Student Body Government (SBG)-which was co-founded by the author in 2010-and responsible for the creation of class evaluation and various student focused events within the University of Tokyo ITASIA program. Unlike student groups within the 1960s, SBG works in connection with the faculty, but also exists for student representation within the university. Data will be collected through use of interviews of student leaders and officers, faculty supervisors, and administrative staff. Social Network Analysis will also be employed to examine how SBG fits within the university structure. Data
collected will be examined through existing theories on globalization within higher education institutions.