



# Learning About Sports Business in Japan: The Queens College Study Abroad Program at Rikkyo University

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## I Introduction

One of the most effective experiential learning activities for promoting cross-cultural competence in a business context is to experience a different culture first hand by studying abroad (Chak & Makino, 2010). Under the leadership and vision of its founding Dean, Professor Noriyoshi Shiraishi, of the College of Business (COB) at Rikkyo University emphasized the importance of such a rich and textured study-abroad experience from the very time of the college’s inception. All students enrolled in the Department of Global Business are required to take part in an intensive three-week Overseas English for Academic Purposes program in their first year of study. Upon returning from this short-term program, many express an interest in studying abroad on exchange for one or two semesters at one of our partner institutions. The COB exchange program is run independently of the university-wide exchange program, and in recent years has grown into an increasingly attractive option for prospective students in high school seeking such opportunities. However, the development, implementation, and maintenance of the program within the scope of the college’s limited resources poses a constant a challenge for faculty and staff.

The College of Business launched its exchange program with two inbound students in 2006 and 17 outbound students in 2007. Starting with three partner institutions in 2005, the program now spans 40 institutions across the Asia-Pacific, North America, and Europe. Forging ties with partners in the United States was especially challenging due to differences in curriculum structure. However, recognizing the importance of diverse international exposure, US schools began offering their students a wide array of short-term study-tour programs (Carley, Stuart & Daily, 2011). Against this backdrop, Professor Toshiya Ozaki, the founding Study Abroad Director of COB, worked in close partnership with his counterpart Gary Braglia, Director of Education Abroad at Queens College (QC) of the City University of New York (CUNY) to develop a unique exchange program. Every year, QC would send students to COB Rikkyo for three weeks in January and Rikkyo in turn could send students to QC for one or two semesters on an exchange basis. While this arrangement may have been common practice outside of Japan, it was a relatively new concept in Rikkyo and other universities in Japan at the time. COB welcomed the first cohort from QC in 2007 and the program has continued to evolve since then. The purpose of this paper is to review COB’s exchange program, with a focus on the QC exchange program, and to undertake a pilot assess-

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ment of student learning in the two most recent student cohorts from Queens College CUNY.

## II The College of Business Study Abroad Program

The COB student exchange program is an integral part of studies at the College of Business and affords students the opportunity to immerse themselves in a different culture while continuing their business studies in English. In a survey of undergraduate business students at eight universities in Hong Kong, Chak & Makino (2010) reveals that students find overseas exchange programs and local internships to be the preferred “out-of-classroom” experiential learning activity. They further adapted a 12 item self-directed learning readiness scale to measure self-directed learning efficacy for “out-of-classroom” learning activities. The study finds that students who engaged in internships and/or study abroad obtained higher self-efficacy scores than students who did not participate in such experiential learning activities. Hence, the empirical evidence stands in support of COB’s establishment of a robust exchange program to promote personal growth, enhance learning out-

comes and develop cross-cultural competence in its students.

A tangible result of self-directed learning from the COB exchange program is COBBY or the “college of business buddy” student organization. In 2009, COBBY was launched as a student-led initiative by those who returned from exchange and recognized the importance of sharing their experiences abroad with their peers and providing a welcoming atmosphere for inbound exchange students. Today, COBBY is recognized as an official student organization in the College of Business, providing assistance with the study abroad fairs held in the Fall term as well as organizing events and providing support to improve the quality of experience for inbound students in the spirit of Japanese styled hospitality, *omotenashi*.

Over the last 15 years COB strived to forge and foster relationships with recognized, internationally accredited programs around the world (Figure 1 and Table 1). As more partner institutions come onboard, we note a proportional increase in both inbound and outbound students on exchange (Figure 2). We also witnessed an improvement in the overall academic record of COB outbound students as evidenced in cumulative GPA and English proficiency test

Figure 1 Number of COB Partner Universities

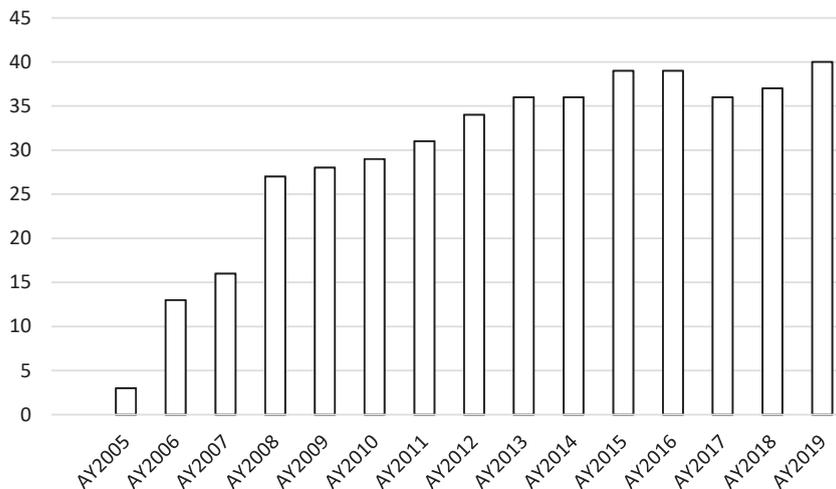


Table 1 List of COB Partner Institutions (as of AY2020)

Partner	Country	Partner	Country
Queensland University of Technology	Australia	Deakin University	Australia
University of Victoria	Canada	HEC Montreal	Canada
Queen's University	Canada	University of Quebec at Montreal	Canada
Beijing Normal University	China	Shanxi University	China
Aarhus University	Denmark	Copenhagen Business School	Denmark
University of Turku	Finland	Hanken School of Economics	Finland
NEOMA Business School	France	ESCEM Business School	France
IESEG School of Management	France	EDHEC Business School	France
EBS Business School	Germany	Cologne Business School	Germany
University of Tuebingen	Germany	Hong Kong Polytechnic University	Hong Kong
Kyung Hee University	Korea	ISCAE	Morocco
BI Norwegian School Management	Norway	Norwegian School of Economics NHH	Norway
Singapore Management University	Singapore	University of Ljubljana	Slovenia
Uppsala University	Sweden	Lund University	Sweden
ZHAW School of Management and Law	Switzerland	Chang Gung University	Taiwan
Radboud U., Nijmegen School of Mgmt	Netherlands	University of Stirling	UK
University of Hawaii at Hilo	USA	University of Missouri, St. Louis	USA
Queens College, CUNY	USA	California State U., San Marcos	USA
Ohio State University	USA	Northeastern University	USA
Eastern Kentucky University	USA	Foreign Trade University	Vietnam

scores (Table 2). This is in large part due to the efforts of the faculty in the Bilingual Business Leadership Program (BBL) and Department of Global Business.

Unlike the university wide exchange program at Rikkyo, the COB exchange program is designed such that credits earned at the partner institution will count towards Rikkyo University's graduation requirements. This unique feature of the COB program makes it possible for students to graduate in four years with a memorable study-abroad experience. From 2014, outbound COB students, transferred the equivalent of 10 Rikkyo credits per term on average. This supports our claim that most COB students (on exchange) complete close to the equivalent of a full academic load at Rikkyo, after accounting for non-transferable credits from language-relat-

ed courses. Expanding beyond undergraduate student exchange, the exchange program now invites graduate students from top-tier universities around the world to study in the all English Master International Business (MIB) program for one or two terms bringing an added layer of diversity to the program. Since cross-cultural communication and awareness are essential skills in today's global economy, and is a central pillar of COB's five-year accelerated BA-MIB program, students on this track are required to spend one year abroad on exchange.

As a result of these efforts, the Japan Student Services Organization, JASSO, awarded the COB study abroad program with generous scholarships to support study abroad opportunities for motivated students in financial need (Table 3). In AY2017, the College of Business

Figure 2 Number of Inbound and Outbound Exchange Students

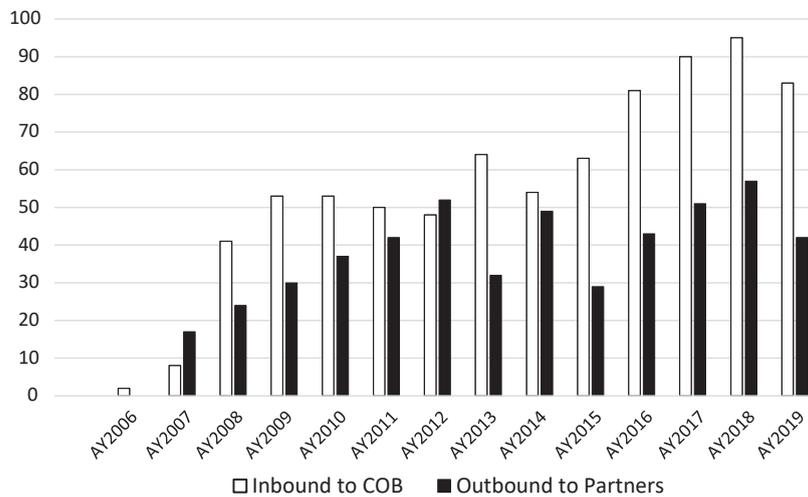


Table 2 Average GPA and Test Scores of COB Outbound Students

	GPA	TOEFLiBT	IELTS
AY2009	2.97	61.90	
AY2010	2.92	63.07	
AY2011	3.03	63.86	
AY2012	3.12	67.32	
AY2013	3.17	73.85	
AY2014	3.01	73.84	5.83
AY2015	3.21	72.14	6.0
AY2016	3.27	70.00	6.0
AY2017	3.11	75.47	6.12
AY2018	3.13	83.36	6.03
AY2019	3.15	78.22	6.10

### III Hosting Students from Queens College

The first cohort of 13 students from Queens College arrived at Rikkyo in January 2007, allowing the COB to send three students to study in New York the following academic year. Over the past decade, COB and QC have found a mutually agreeable balance at approximately 15 short-term inbound students from QC and three outbound student-semesters from COB each year (Figure 3). In other words, five QC students on the 3 credit short term program balances with one COB student-semester of approximately 15 credits.

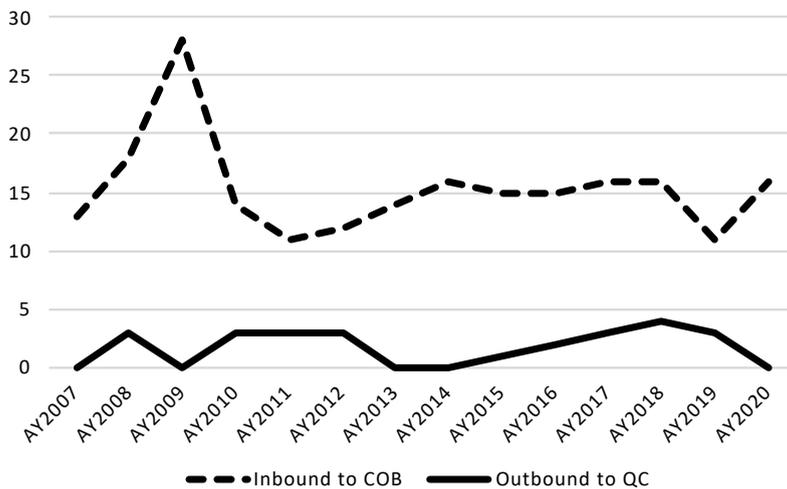
Students from Queens College arrive in Japan on January 2nd each year as part of a larger cohort of students enrolled in a broader Japan study abroad program. After one week, the students splinter into smaller groups focusing on a particular aspect of Japanese studies. The College of Business organizes and hosts the “Business in Japan” component of this larger program. Held at Rikkyo’s Ikebukuro Campus, the “Business in Japan” segment is a key element of the QC study-tour program. A study

was granted full funding renewable up to three years from JASSO. The application was submitted independent of the university wide program enabling us greater latitude in providing financial support for COB students. In the most recent application round of AY2020, the COB study abroad program was the only exchange based program in Rikkyo to be honored with funding from JASSO. The scholarships renewed for another three years of funding included support for students on the international double degree track in the Masters International Business (MIB) program.

Table 3 COB JASSO Scholarship Budget

Academic Year	Inbound Budget	Outbound Budget	Total Budget
AY2014 Waitlisted (Reduced Budget)	¥6,720,000	¥6,110,000	¥12,830,000
AY2015 Waitlisted (Reduced Budget)	¥5,760,000	¥4,720,000	¥10,480,000
AY2016 Waitlisted (Reduced Budget)	¥15,120,000	¥19,600,000	¥34,720,000
AY2017 Proposal Accepted (Full Budget)	¥24,160,160	¥34,570,000	¥58,730,000
AY2018 Proposal Accepted (Full Budget)	¥15,520,000	¥24,400,000	¥39,920,000
AY2019 Proposal Accepted (Full Budget)	¥13,120,000	¥26,600,000	¥39,720,000
AY2020 Proposal Accepted (Full Budget)	¥27,760,000	¥24,720,000	¥52,480,000
AY2021 Proposal Accepted (Full Budget)	¥19,440,000	¥18,200,000	¥37,640,000

Figure 3 Number QC Inbound to COB and COB Outbound to QC



Note: COB outbound students study for one or two terms full time at QC. QC students are on a short-term program to COB.

tour being defined as “an activity of learning and researching through personal visits to one or more unfamiliar sites, where those sites (the human participants, their interaction, lifestyles, cultures) are the subject of study” (Miao, 2006, p. 423).

The “Business in Japan” segment of the program included a series of lectures, discussion sessions and site visits with COB instructors (Table 4). Each year, full time COB faculty actively engaged in lectures ranging from topics on accounting & finance, to strategy and to case based lectures on companies such as Nissan

with enthusiasm. Full time COB faculty also welcomed QC students to participate in regularly scheduled classes affording the students an immersive view into the Department of Global Business by observing both a typical lecture with more than 100 students in attendance and participating in a traditional Japanese university-style seminar, or zemi, which espouses small-group interactions. This gave QC students a preview of the full study abroad experience at Rikkyo or other Japanese universities. For COB students, the interactive sessions brought greater diversity to the classroom and an opportuni-

Table 4 Faculty Instructors Affiliated with Program: 2007 ~ 2020

Toshikata Amino	Scott Davis	Herbert Donovan	Takabumi Hayashi
Goro Hoshi	Chie Iguchi	Adam Johns	Takashi Kosaka
Roy Larke	Masaki Matsunaga	Ayano Nishihara	Yosuke Nagashima*
Noriaki Okamoto	Toshiya Ozaki	Yuka Sakurai	Hiroshi Sasaki*
Douglas Schules*	Nobuya Takezawa*	TaizoTaya	Yosuke Tsuji*
Masaru Yokoi*			

Note: Names in alphabetical order.

\* "Sports Business in Japan" instructors.

ty to share their thoughts with and learn from students with different cultural backgrounds. As noted by Sakurai (2012) “participants are able to broaden their perspectives and gain new ideas and thoughts by comparing and contrasting their own attitudes to those of local students” (p. 137). Many participants from QC commented that their discussion in class and conversations out of class with Rikkyo students enhanced their learning experience.

*The Rikkyo University and Queens College exchange agreement changed my life and the lives of many students who had the privilege to attend the program. I was a student in the first QC cohort who studied at COB, back in 2007. The program was an eye-opening experience, and I learned so much about Japanese culture and business from the COB faculty. Few years later, I became director of education abroad at QC, and I witnessed firsthand the positive impact on Japanese and American students. Queens College and CUNY are proud of the exemplary relationship we have with Rikkyo University.*

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 (2011-2019)  
 Director of International Programs and Study  
 Abroad at Brooklyn College

COB faculty at the time, we elected to take an experiential approach to familiarizing students with the different aspects of the sports industry settling on the theme of “Sports Business in Japan” (Table 5) for January 2019 and 2020. 11 students participated in 2019 and 16 students in 2020 for a total of 27 students from different colleges within the CUNY system. While many students majored in business or management related fields, students specializing in other fields within the social sciences or natural sciences also participated in the program.

Accompanied by volunteer COB student guides, QC students first engaged in a sports retail field study in selected areas around Tokyo, with the objective of observing and experiencing sports retail culture in Japan. This exercise is intentionally scheduled early in the program to help QC students familiarize themselves with the Tokyo public transportation system and more importantly to interact with COB students in an informal setting. Groups are provided guideline questions and maps and briefed in general etiquette when entering stores in the Tokyo area. On the following day, students are required to present on their findings and to compare their experience with shops in New York City, thereby beginning to reveal and understand subtle cultural differences.

The field study is then followed by a series of lectures to brief and prepare students for site visits including sporting events. Students are similarly expected to document their experience at sporting events such as a Sumo tournament

From AY2018, COB developed a themed program designed to provide exposure to a specific industry in Japan. Based on the expertise of

Table 5 *Model Program: Sports Business in Japan*

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- *Introduction and Orientation:* Orientation to the program, self-introductions, campus and Ikebukuro tour, event hosted by the “college of business buddy” student organization (COBBY).
  - *Sporting Goods Retail Field Study and Debriefing:* Form groups of 4 students to visit different pre-determined destinations in Tokyo to observe and collect information on retail stores. Students report on their findings in a debrief session.
  - *Interactive Lectures:* Introduction to Sports Business, Sports Finance, Sports Marketing & Baseball, Creative Industries and Sports, Ski Industry
  - *Seminar and Workshops:* Creative Industries and eSports, Kendo workshop
  - *Site Visit and Debriefings:* Sumo Tournament, B League basketball game, Panasonic, Japan Airlines, Hakuba Valley Ski Resort
  - *Final Report on Ski Resort Industry:* Group presentations based on site visit to Hakuba Valley.
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and a B. League basketball game. In observing professional sports in Japan first hand, students can compare and reflect on their consumer-fan experience in Japan with their experience in New York city. QC student interaction with COB student volunteers is a unique facet of this short-term program that encourages students to share their views of sports business in a less formal setting. Finally, students engage in a study of the Hakuba Valley ski resort managed and operated by Nippon Ski Resort Development (NSD). After touring the resort facilities and interacting with NSD management, students are tasked with proposing new business opportunities for the resort drawing on their learnings and experiences of the previous two weeks.

#### IV Assessing the Learning Experience

At the close of the program, students write a reflective essay on their experience and learning. Here, learning is perceived as a process based on experience. In other words, “learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). Asking students to engage in re-

flexive essay or journal writing is thought to be an effective way to gauge such learning (Maellaro, 2013; Zahra, 2012). To measure the extent to which the “learning process” of the program is achieved, we focused specifically on issues related to sports and culture (New York vs Tokyo) and learning about the business of sport. In analyzing the reflective essays, we employed Kolb’s (1984) learning cycle framework which purports that experiential learning takes place through the interaction of theory and experience in four stages or modes: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The Kolb learning cycle is thoroughly documented in the experiential education literature, providing us with a meaningful framework to explore the learning process of the participants through their reflective essays. We are cognizant of the shortcomings of this approach and that learning is holistic in nature, going beyond the individual learning initially formulated in the Kolb model (Kayes, 2002; Quay, 2003; Seaman, 2008 among others).

Concrete experience involves “the here and now.” A detailed description of what happened or of the environment without any attempt at

interpretation is categorized as concrete experience. When students begin to understand and think about the meaning of the experience from different perspectives, this takes them to the next step of reflective observation. The third stage, abstract conceptualization, requires the student to demonstrate the use of logic and concepts “to build general theories about experiences and new perspectives” (Maellaro, 2013, p. 235). Finally, active experimentation is where students express a willingness to try something different by applying the “general theories” to personal situations.

As our study is exploratory in nature, the learning experience is broadly defined and we need not strictly adhere to the definitions in the Kolb learning cycle. Our framework of analysis is semi-structured in that we solely focus on two predetermined themes, sports and culture, and learning the business of sport, when assessing student essays. For each of the two themes, the authors read and categorized the essays into one of the four stages in the learning cycle based on our interpretation of the content. For example, if students outlined an observation in considerable detail and provided a comparison with their experience in New York, this would constitute reflective observation. Overall, the students exhibited an exceptional ability to compare and contrast their experience in Japan and the United States. Students were observant, picking up details such as the position and content of billboards and how arena staff worked to keep the stands clean. QC cohorts showed a high level of reflective observation, beyond what would be expected of an undergraduate

student with only three weeks of study and living experience in Japan. A few students applied theories learned in their home programs such as microeconomic theory, to better understand the pricing they observed at sports events in Japan. This would be coded as a case of abstract conceptualization. Given the short time span of the program, QC students had limited opportunity to engage in active experimentation. However, one student took the initiative to contact and visit an external sports organization, moving beyond their comfort zone and “actively experimenting” based on their limited exposure to Japan. Our assessment of the depth of reflection for the students in the program is summarized in Table 6.

While we coded depth of reflection of most students as reflective observation, we believe this constitutes substantial experiential learning even if the student did not go through the entire four stage cycle. As noted by Quay (2003), “experiential education requires further theorization of the relationship between reflection and concrete experience, beyond the basic fact of the existence of this relation” (p. 111).

## V Conclusion

The College of Business exchange program was launched in 2006 independent of the university wide program and its resources, requiring much innovation and creativity on the part of the faculty and staff involved. The program now boasts 40 partner universities around the world including internationally accredited institutions

Table 6 *Depth of Reflection on Program Main Themes*

Kolb's Learning Cycle	Sports and Culture	Sports Business
Reflective Observation	23	24
Abstract Conceptualization	4	1
Active Experimentation		1

as well as programs which place an emphasis on Asia. Forging ties with partner schools is not about ticking boxes, not about preparing documentation for third party organizations, and certainly not about the number of signed agreements. It is about building trust and mutual respect as exemplified in our long standing exchange program with Queens College. COB continues to dedicate our scarce resources to such a time consuming, and at times frustrating, endeavor of developing and maintaining an independent study abroad program. Why? As our founding Dean, Professor Shiraishi would say: "It is for the students."

#### Acknowledgements

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#### Dedication

This research note is dedicated to the memory of our founding Dean, Professor Noriyoshi Shiraishi, who had the passion and vision to set the COB study abroad program in motion.

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