

# **Some Problems in the Implementation Process of UCTS : the Case of Otaru University of Commerce\***

Hideki Funatsu

Otaru University of Commerce

\*This paper is a substantially revised version of the oral presentation at the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the European Association for International Education (EAIE) Session-UCTS (UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme) : Challenges and Potential Benefits on December 7, 2001. The opinion expressed in this paper is the author's not of the university. The author alone is responsible for any shortcomings.

## **Abstract**

Otaru University of Commerce has developed one-year undergraduate exchange program with various universities in the world since 1991. The main purpose is to facilitate the credit transfer with the partner universities. Since we did not have a proper procedure to recognize the student's credit taken in other universities, it was a time consuming process to document the officially recognized graded credits. This difficulty motivated us to utilize a universal credit transfer scheme. Although UCTS has been partially implemented into our university, its potential benefit is clear. As more universities use, the benefit is greater. We are encouraging our partners in Asia and the Pacific to adopt the UCTS. A remaining task is to bridge UCTS and ECTS. Increasing number of exchange students from Europe

requires us to ask our European partners to recognize UCTS as equivalent to ECTS. This process may lead to create a world credit transfer system.

## 1. Introduction

There is a growing awareness of the importance of international education in the literature.<sup>1)</sup> The promotion of study abroad has become important part of the regional economic integration. The purpose of this paper is to discuss some problems emerged in the implementation process of the credit transfer scheme suggested by University Mobility in Asia and Pacific (UMAP). I present the case of a Japanese university that heavily involved into the UMAP activity.

Otaru University of Commerce (OUC) has been developing the undergraduate exchange program suitable for students in Europe and Asia-Pacific for the last ten years. The junior year abroad has been popular and common among universities in Europe and North America since 1960s. Some of Japanese private universities have also developed the exchange program with universities in USA and other countries. However, it has been difficult for an average Japanese university to host a meaningful number of exchange students from North America and Europe because of the language barrier and the lack of a transparent credit transfer scheme.

OUC started the special study abroad program designed for exchange students in 1999. The course is taught in English and the credit transfer scheme developed by the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) is adopted. In order to facilitate the undergraduate student exchange, it is essential to establish a transparent procedure for credit trans-

---

1) See a few examples in References.

fer. As the number of exchange partners increases, we have experienced some difficulties to approve credits taken abroad. I would like to share our experience by explaining why we decided to use UCTS (UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme) and how we try to implement UCTS in a full scale. Finally, I would like to discuss a possible linkage between UCTS and ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) and a need for cooperation between European Union and Japan.

## **2 . Potential Benefits of UCTS and Some Problems**

When we start sending our students oversea, the difficulties we faced were how we should approve the grade and credit taken in other countries. Some of the faculty members were very conservative and did not want to approve any credit at all. I as Director of International Center had to present all the syllabuses and class notes that the students used at the host universities to the curriculum committee of our university. Our partner in New Zealand did not use a credit system at that time. As a result I had to find out how much our students studied per class at the host institution. The scale of earned grade appeared on the student's transcript differs among universities in various countries. I had to make a formula to convert those grades into our scale. All these administrative tasks become extremely heavy as the number of our exchange partners increases. Therefore we have decided to participate into the UMAP activity to promote a wider use of UCTS.

What we have done so far are as follows ;

- (1) The contents of our program including the syllabus are available online 6 months prior to the beginning of the program so that the

potential exchange students have sufficient information when they commit themselves into the program.

- (2) UCTS credit points and grades are written besides our credit points and grades on the official transcript we issue.
- (3) Whenever we sign a new student exchange agreement, the article on the use of UCTS is inserted.

What we are unable to do so far is that the mutual recognition of the student's study plans before departure. Students decide their study plans after their arrival at the host institution. Home institutions sometimes do not have that information until the students return to the institution. We are making our best effort to exchange the information about the student's registration immediately after student's arrival.

Since UCTS is not widely used in other countries, we are constantly asking our exchange partners to use UCTS credit points and grades on their transcripts. Mutual recognition of the study plan by the exchange student is very important. Since the current form of the study plan and a suggested procedure by UMAP are rather rigid, we are unable to document the learning agreement before the student's departure. We have to set up some kind of pre-departure guidance to exchange students.

Another problem we face is the flexibility in the choice of the subjects after arrival. Exchange students may drop some courses and add other courses after arrival to the host institution. We should have some procedures and forms for changes in learning agreement.

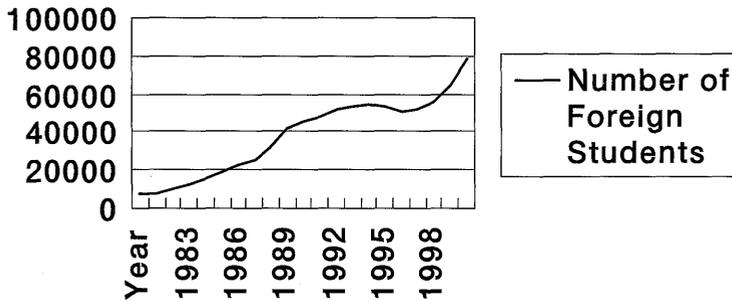
The last problem I should mention here is the exchange with the non-UMAP countries. As we expand our exchange partners in the world, we need a similar kind of credit transfer scheme with universities in the non-

UMAP countries. UCTS is a partial arrangement by its nature. Eventually we need a universal scheme for the university credit transfer system.

### 3 . Undergraduate Exchange Programs in Japan

More international students are coming into Japan in the past three years as you see from Graph 1. The number of enrollment into the undergraduate program is increasing. Although most of degree seeking students are coming from Asia, the short-term exchange program attracts students from Europe and North America (Table 1). A junior year abroad program is the best way to promote the student exchange in Asia, Europe and the Pacific.

More Japanese universities are offering the special program in English and trying to facilitate the credit transfer with exchange partners. Early exposure to a different culture and society is important for the future leaders in the interdependent world. Tuition for exchange students are waived in most of the cases and the scholarship funded by the Japanese Government is provided through UMAP and Association of International Education, Japan (AIEJ). The university tuition is increasing in Japan (Graph 2).

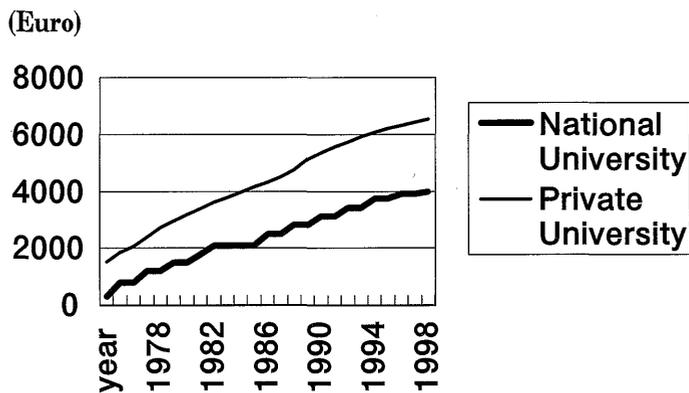


Graph 1 Number of Foreign Students in Japan

Table 1 The Number of Foreign Students in Japan

Region	Total Number	Short-term Students	Share of Short-term Students
Asia	72127	3681	0.051
Europe	2389	864	0.362
N. America	1360	903	0.664
S. America	943	135	0.143
Africa	872	19	0.022
Oceania	526	205	0.390
Middle East	525	27	0.051
Total	78812	5834	0.074

Source : Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology



Graph 2 University Tuition in Japan

However, unlike some universities in Europe, Japanese universities do not use price discrimination to international students. It is one of the Japanese government policies to promote the study abroad in Japan. Exchange programs have been generously funded by the public expense.

#### **4 . A Need for EU-Japan Cooperation in International Education**

A remaining task for a wider use of UCTS is linkage between ECTS and UCTS. Since most of major universities in Asia and the Pacific have the student exchange program with European universities. European partners of OUC do not recognize the UCTS so that students from Europe may have difficulties to transfer the credits obtained in Japan. If European universities recognize UCTS as equivalent to ECTS, a credit transfer might be easier. More ambitious approach is to create a new universal credit transfer system. Since ECTS and UCTS are essentially same, we may just rename them WCTS (World Credit Transfer System). In order to promote the student exchange in the world, it is better to have a standard format. As the development of UCTS is still in its infancy, EU and Japan may work together to develop a credit transfer system that can be used anywhere in the world.

A more practical approach will be to create a pilot project by forming a consortium of universities in European Union and Japan. This consortium may develop a suitable curriculum for exchange students and utilize ECTS and UCTS effectively to facilitate the credit transfer.

Slightly modifying the documents by University of Leeds reported by Professor Taiji HOTTA of University of Hiroshima in the Japan UMAP domestic expert committee, I would like to suggest the following forms of "Mutual Approval of the Study Plan" and "Transcript of Study Abroad Record".





D	60~ 69	STATISFACTORY-fair but with significant shortcomings
E	50~ 59	SUFFICIENT-performance meets the minimum criteria
FX	40~ 49	FAIL-some more work required before credit can be awarded
F	0~ 39	FAIL-considerable further work required

A major modification suggested is the grading scale. The current grading scale used by both ECTS and UCTS assume the relative measure indicated by “% of successful students normally achieving the grade”. However, most university professors have their own evaluation criteria based upon their academic freedom and honesty. Therefore, the choice of the evaluation measure belongs to academic faculty. WCTS should be neutral in the choice of measurement. I recommend a simple scale of 0~100 for WCTS grade.

A suggested procedure for World Credit Transfer System is as follows ;

- (1) Universities sign the student exchange agreement that explicitly states the use of WCTS.
- (2) Host institutions announce the content of the study abroad program by six months prior to the beginning of the program.
- (3) Home institutions select exchanges students and nominate them to Host institutions with the study plan.
- (4) Host institutions admit exchange students and approve the study plan.
- (5) After arrival, exchange students register at Host institutions. If students wish to change the study plan, they need approval from both Home institutions and Host institutions.
- (6) Host institutions evaluate students' performance by using their own grading systems and issue the WCTS transcript of the study

abroad record.

- (7) After the return of the exchange students, Home institutions approve the WCTS transcript and transfer the credits into the own transcripts. Home institutions are responsible for informing the completion of the credit transfer to Host institutions.

## **5 . Concluding Remarks**

The use of UCTS is still limited to a small group of universities in Asia and the Pacific. Apparently the benefits are greater as more universities use UCTS. Some incentives are provided to use UCTS in Japan. Scholarships for the short-term exchange students are now given through UMAP and AIEJ. More Japanese universities are expected to use UCTS for promoting the student exchange. A possible linkage between UCTS and ECTS is important for facilitating the student mobility in the world. An ambitious plan for creating the World Credit Transfer System is suggested.

**References**

- Forest, James J.F. edited (1998) *University Teaching, International Perspectives*, Garland Publishing, Inc., New York and London.
- Leach, Fiona E. and Angela W. Little edited (1999) *Education, Cultures, and Economics, Dilemmas for Development*, New York and London.
- Funatsu, Hideki (2001) "International Education and Economic Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific", *this Review*, vol. 51, no. 2/3.
- Neef, Dale, G. Anthony Siesfeld and Jacquelyn Cefola edited (1998) *The Economic Impact of Knowledge*, Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Scott, Peter edited (1998) *The Globalization of Higher Education*, The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, Philadelphia.