

Cooperation of University and Industries through the Internship for International Exchange Students of Hiroshima University

Naomi TSUNEMATSU

We newly opened the internship course for international exchange students of **“Hiroshima University Study Abroad Program (HUSA Program)”** titled **“the HUSA Internship”** in 2003 and provided the opportunities for international exchange students to work as an intern for two weeks in local companies and the local municipal government. Since then, we have made efforts to improve the course with the cooperation of the local industries and the municipal government. More than fifty students have already worked as “an HUSA intern” through this system, and most of the students who experienced the HUSA Internship have been engaged in the work related to Japan after graduation. Most of the previous interns are currently working in the foreign branches of Japanese companies, or in the sections dealing with Japanese customers, etc. “The HUSA Internship” has significantly influenced the future career of the students who experienced it.

Currently we are offering the two courses for the internship of exchange students: “HUSA Internship I: Career Theory and Practice” (Japanese level: from the Intermediate to the Advanced), and “HUSA Internship II: Practicum” (Japanese level: Advanced only). “HUSA Internship I: Career Theory and Practice”, which was newly opened in 2010, is for the students to well prepare for the “HUSA Internship II: Practicum” which provides the actual work experience as an intern. The HUSA Internship I: Career Theory and Practice has become a place where students could find connection between their university learning and Japanese society & global society, and students with various backgrounds can study together by bringing diverse perspectives and exchanging different views. This course has also created a place for students to have training for practical skills, and also to work on the group project with Japanese students, using the educational method called PBL (problem-based learning) based upon the entrepreneurs’ lecture series which I introduced in 2010. In order to work on the project related to their career and important themes related to work, students fully utilize their Japanese and English ability to communicate with each other and have active interaction.

The crucial point in establishing the internship course for international exchange students is to negotiate with the industries with the proper understanding that there is hardly any substantial benefit for the company itself where we send the foreign student intern at undergraduate level. Internship for exchange students is very different from most of the internship which the companies set up by themselves for the purpose of finding potential human resources or for the advertisement of their companies. The reality is that usually exchange students do not have official work experience with responsibility, and it takes considerable amount of time and effort for the company trainers to provide guidance and assistance to the student interns within the company.

The internship site of international exchange students in Japan, is not a place where students offer professional skills, and rather, it is an occasion where the students are given the opportunities to observe the Japanese work culture and have some work experience with the benevolence and assistance of the employees. In 2010 we had a very exceptional internship case in which the president of the company actively offered assistance to the interns and provided the rare opportunities for them to develop a new product for a global market by utilizing the students' new perspectives. However, this kind of case is rare, and we really cannot expect the local companies to have the special sense of mission to assist the international exchange students' internship with generosity and the prospect that students could contribute their experience to the global world in the future in broader and long-range perspective.

Therefore, the crucial point for the successful continuation of the internship for international exchange students is to properly understand the position of the student interns, university, and industries and take actions accordingly. The lecturer in charge of the internship course needs to understand that companies are offering assistance for the future of the student interns for educational purposes, wishing that someday these international students will become a bridge between Japan and their country, and will contribute something to the global world as a global leader. This reality also needs to be incorporated into the instructions in the classes where exchange students prepare themselves for the internship. This will help the students to develop sense of responsibility and mission to do internship with proper courtesy and strict attitudes.

In 2010 I conducted a survey on the local companies' perception of the internship for the international exchange students. As a result I have found that it is very important for the university to clearly present the significance and meaning of the "HUSA Internship"

to the industries since it is difficult for them to grasp the system of the exchange program and the purpose of the internship. In order for local companies to offer assistance, they need to understand the purpose of the internship for exchange students, what kind of help is required from them, and how their assistance can contribute to the exchange students, university, and the world in the future. In order to enhance the understanding of the exchange program and the HUSA Internship course, I have issued the pamphlets of the HUSA Internship and distributed them to the local companies in 2010.

Also, by following the advice of the local companies, we have established the system in which local companies can register for accepting the exchange student intern whenever they wish. Together with this, we have also created the system for students to be able to choose the working period as an intern for two weeks, from summer break, winter break, and spring break, although till 2009 the HUSA interns experienced internship only during the summer break for two weeks. This flexible system has been working very effectively this year since local companies can choose the most appropriate time to accept an intern. In reality, only two companies registered to accept interns through the registration system initially, and this indicates the reality that for companies the “HUSA Internship” does not create so much benefit and it is not quite worth registering for accepting the student interns. It is crucial to understand that the companies have merely offered assistance so far due to the request through the connections among the local companies.

For the continuation of the internship for exchange students, the lecturer in charge of the course needs to establish a relationship of mutual trust with local companies and municipal office. For this purpose, it is significant for the lecturer to constantly visit or communicate with the people of the companies who have been assisting the HUSA Internship so that sense of human connection could be established. Furthermore, it is significant to report the achievement of the internship to the industries so that they could see the achievement of the students and the significance of their assistance. Without being able to see the consequence of their contribution to the internship and without any human communication with the lecturer in charge, it is impossible for the companies to continue their support when there is no benefit on their side.

At a glance the HUSA Internship course appears to be systematized and institutionalized as an official course of Hiroshima University. However, in reality, every year the

HUSA Internship course needs to be started from zero, by the lecturer's visit to the companies and request for the cooperation from them. There is no guarantee that we could continue the HUSA Internship in the following year as it is clearly indicated by the local companies' claim that they cannot guarantee the following year's assistance in the evaluation after the internship. We need to understand the fact that companies, who have been offering help as international contribution, cannot promise accepting exchange student as an intern in the following year unless they examine the financial situation of the company in that year. Only with the continuation of the relationship of mutual trust, understanding by the university of the industries' volunteer spirit for international contribution in the global world, and conveyance by the lecture of the significance of the internship for exchange students, "HUSA Internship" can be continued and developed.