

UBC-RITSUMEIKAN ACADEMIC EXCHANGE PROGRAMS FOR THE KNOWLEDGE AGE

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In my experience at Canada's University of British Columbia and at Japan's Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University I have always valued our campuses' inclusive environments and the prevailing spirit of intercultural understanding through discussion, reflection, and analysis. I found it invigorating to be part of an ongoing quest for intercultural aptitudes and an enriched social and intellectual community that extends well beyond the campus and becomes a way of life. With students at the center of this academic program, some simple questions arise: Who are our students? What are their expectations? How do they differ from previous student generations? In all of this, the main focus of university teaching in the humanities remains essentially unchanged: Students still need and want to be able to consider information critically, assimilate facts into bigger narratives, and generate new ideas. Educational Technology has accelerated and diversified all aspects related to these goals. Hence, the students of today's "Empowered Generation" are experiencing an educational development in which students gain an increased ability and agency to make decisions and improvements in their own learning environment. As part of this trend, students have come to expect personalized curricula and instantaneous feedback. In order to reach and motivate these students, learner centered teaching must first create cause consensus and shared enthusiasm for a common goal. Our students have grown up in a world where technology provides a platform for infinite customization and instant gratification in all aspects of life. At the same time, ubiquitous information has instilled a global social conscience in them. As a result they are well aware of their privileged position while maintaining a positive outlook. Self-assured and competitive they also have a very sophisticated social awareness. They think globally and act locally to make their world a better place. They are ready to take on the pressures and challenges of a truly global knowledge economy and in return demand complete access and full participation. This philosophy is also well expressed in Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University's mission statement and its universal goals towards "Freedom, Peace, and Humanity, International Mutual Understanding" and "the future shape of the Asia Pacific Region." UBC's own mission statement entitled "Place and Promise: The UBC Plan" further suggests how these universal goals can be achieved through educational policies and strategies: Student centered learning should be transformative through teaching strategies, an enriched educational experience beyond the classroom, and a rewarding campus and community life in Vancouver. We should strive to increase motivation by enabling enhanced flexible self-directed learning and sharpen the focus of program requirements including prerequisites. Participatory action research is in itself a teaching and learning evaluation process perfectly suited for the university language classroom and community engagement. Throughout, everyone benefits from enhanced classroom transparency and a sense of community through supportive and constructive feedback mechanisms. UBC-Ritsumeikan House exemplifies a coming together of both formal and informal learning spaces designed for a lifestyle that is dedicated to knowledge formation. On a personal level, my own teaching interests and work as an educational leader emerged at UBC and were further shaped at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University. This led to a specialization in teaching content courses in Academic Writing and English Literature to Ritsumeikan and Kobe students with the aid of educational technology for SLA. The result is a unique

institutional knowledge seeking experience and understanding of both UBC and Ritsumeikan from a learner's and instructor's perspective, and substantial experience in teaching Japanese and other foreign and local undergraduate students at UBC and Rits-APU. The UBC-Ritsumeikan Academic Programs are part of an even larger study abroad experience and there are important connections on every level that make for a balance of academic life with other aspects of a study abroad experience regarding health and wellbeing. Thus students may truly immerse themselves and fully enjoy all that their time at UBC can offer. Together, the courses raise student awareness of societal issues and enable them to become an advocate for positive change perhaps even through non-profit agencies and the public sector. The programs may also explore experiences that mimic an internship, practicum, or research assistantship within the given mandate. For example, it could be beneficiary to emulate a kind of volunteer practicum and dovetail a course with off-campus experiential learning in internship-like co-op experiences, just as the fieldtrip experiences are already linked with course topics and learning goals. In all of these endeavors, a student-centered administrative philosophy lends support to student-led initiatives and encourages student involvement both at UBC-Ritsumeikan House, the larger UBC campus, and beyond. UBC-Ritsumeikan House is an exceptional place of mind and an inclusive, respectful learning community that fosters global citizenship, advances sustainable goals and serves the people of British Columbia, Japan, and beyond. UBC-Rits sparks motivation and innovation through synergy in – to quote Dr. Gupta - “a cosmopolitan microcosm, nexus, and gateway to nurture tomorrow's leaders of the global knowledge economy.” Significantly, UBC-Rits is the physical home - the 'here and now' of a much larger symbiosis of two Pacific Rim research powerhouses. UBC is Canada's clearest window into the creative and entrepreneurial forces of the Asia Pacific, and UBC-Ritsumeikan House is the bright light in that window. This paper explores today's challenges of the multicultural classroom.