

Chapter 6

Waseda University's E-School: 10 Years of E-Education in Japan

Shoji Nishimura
Waseda University, Japan

Douglass J. Scott
Waseda University, Japan

ABSTRACT

In 2003, the School of Human Sciences, Waseda University (Japan), established the e-School, Japan's first complete undergraduate program enabling students to earn their bachelor degrees solely through e-learning. Supported by the availability of high-speed Internet connections, it has become possible to economically transmit high-quality videotaped lectures across Japan and throughout the world. Waseda's e-School has many features that contribute to its success, among these are that lecture contents are transmitted with an image quality that allows students to easily read what is written on the blackboard. In addition, online classes are relatively small—21 students on average—and new classes are created to respond to students' needs and interests. This chapter outlines the e-School's first 10 years of operation: Its history, curriculum, administration, and management learning system. Data are also presented for student engagement with the e-School system for the first ten years of operation (2003-2012).

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INTRODUCTION

Waseda University, one of Japan's oldest private universities, started to issue "*Waseda kougiroku*" ("Waseda lecture transcripts") for off-campus students in 1886, only four years after the University was founded. *Waseda kougiroku* continued to be issued until 1957 and was ultimately distributed to a total of 2.7 million students. Such students include many distinguished researchers and scholars in Japan, such as Soukichi Tsuda, the famous historian specializing in Japanese and Chinese intellectual histories. *Waseda kougiroku*, along with the "itinerant lectures" given in various regions in Japan, deserves special mention in the history of lifelong education in Japan (Waseda Daigaku 1972).

Since 1949, Waseda University was engaged in providing continuing education through its School of Political Science and Economics II (closed in 1973), the School of Law II (closed in 1973), the School of Letters, Arts and Sciences II, the School of Commerce II (closed in 1973), and the School of Science and Engineering II (closed in 1968), all of which taught evening courses, as well as the School of Social Sciences (established in 1966) which offered classes both in the daytime and evenings. However, these courses were offered on-campus and the University had no correspondence courses as a university under the post-war system. The advent of widely-available Internet connections was to greatly change the University's educational delivery options (Waseda Daigaku 2007).

Aoki and Bray (2006) explained that the Japanese Ministry of Education recognized correspondence and distance learning schools starting in 1950. This recognition granted accredited schools the authority to issue degrees to graduating students. The authors note that while distance-learning programs could receive accreditation, the Ministry of Education maintained separate systems for these new programs and traditional campus-based institutions (Aoki & Bray 2006). This separation continues to this day.

In the United States, e-learning on the Internet was actively introduced by higher education institutions since the middle of the 1990's. In particular, with regard to distance education, the University of Phoenix introduced large-scale e-learning in a successful manner (Sperling 2000, Yoshida 2002). Japan's entrance into Internet-based education was delayed because Japanese law didn't allow universities to offer Internet-based education until 2001. Amendments to the standards for the establishment of universities by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in March 2001 specified that "a class utilizing the Internet" (i.e. a kind of e-learning) could be recognized as one form of "a class conducted by using media (remote teaching)." This allowed universities' correspondence courses to use the Internet as the primary means of delivering course content for all credits required for graduation (i.e. 124 credits) (Shimizu 2002).

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