Chapter 4.20

E–Learning Practice and Experience at Waseda E–School:
Japan's First Undergraduate Degree–Awarding Online Program

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ABSTRACT

In 2003, the School of Human Sciences, Waseda University, Japan, established the e-School, Japan's first complete undergraduate correspondence courses enabling students to acquire their bachelor degrees solely through e-learning. Supported by the widespread availability of high-speed Internet connections, it has become possible to transmit videotaped lectures with an image quality close to that of television, not only throughout Japan, but also throughout the world at affordable rates. In addition, the lecture contents are transmitted in an image quality that allows students to easily read what is written on the blackboard. Waseda's e-School has many features that contribute to its success. Among these are the coupling of online and on-campus courses enhancing the educational experience of all students. In addition, online courses are relatively small—most courses are capped at 30 students—and new courses are created to respond to students' needs and interests. This article outlines the e-School's curriculum, management structure, and system and reports on the current status of the courses by analyzing the results of a questionnaire survey conducted after one year from their establishment and the state of credits registered and earned by students.

INTRODUCTION

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

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

In the United States, e-learning using the Internet has been actively introduced by higher education institutions since the middle of the 1990's. In particular, with regard to distance education, the University of Phoenix has introduced e-learning in a successful manner (Sperling 2000, Yoshida 2002). Japan's entrance into Internet-based education was slower to start, ideed, 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).

Changes in access to high-speed Internet connections also contributed to the development of Internet-based education in Japan. According to the Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications Japan, as of the end of March 2003, the accumulated number of subscribers of broadband Internet connections amounted to approximately 6.9 million (DSL: 6,589,867, FTTH: 305,387) (Economic Research Office, General Policy Division, Information and Communications Policy Bureau, Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications, Japan 2004). The spread of broadband Internet connections made it easier to deliver dynamic picture images in high quality to the average home.

Various Japanese universities have conducted Internet-based education. In Japan, national universities were given independent status in April, 2004 and these universities have become eager to highlight their school's features, which has created increasing interest in e-learning and distance learning (Shimizu 2004). Some universities, such as Yashima Gakuen University, Japan Cyber University, Nihon University Graduate School, Shinshu University (Nagano Prefecture) and Nagaoka University of Technology (Niigata Prefecture), have started to offer e-learning-based curricula coordinated by each school. Yashima Gakuen University is a correspondence university established in April 2004. The students can graduate by using the Internet without the need to study on campus. The program's characteristic learning method

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