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GraSPP in Transition

Nobue Nachi Project Academic Support Specialist

The term “GraSPPers” has been heard about recently. The moniker is applied affectionately to GraSPP students and graduates, particularly overseas students or Japanese students who have studied overseas. There is something very pleasing about the term, indicating the sense of their psychological bond with GraSPP. The class of 2016 at GraSPP will be graduating this coming March. Similarly, the fourth intake of the MPP/IP established in 2010 completed their program in September of last year. As someone who has been involved in establishing the double degree programs, the student exchange programs, English-language programs such as MPP/IP and CAMPUS Asia since their inception, I have been struck by the changes at GraSPP over the last four to five years. GraSPP may have the shortest history of any graduate school at the University of Tokyo, but we can also be described as furthest ahead in terms of internationalization.

The numbers of students enrolled in graduate schools as of May 2015 are listed in the 2015 edition of a guide to the University of Tokyo published by the university. These include figures for international students (defined as those on a student visa). Using these numbers to calculate the percentage of international students puts GraSPP in clear first place, with 35.6% (96 out of a total of 269 enrolments). The next highest were the Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies at 29% (112 of 385), and the Graduate School of Economics and the School of Engineering at 28% each (95 of 339 and 929 of 3,293 respectively). Looking back at the numbers for five years ago in May 2010, GraSPP was in the last place with international students making up only 3.7% of enrolments (9 of 241). For comparison, the School of Engineering and the Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies were in top place with



24.8% each (779 of 3,140 and 90 of 362 respectively). Whereas the number of international students in the School of Engineering has gradually crept up from 24.8% to 28% in this five-year period, GraSPP has gone from 3.7% to 35.6%, an indication of just how rapid the pace of change has been.

There is a logic to this that relates to past deans and GraSPP's own struggle for survival. As a school of public policy, we should by definition have an international perspective. If we are to establish and hold our place on a par with other leading public policy schools in the world it is crucial that we be recognized within the network of such schools, namely the Global Public Policy Network (GPPN). In order to participate in the GPPN we must offer double degree programs, which in turn makes it essential that we offer more courses in English. This led to initiatives such as offering MPP/IP and CAMPUS Asia as well as scholarship programs to attract high-quality international students, and ultimately to establishing the double degree programs. These kicked off a sudden rise in the number of our students studying overseas and international student enrolments at GraSPP.

While it is true that GraSPP now routinely has more than 100 international students from nearly 30 countries and regions at a time, such that it has become commonplace to hear different languages being spoken in our hallways – with one class in three being held in English and practices having been established whereby staff are able to work in English – nevertheless the real challenge of becoming truly international has yet to come. When it comes to reaching a position where we can keep up with high international standards, in content not just in form, there remains a long road ahead.



GraSPP Graduates Go Global Singapore



Kazumi Sashida

Graduated in 2009. While at GraSPP, attended the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs as an exchange student. She is currently employed by Visa, having previously worked on syndicated loans and project finance at Mizuho Bank.

Kellie Tan

Born in Singapore. Graduated in 2015. While at GraSPP, attended the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po) as an exchange student. She is currently employed by the Singapore Ministry of Transport.

Jie Li

Born in China. Graduated in 2013 with a double degree with the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy of the National University of Singapore. She is currently engaged in research into international relations in Asia at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy of the National University of Singapore.

Moderator Takanao Tanaka

Year 2, Economic Policy Program. He has been studying for a double degree at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy since September 2015.

— Has your experience of studying at GraSPP proved useful in your current work?

Kellie : GraSPP not only equipped me with specialist knowledge, it also provided me with the opportunity to meet people from diverse backgrounds, study Japanese, and gain a variety of different experiences. All of these were valuable experiences, making me glad I grabbed the opportunity. When I am assigned a difficult task at my job, I hark back to my time at GraSPP and strive to grow by making the most of the situation I find myself in.

Kazumi : I, too, believe it is important to make the most of opportunities. Although I felt overwhelmed at Columbia University where most of the people around me were mid-career students (people in their 30s who already had work experience), I got to a point where I decided for myself that I needed to learn as much as I could and express my own opinions without fear of failure. Although it was a tough environment, it made for a wonderful experience.

Jie : Through discussion with faculty and classmates, I developed an ability to think deeply. This is helping me in my current job. Also, the people I met in Japan were very kind and helped me a lot.



— Tell me about living in Singapore and your vision for your future careers.

Jie : I considered various different options such as getting a job or going into research before choosing to do research at university. Living in Singapore provides a great work-life balance, and being an international environment means it is an easy place for someone from overseas to settle in. While my specialty may change, I intend to continue in research.

Kazumi : Working in Singapore is characterized by a rapid pace of growth. It is not easy to earn the trust of people from different backgrounds, and that means I have a lot to learn. I intend to continue working in an international environment and my aim for the future is to be involved in public-sector work that improves people's way of life.

Kellie : Having only been working for two months, I feel I am growing day by day. My job involves bus-related policy and it keeps me very busy. Sadly, the reason I won't be able to attend the dinner today is because of my work.



— Do you have a message for current students?

Kazumi, Kellie : Make the most of your chances. If you approach your study resolutely, it will pay off in the future.

Kellie, Jie : Get to know people from diverse backgrounds. By studying Japanese, international students will find they have more opportunities to engage with Japan and make discoveries.

Moderator's closing remarks

Conversation with past students who are active around the world has covered a wide variety of topics, including recollections of Japanese culture and seasons, things that people from overseas find hard to understand, how easy it is for women to work, and the future of GraSPP. In all this, the message that comes through most clearly is to make the most of your chances.

Takanao Tanaka



— Tell me where you are from and how you came to develop such a love for Japan.

I am from Minneapolis, the capital of Minnesota. It is corn belt country, producing soya beans, maize, and wild rice. I went to the University of St. Thomas, a small private university where I majored in political studies. Minnesota is very cold in winter, with temperatures as low as -20°C . The most famous thing about the place is how cold it is in winter.

A friend from my class at high school had an American father and a Japanese mother. I became very fond of Japan after trying Japanese food at their home and hearing all about Japan from them. My first visit to Japan was in 2008 on a graduation trip when I was 18 years old. Together with my friend, we visited Tokyo, Kyoto, Mt. Fuji, and Hiroshima, finishing up with a visit to his mother's family in Shimonoseki.

In my second year at university I did a four-month exchange at Sophia University. This included a home stay with a host family in Jiyūgaoka. My host mother was from Kansai and the family were enjoyable to stay with. Even though I am now back in Japan, the timing hasn't yet been right for me to go and see them again. I plan to send them a letter and pay a visit after I get a reply.



Flying high in front of the Japanese Embassy in Washington, his previous workplace

International Student Interview

No. 7

Cory Baird (USA)
Year 1, MPP/IP

— How do you feel about living in Tokyo and the lifestyle here at the university?

I have always loved Tokyo, ever since I first came here on my travels. It's such a wonderful city and it's great to be living here again since September (2015). You may not notice it but Tokyo is really huge. It is full of energy yet still so easy to get around. When I first arrived back I found somewhere as close as I could, expecting to find it difficult due to lack of familiarity, and I am currently living in a shared house in Nezu, but from next semester I intend to move to a place near Nishi-Nippori with two Japanese friends I met while at Sophia University. One of them works at a company and needs a place close to a railway station. With the three of us pooling our money, we can get somewhere quite spacious.

I passed the entrance examination for GraSPP on my second attempt. I was so set on coming to GraSPP and I was very glad to be accepted. I had no intention of going to an American graduate school. There didn't seem any point in an American going to an American graduate school, and the fees are very expensive. I felt that going to an overseas graduate school would bring significant benefits that go beyond study. The GraSPP program is full of things I wanted to do, making it the best choice. When I passed on my second attempt, I was working as a local employee at the Japanese Embassy in Washington. In all, I spent about nine months working at the embassy. My supervisors there were very surprised to hear that I was going to leave the job and to go to the University of Tokyo.

Even though I visit countries other than Japan, I always find myself coming back here. As going back to Minnesota for the winter holidays costs a lot of money, I plan to take a "trip home" to Iejima in Okinawa where I spent two and a half years working as an assistant language teacher under the JET program. I wanted to go back to Japan and drew on my experience at Sophia University to apply for a place on the JET program. I had expected to be given a post in Tokyo, so when I first heard where I would be going I looked it up on Google Maps and was completely surprised!! Still, I'm truly grateful I got to go to Iejima. It was like winning big in the lottery. I'm so looking forward to catching up again with the people there I got to know so well. After that, I plan to take a trip around Southeast Asia until about March. I have already reserved an LCC roundtrip airline ticket for only about 30,000 yen. As I don't have a fixed schedule, I plan to limit the number of places I go to and take it easy while I am there.

(Interview and text by editor)



Preparing a Thanksgiving meal with friends at GraSPP

Message from **International Grasppers**



Moe Thida (Class of 2010)

Deputy Director, Public Relations Section
Department of Urban and Housing Development, Myanmar

It has already been three years since I graduated from GraSPP, but it feels like it has been only three days! Until I enrolled in MPP/IP at GraSPP in 2010, I had been a junior officer naïve to sophisticated policy issues around the world with limited experience in effective negotiation. Back in the government sector after graduation, I have been taking part in policy formulation and transformation processes in Myanmar. It is necessary for me to use a holistic approach in

analyzing daily challenges and convincing arguments to lead my peers in different government departments. I am also expected to be a resource person for my institution to make the best use of my knowledge in working with international organizations. With my improved analytical skill in public policy, I won the Humphrey Fellowship Award to study at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the U.S. In fact, in my daily work, I use my knowledge and classroom practices gained from MPP/IP. The best memories from my school life at GraSPP remain deeply in my mind and heart. Friendly and modest faculty members with superb academic skills and field exposure offered me the lens to see and the arms to reach the real world.



Rully Prassetya (Class of 2012)

Research Economist, Indonesia's Resident Representative Office
International Monetary Fund

I am Rully, currently serving as a Research Economist at the IMF Resident Representative Office in Indonesia. My daily work revolves around surveillance of the Indonesian economy as well as research on real sector issues, for instance, growth, trade, inflation, and balance of payments among others. I am grateful for the activities that I am currently doing as I gain many learning opportunities and get exposed to the most pressing issues facing Indonesia. Among

my favorite activities at the office are listening to many visitors sharing their thought on the economy as well as helping the annual Article IV Mission Team. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the GraSPP communities. During my studies at GraSPP, I was exposed to many concepts by taking various courses on monetary policy, politics of world trade, Asian economic integration, PPPs, and governance, all of which are relevant to my current job. In fact, I still consult my lecture notes regularly at work. I think young professionals who would like to have the combination of internationally minded professors and opportunities to study economic development and structural issues should go to GraSPP. Lastly, I would like to thank all the professors and staff at GraSPP who have made my school life incredibly worthwhile.



Yoav Hilman (Class of 2010)

Oriental Consultants Global Co., Ltd.

I joined Oriental Consultants Global on May 2012 during my last semester at GraSPP, dividing my time between my academic assignments under the MPP/IP Program and part-time employment at the company. Upon graduation I started full-time employment as part of the relatively new (and rather small) legal department.

Oriental Consultants Global is a Japanese International Development and Engineering Consulting firm currently involved in over 150 ongoing projects worldwide. The Tokyo headquarters oversees the international activity and manages 5 overseas subsidiaries as well as dozens of branches or representative offices around the globe. Therefore, based at the company headquarters,

my work includes wide aspects derived of the international nature of the company, including in-house legal counsel, reviews of legal documents and legislation, risk evaluation, crisis management, compliance, and general dealings with public officials in project countries worldwide.

Throughout my work I am exposed to many legal aspects of international ODA projects and infrastructure construction works. Focusing on legal issues might not be very glamorous (it is mostly not) but my day-to-day work also involves economical and operational features as well as diverse experience in large scale project management.

Also, although based in Japan, my work often requires overseas traveling providing practical experience in developing African and Asian countries. For example, throughout the last year I was assigned to a few infrastructure projects in Myanmar and spent a total of 5 month intermittently in Naypyitaw and Yangon.



GraSPPers keep showing up in the most unexpected places at the most unexpected times. They were at APEC Voices of the Future (a youth summit held to coincide with the APEC meeting) in Manila, Philippines and again at the annual GPPN conference held in Sao Paulo, Brazil. They were able to meet and catch up with Koichi Hasegawa (currently the Director representing Japan at the Asian Development Bank) at Manila and Professor Takatoshi Ito (ex-dean of GraSPP, currently a professor at Columbia University) at Sao Paulo. They are living up to the reputation of GraSPPers as globetrotters.



What delighted me most in this issue's interview was Cory san's repeated use of phrases like, "going back to Japan" or "returning to Japan". Using words like "going back" and "returning" suggests that he sees Japan as his "home away from home". It is a reminder to freshen my resolve to work diligently at the small things to increase the number of people like Cory who fall in love with Japan, with Tokyo, with the University of Tokyo, and with GraSPP.

(Editor)

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[design] Masahiro ABiCo

7-3-1 Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-0033, Japan tel 03-5841-1710 fax 03-5841-7877

E-mail grasppn1@pp.u-tokyo.ac.jp <http://www.pp.u-tokyo.ac.jp>