Purpose for my Shadowing Experience
In American higher education, the concept of student success is common at most institutions, to the point where it seems there are few new ideas left to explore. Colleges and universities routinely have student success centers, departments, programs, and strategic plans – mostly aimed at retaining and graduating more students. At James Madison University we, too, have such a program, which we are about to expand and make more visible with the construction of a state-of-the-art building to house and integrate associated programs and services. As the director of career and academic planning, I wanted to uncover fresh ideas about how to increase the likelihood that students at JMU would thrive academically, personally and socially. Having been exposed to colleagues from several Japanese universities during their shadowing experiences here, I knew they had much to teach me about student success, and that from them I could find fresh insights for my work here.

Expectations and Goals
1. I expected the trip to be a whirlwind – too many things to see and learn in too short a time.
2. I expected to find the on-campus portion of my trip to be informative and affirming, and the cultural aspects of my trip to be eye opening and memorable.
3. I expected both to learn and to contribute. All of these three expectations were fully met.

Specific goals for the shadowing program:
1. Understand principles and practices Japanese institutions employ in career counseling.
2. Understand how Japanese institutions manage corporate relations and recruiting programs.
3. Understand how Japanese institutions integrate academic advising, selection of a major, and academic success.
4. Understand how Japanese institutions ensure that first year students successfully transition into the university through orientation, advising and support programs.

Host Institutions and Programs

Ritsumeikan University
Dates of Visit: June 2-4, 2013

Characteristics:
- Ritsumeikan University is a private, comprehensive university with several campuses; I visited the Kinugasa campus, which is located in the ancient capital city of Kyoto. All students live off-campus in the surrounding neighborhoods of Kyoto.
- Ritsumeikan translates as “the duty to cultivate one’s mind during the life span”, which the university is clearly committed to through its focus on essential lifelong skills in writing, languages and communication.
- The vision for RU in 2020 includes five strategic goals: 1) Contributing to the region and global society; 2) Creating learning communities and learner-centered education; 3) Becoming a distinctive global research university. 4) Promoting educational environments that support learning and research; and, 5) supporting recovery and re-building following the Great East Japan Earthquake.
Programs and People:

- **Host** – Ms. Noriko Kijima
- **Interpreter** – Mr. James Kelly
- **Career Services** – Mr. Makoto Ikeda, Ms. Eri Uno, Hiroshi Sugimachi
- **International Affairs** – Oshima Hideho, Dr. Toshiko Sakamoto, Ms. Saori Hagai, Dr. Miki Horie
- **International Planning and Development** – Junko Nishida, Sora Nakamura,
  - **Development and Support of Higher Education**
  - **Support for Transition to Higher Education** – Kenji Yamaoka
- **Global Gateway Program** – Dr. Kanduboda Arachchige
- **Medical Service** – Dr. Katsumi Nakagawa, Ms. Saeko Kusuda
- **Student Affairs** – Ms. Ayako Sugiyama, Ms. Yuka Okagura, Ms. Midori Kojima, Yuuka Ogura
- **College of Letters** – Prof. Nurifumi Kawahara
- **Institute for Teaching and Learning** – Sasaki Koji, Dr. Kawanabe Takashi
- **Research** – Ms. Yuka Otsubo

Observations of Note:

- **Health Service**:
  - Despite being understaffed, it effectively serves students and faculty/staff of the university, including providing required annual, comprehensive physical exams.
  - Through innovative programming they have significantly reduced the incidence of tobacco use among students.
- **Student Support Room (counseling)**:
  - As a result of understaffing they are continually seeking efficiencies in their operation, including introduction of group counseling models.
  - Most prevalent issues are anxiety, depression, not finding a peer group.
- **First Year Experience**:
  - *Oritors* are 700 peer educators who help new students transition to the university. The group was started by is still led by students.
  - New students take skills assessment tests and optional pre-enrollment courses designed to boost their competencies in English, science, and mathematics.
  - Students are required to submit to advisors a plan that includes strategies for course prep, studying, and career exploration.
  - They focus on active learning and provide new students numerous opportunities to engage in meaningful experiences.
  - At new student orientation, each academic college hosts programs tailored to its students, including a common reading.
  - The university offers both a first year experience course for new students and an academic freshman seminar taught by the faculty in each academic unit.
- **Career Services**:
  - Career support for students in is three phases: 1) Career counseling and outreach focused on self-awareness; 2) Career education in which students integrate self-awareness with career pathways to better understand particular fields; and, 3) Job search that focuses on skills development, planning, and outreach to employers.
  - The Mock Interviewing program is effective, but RU pays hefty fees to employers to have them come to campus for this purpose.
  - Job search typically occurs in the junior year.
- **International Programs**:
  - Long-term goals include securing 500 partner universities, dispatching 2,400 students, and conducting student exchange programs at 150 universities.
The Global Gateway Program prepares Japanese students to study abroad by, among other things, providing intensive instruction in English. I had the honor of participating in an English Speaking course.

The Study in Kyoto Program provides semester or year-long program for students with little or no Japanese language training to study language, culture and business.

**Hiroshima University**
Dates Visited: June 6-8, 2013

**Characteristics:**
- Hiroshima University is a research-intensive, public university. I visited the Higashi Hiroshima campus, which borders the growing city of Saijo.
- Hiroshima University, which has a strong liberal arts core and practices problem-based learning across all its faculties, is committed to the idea that all students should "discover the joy of learning."
- Hiroshima infuses into its academic and out-of-class experiences five guiding principles: 1) Pursuit of peace; 2) Creation of new knowledge; 3) Nurturing well-rounded human beings; 4) Collaboration with local, regional and international community; and 5) Continuous learning and self-development.

**People and Programs:**
- Host – Hisako Umemura (International Exchange)
- International Affairs/Education – Dr. Taiji Hotta, Dr. Naomi Tsunematsu, Hisaharu Okuda
- Research Institute for Higher Education – Ms. Masako Kotake
- Education Reform – Dr. Shuichi Furusawa
- Career Center – Reiko Mori
- College of Engineering – Dr. Satoshi Tanaka
- Libraries – Nobuko Katsuragawa

**Observations of Note:**
- **Learning and Advising Systems:**
  - Extensive use of an E-Portfolio system for students by all academic departments.
  - Problem-based learning as a primary means of instruction in all academic areas.
  - Faculty provide academic advising (tutoring) for all students. The Tutors require students to meet with them at least three times during the first year of college: beginning of the first semester, at the release of mid-semester grades, and at the end of the first year.
  - Tutors assist first year students by addressing: 1) the value of the liberal arts; 2) academic options/majors; 3) the mission, goals, resources of the university; 4) peer learning resources; and, 5) the tutoring system.
  - As in many American universities, academic advising in the colleges is uneven and suffers from a lack of faculty attention and rewards.
- **Career Services**
  - Focuses on helping students understand viable career options and on job search techniques.
  - The office staff is small considering the size of the student population, but they are helped considerably by faculty in each college who provide discipline-specific career counseling.
  - Mock interviews conducted by alumni are a key program offered by Career Services.
  - Japanese firms maintain their profile on campus by conducting information sessions for students throughout the year; however, corporate recruiting occurs at corporate sites, not on campus.

- **International Programs**
  - The faculty and staff of HU are passionate about international educations and are supporting more than 1,000 international students annually.
  - The HUSA (Hiroshima University Study Abroad) program is a 6-12 months experience available to students from partner universities in which students study in areas such as economics, environmental chemistry, food science, marine science, statistics, communication.
  - The most remarkable aspect of the HUSA program is its Globalization Internship. This internship provides twenty students each year the opportunity to earn credit and complete an on-site project with a local Japanese firm.

- **Cultural Activities**

My itinerary left little time for exploring Japan beyond the universities. However, I did manage to spend quality time walking throughout both Kyoto and Hiroshima, as well as enjoy several hosted meals that were the highlight of my time in Japan.

- My first cultural experience confirmed that the “world is flat.” On the shuttle from Itami airport to my hotel in Kyoto, the first person I met was a professor at the University of Alberta in Canada, who was a native of Sweden that came each summer to Kyoto to teach Japanese History and Culture to visiting American college students!
- I toured central Kyoto, enjoying the tastes of Nishiki Market and exploring the famous Gion geisha district, Japan’s largest and most famous, which gave me the opportunity to learn about the true origins and purpose of this unique Japanese tradition.
- While at Ritsumeikan University, I was able to visit two of Japan’s most revered historical sites: the Kinkaku Temple (better known as the Golden Pavilion) and Ryoan-ji, a temple containing Japan’s most famous example of kare-sansui, the Japanese Zen rock garden.
- The most memorable Kyoto adventure was my first traditional Japanese dinner, featuring great food and wonderful company - and a chef who sang John Denver’s “Country Roads” when he found out I was from Virginia.
- As was true in Kyoto, in Hiroshima I enjoyed wonderful meals, most notably a traditional Japanese dinner; I also dined at my new favorite restaurant in the world – Q in Saijo – where I
enjoyed the signature dish of the Hiroshima region – okonomiyaki.

• Undoubtedly, the most emotional and provocative experience I had in Japan was spending an afternoon in Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima; I was touched by both the descriptions of the horrific devastation, as well as by the hopefulness of the people of Japan and their total commitment to peace.

**Surprises, Lessons Learned, and Conclusions**

• The differing perspectives of faculty and student affairs professionals on the mission of a university and how it should achieve that mission are universal, as is the quest of student affairs staff to bridge this divide.

• Japanese universities, particularly student affairs offices give new meaning to the phrase “do more with less.” Their dedication to student success, despite budgetary, staff and facility inadequacies is amazing – and they are getting positive results.

• The biggest hurdles to organizational change in higher education, no matter the country or institution, are tradition, bureaucracy and financial constraints. However...

• Passionate educators anywhere can overcome almost any obstacle. Experiencing the passion of people like Saori Hagai and Katsumi Nakagawa at Ritsumeikan and Naomi Tsunematsu and Taiji Hotta at Hiroshima reminded me of why I chose higher education as my career and inspired me to continue to seek innovation and excellence in my work.

• The call to serve others, especially the less fortunate who often live at the mercy of natural events, is universal. The response of students and faculty at Japanese universities to the Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima nuclear disaster are reminders of the commitment of JMU students and their learning partners to the Gulf region following Hurricane Katrina.

• Japanese students are shy, especially around foreigners. Yet they are generous with their time and engaging companions once they warm to your presence. I learned much from them, especially those involved with the Oritors program at Ritsumeikan and those who joined me for dinner in Saijo.

• Learning the Japanese language ahead of my trip proved difficult, thereby increasing my admiration for those I visited and their command of English. But, I learned that knowing how to say “hello”, “thank you”, and “yes” in another language goes a long way.