

Results of the Student Survey at Shiga University

1998-1999 :

Some Influential Factors on Students' Perceptions
of
their Academic Experience

January 2003

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Abstract

This paper outlines some of the results of a survey of student perceptions of academic and non-academic experiences. The survey was conducted at Shiga University during 1998-1999 and targeted the first-year Student cohort with some second to fourth year Student participants. It specifically concentrates on the results from the questions that were aimed at examining the various factors that possibly influence the students' initial perceptions of their academic experience. It concludes that students' perceptions of their academic experience were significantly influenced by the following factors: a) students' choice of university and specifically whether they could enter their first choice of university, b) students' choice of their faculty and specifically whether they could enter the faculty of their choice, c) students' choice of their major and specifically whether they could study the major of their choice, d) the nature of courses and specifically how students chose their courses, how they were assessed in courses, how much time they studied for courses, and whether they understood their courses, and e) the student relationship with the faculty. Further, the combined factors of the process of major allocation, the lack of systematic course structure and assessment, and the poor communication that existed between faculty and staff resulted in a significant number of students experiencing an overall disappointing academic experience.

Keywords: Higher Education, Students, University, Japan, Influences
Questionnaire Data

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"I was very much disappointed with university. In fact, we have a lot of freedom at university and we can 'play' if we want to or we can study if we want to. However, even though I wanted to study when I entered university, I have completely lost my desire to study because lecturers started using technical terms from the beginning of the courses. I hope that lecturers could start the courses from more introductory levels."(Student 97#)

Much of the English language literature on Japanese higher education demonstrates the close relationship between the higher education system and the employment system and its specific effect on the student body. (Vogel, 1979 , Dorfman,1987) Overall, students are said to look forward to their university years as a respite period between the pressures of university entrance examinations and their future employment.(Ellington, 1991, Teichler, 1997) However, this should not automatically suggest that all students are not interested, if not initially interested in their academic lives at university.

This paper outlines some of the results of a survey of student perceptions of academic and non-academic experiences. ¹ It was conducted at Shiga University during 1998-1999 and targeted the first-year student cohort with some second to fourth year student participants. The paper specifically concentrates on the results from the questions that were aimed at examining the various factors that possibly influence the students' initial perceptions of their academic experience; an experience which the student body generally considered to be an overall negative and disappointing one.²

¹ It should be noted that the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) programme was used in the analysis of the quantitative data from the survey.

² Interviews with students were carried out by Marina Lee-Cunin as part of her doctoral research. However both authors also had numerous conversations with students about how they generally perceived their experiences as students at Shiga University

In the academic year of 1998-1999, the total first-year student population was 681 and 28.9 per cent (197) of those students participated in the survey. The remaining 75 student participants were from the second to fourth year cohorts. Regarding gender distribution of the student participants, 73.5 per cent were male and 26.5 per cent were female. A further 2.6 per cent of students stated that they were international students. It should be noted that due to the disproportionate number between the male and female student sample size and the small international student sample, this paper will not pay specific attention to gender or ethnicity/nationality issues.

1. The Process of entrance to university

"I don't like Shiga University that much because Economics was not what I wanted to study. I sometimes have terrible difficulty studying Economics; it's difficult for me to understand. Since I didn't enter Shiga University in order to study Economics with any real desire, I have a negative image of this university."(Student 205#)

The transition from high school to university and the examinations which are taken with in this process all have some effect on a student's perception of the university in which s/he eventually attends and may even affect the major which s/he chooses. The majority of students surveyed followed the traditional path to university Ninety-two point three per cent attended a general high school and 94.8 per cent took the national university examination together with the specific Shiga University entrance examination.

It should be noted that students sit the national university examination in January and the entrance examination for Shiga University in February and March. However, before the official national examination results are announced, students can gain some idea of how well they have done in the examinations by checking the answers of each question as they are open for public

viewing. If students think they are unable to attend their first or even second choice of university due to a low score or a fail at the national examination, they then apply to take the entrance examination for a specific university that they think will be more likely to accept them. In order to check whether this was the case among the student participants, they were asked why they chose to attend Shiga University.

The results found that the majority in the 'Other Reasons' category (36.2 per cent) stated that they entered Shiga University either because they could not enter their first choice university or they had failed the national university entrance examination but passed the entrance examination for Shiga University. This indicated that many student participants had not specifically wanted to study at Shiga University and had hoped to attend university elsewhere.

In the 'Other Reasons' category, students also stated that they chose Shiga University because it was in close proximity to their home, that they could not afford to go to a private university, or that they could not carry on being a *ronin* and trying for their first choice university.

Further, 29.2 per cent of students stated that they chose Shiga University because they felt that they needed higher education for a better job. This indirectly implied that any university would have filled this need. Yano suggested that by high school, most students had already considered that it made economic sense to continue onto higher education as the difference in lifetime earnings between a college graduate and a high school graduate was greater than the difference between a high school graduate and a junior high school graduate.(Yano,1997,p.208)

Conversely, 21.8 per cent of student participants stated that they attended university because they did not wish to enter the labour market as yet. Traditionally, university has had, and still has to a greater extent, a reputation of being a leisure land for young people. (Ellington, 1991, p.147) Therefore, While they delay working in the market, many students may simply view

university as the place to improve their leisure and sports skills via the university clubs, to obtain a part-time job in order to have extra money for hobbies and personal use, and/or to live alone thereby experiencing a Semi-independent life within a secure and 'socially approved of' environment.

Twenty-four point four per cent of students stated that they chose Shiga University because it offered the courses in which they wished to study. All students can access basic information about Shiga University from a number of books published by private companies which contain all the general information about all universities in Japan. Further, some of these books state the rank that all faculties have been given. Shiga University has a fairly high ranking as it is the largest Economics faculty in the country.

Students would have also noted from the information books that there are six departments within the faculty so that they did not necessarily have to specifically study Economics. However, they are unlikely to have known about the specific courses offered at the university unless they had personal knowledge from friends or family members who had previously attended Shiga University or generally gained information outside of the main guides to universities. It should also be considered that, in general, the field of Economics enjoys a positive reputation and so some students may have assumed that the faculty would have offered attractive courses that were perhaps modern in content and relatively practical.³

Fifteen point six per cent stated that they chose Shiga University for reasons concerning intellectual enjoyment. This implied that other universities may have also fulfilled the needs of

³ In the interviews, students often said that they expected Economics to deal with modern issues such as the Japanese recession as well as Japan's position within the global business world.

those students by offering other types of academic programmes that interested them. However, Only 4.5 per cent of students specifically stated that they chose Shiga University because it was their first choice of university.

It should also be noted that 95.2 per cent of students stated that Shiga University was the first university that they had attended. The remainder had come from either a specialised high school, entered through the recommendation of their high school (*suisen nyugaku*) or taken one of the following examinations to enter Shiga University: examination for overseas students, for mature/working people, for students who have lived abroad for more than 3 years or for students transferring to a 4 year university. Therefore, for the majority of student participants, Shiga University was their first experience of higher education.

The results therefore, indicated that the majority of students seemed to be at Shiga University by default rather than by specific choice and this would most likely, have a significant influence on their initial perceptions of Shiga University. Many students had in some way, indicated that any university would have fulfilled their individual needs in terms of personal development, intellectual enjoyment or supplying higher education for employment opportunities. It could therefore, be concluded that were possibly a large number of first-year students who were initially reluctant to be positive about attending Shiga University. This of course, did not favour the university but the results could be generally applicable in terms of understanding some of the reasons for the general lack of enthusiasm among students with respect to their academic studies not only at Shiga University but perhaps at other universities as well.

2.Student choice in studying at a Faculty of Economics

Students were asked why they to chose to study at a Faculty of Economics. Their responses

were similar to those of choosing to enter Shiga University although their reasons were prioritised differently. The results showed that the majority of students (37.5 per cent) wanted to study for intellectual enjoyment while the second reason given was the usefulness of an economics degree for a future job (26.5 per cent). Although it has generally been confirmed in previous research that there is little relationship between what students study at university and the tasks which they carry out at their future jobs, on an individual level some students may have still entertained the idea that the relationship between economics and the business world would make Economics a good subject in which to study. (OECD, 1993, p.25) As already noted, Economics enjoys a fairly reputable position within and outside of the social science arena which would emphasise the above notion.

The other results indicated that students could not find any other interesting major in which they wished to study, therefore they opted to study within an Economics faculty (17.3 per cent). Thirteen point six per cent of students stated that this faculty was automatically assigned to them on the basis of their application. These students also stated that the reasons they had been automatically assigned was because they had a) failed the national university entrance exams b) scored low in the national exams but passed the Shiga entrance exam solely or, c) did not get into their first choice university. Finally, 13.2 per cent stated that they had a math problem and therefore, chose Economics as the next option area within which to study. The use of statistics and the field of econometrics made Economics a likely second choice for these students. Finally, in the 'Other reasons' category, the majority of students (16.9 per cent) wrote 'see I came to this university.'

The results of choosing to attend Shiga University were crossed against choosing the faculty to check whether there were any inconsistencies in the data. The results indicated a fairly consistent pattern. Out of the students who chose Shiga University for intellectual reasons, 55.4 per cent also chose the faculty for intellectual enjoyment. Out of the students who chose Shiga

University as their first choice university, 71.4 per cent also chose the faculty for intellectual enjoyment. Out of the students who chose Shiga University for a better job, 31.5 per cent also chose the faculty for its usefulness for a future job.

In conclusion, it would appear that although the results of why students chose Shiga University were not in favour of the university, the results of why students chose an Economics faculty were a little more positive. Over 50 per cent of students wanted to study Economics either for intellectual enjoyment or for its perceived usefulness in future employment and a further 17.9 per cent chose the faculty as a second choice to a mathematics-based one. This would then suggest that students' more positive attitudes towards studying at a faculty of Economics could also have significant impact on their general perceptions of Shiga University changing their initial negativity about the university into more positive perceptions regarding studying at the Faculty. It would appear that once students arrive at the university, well over half of them wish to study within the Faculty of Economics.

3. Student choice of their major

Students were also asked whether they had ever thought of changing their major. This was specifically aimed at examining the extent to which their particular major could be an influential factor in their initial perceptions of their academic experience. Within the Faculty of Economics, students could choose to major in one of six departments. It should be noted that over half of the student participants (54.4 per cent) majored in Economics, followed by Business Administration (17.3 per cent), Accounting (11.4 per cent), Information Processing and Management (11.0 per cent), Finance (3.3 per cent), and Social Systems (2.6 per cent).

The results showed that 60.3 per cent of students indicated that they would not change their major while 39.3 per cent said they would. Students were further asked to state their reasons

for changing their major. The largest number of students (37.6 per cent) stated that they wished to change their major because they had found another one that they preferred. Although most courses in the first year were compulsory courses within a major, students were able to choose some option courses in another department and therefore, would have experienced a range of courses within and outside of their major in their first year.

A further 32.1 per cent stated that they wanted to change their major because they could not initially choose the major that they wanted. This was because of the specific system of allocating majors at Shiga University. As there were only a specific number of places offered within each department, when a major became over-subscribed, students were simply allocated another major. This allocation was based on their scores at the Shiga University entrance examination and on what they had personally indicated as being their first, second or third choice of major.

Moreover, changing from one major to another was a difficult process at Shiga University. The university only allowed a student to change a major at the end of his/her second academic year, after having obtained a required number of credits and completed specific courses. It is likely that by the end of the second year, most students will have decided to stay within their major rather than opt to change. Official university statistics showed that in 1998- 1999 only three students changed their major, from Economics to Business Administration, Information Processing to Business Administration, and from Economics to Social Systems. The previous year of 1997-1998, only seven students changed their major; six from Economics to Social Systems and one from Economics to Accounting.

A further 22.9 per cent of students stated that they wanted to change their major because they were disappointed in the major that they chose. This could be due to having little or no prior knowledge of the major. However, it could also indicate issues arising from the structure and

nature of courses themselves, for example, how they were designed and taught and the previous level of knowledge required in order to take them.

The other reasons (14.7 per cent) for wishing to change majors were stated as a) being influenced family and friends b) realising the major was not useful for future employment, and/or c) that their major was too difficult to understand. It should be noted that within each major, half of all Economics majors wished to change their major (50.3 per cent) whereas a lesser one third of students in the other five majors indicated that they wished to change.

The results for reasons for choosing a faculty were crossed against reasons for changing a major to check whether there were any inconsistencies. The results were consistent indicating that out of those students who chose their faculty for intellectual enjoyment, 51.5 per cent found another major that they liked. This showed that these students had a more flexible attitude towards changing majors and courses as they tended to participate in education for reasons connected with their personal development.

Out of the students who chose their faculty because it was automatically allocated to them, 52.9 per cent wanted to change their major because they could not choose what they originally wanted. Again this result was fairly consistent in that students who had little choice in their faculty were more likely to want to change their major as it was not what they had originally wanted to study. Further, from this same group of students, 20.6 per cent wanted to change their major because they found another major they liked.

Out of the students who chose their faculty because of its usefulness for a future career, 36.7 per cent wanted to change their major because they found another major they liked, perhaps one which they felt was more useful for their future. Finally, out of the students who chose their faculty because there was no other interesting major they were interested in, 42.1 per cent

were disappointed at what they taken which again was a fairly consistent result.

In conclusion, it would appear that the majority of students did not wish to change their current major when asked and this was consistent with the results that indicated that a significant number of students were fairly satisfied with studying at a faculty of Economics. However, one third of student did wish to change their major and this was largely due to finding another major that they liked, experiencing disappointment in the major that they had originally chosen, and being automatically allocated to a major.

The first two reasons indicated individual decisions and choices. Students are unlikely to have previously studied subjects within their chosen major. Therefore, they are choosing their major largely based on a personal interest with perhaps some bare knowledge of the subject. Moreover, they will not be completely certain that they have chosen the right major upon beginning the required compulsory courses. They then take option courses from other fields and realise that they are more interested in another subject. "I wanted to change because Management is more interesting than Economics." (Student 192#) Further, students could be at a loss when they finally encounter what their subject entailed. "I didn't know anything about the courses in the Economic Department until I entered this Faculty." (Student 158#)

The latter reason of being allocated to a major indicates that the student had no choice in what s/he studied and there are obvious negative consequences to this. Students may begin their academic studies of four years with an overall lack of interest in their studies and may be more inclined to look to non-academic experiences for fulfilment such as actively participating in university clubs or obtaining a part-time job. Further, for the students who did not originally wish to study at Shiga University but were initially interested in a faculty of Economics, being allocated a major in which they had little or no interest may have had the effect of returning the students to their original negative perceptions of the university. In fact, it may even compound

their feelings because they had to study at a university which they disliked and in subject areas in which they had no interest.

Moreover, due to the virtual inability of students to change their major at Shiga University, the overall 39.5 per cent of students regardless of their reasons, become stuck with a major that they no longer enjoyed. It is likely that a significant proportion of those students will become disinterested in general with any academic study at Shiga University. Such a situation may contribute to the negative student behaviour which is familiar to Shiga University faculty members, such as students sleeping in class, engaging in consistent absenteeism, attending classes late, not participating in class activities as well as prioritising club activities and part-time jobs over studies.

Finally, it should also be considered that integrated with the students' reasons for wishing to change their major, is the issue of peer group influence. Students are greatly influenced by each other and as they build friendships, they access information about academic studies through these unofficial but influential networks, Both friends and/or sempai may also be encouraging students to change their major based on their own ideas about their academic studies and experiences with their major.

4. Courses: structure, assessment, study skills, student comprehension

Similar to the reasons why questions were asked concerning choosing a university , faculty or major, it is suggested that the students' ability to choose their own courses might also have some impact on their perceptions of the university as a whole. The results showed that the majority of first-year students at Shiga University took more than 12 courses in a semester(87.2percent)while the remainder took between 9 to 12 courses(11.7 per cent).Each course was 1.5hours per week so that the total course load in hour for most students was 18.0

hours per week.

The majority of courses for the first-year students were compulsory and there were a number of complaints about having to take such courses. However, there were also some courses that students could individually choose to take. The results⁴ showed that 94.1 per cent of students stated that their first reason for choosing a course was because it was compulsory. However, their second reason for choosing courses was split into two categories. The first category was choosing a course for intellectual enjoyment (54.6% per cent) while the second category was choosing a course because it was easy to pass (53.1 per cent). Among the other reasons for choosing courses were a) because their friend had previously taken it (17.3 per cent) b) because they liked the teacher which could include liking a teacher whose class was considered easy to pass (8.9 per cent) c) because the course was connected to an outside interest or hobby (9.2 per cent), and/or d) because the course was connected with future employment.

Regarding the forms of course assessment, most of the courses were the traditional, 'end of semester,' 100 per cent examination-based type with the exception of some language courses which included assignment work depending on the individual teacher. Over 95 per cent of students confirmed that they sat written examinations at the end of the first semester and a further 93.4 per cent stated that they would take between five to more than twelve exams at the end of the academic year.

Students were also asked about their general academic understanding of their courses. The course was defined as the course material and the lectures. The results showed that only 10.0 per cent of students stated that they understood 75 per cent of their entire courses. Only 36.9 per cent understood about 50 per cent of the courses, with 47.6 per cent stating that they understood less than 50 per cent or very little. In addition, there were 5.1 per cent of students

⁴ Students were permitted multi-answers in this question.

who said they did not understand the courses at all. Therefore, just over half of the students came away from courses understanding less than 50 per cent of it to nothing at all.

These results could indicate that students had little time to 'digest' the amount and depth of information required for the courses and examinations for which they had to study. However, students were also asked how much time they personally spent outside of the classroom studying for their various courses. The results showed that 32.5 per cent studied less than 1 hour, 28.8 per cent studied between 1-3 hours. 25.5 per cent studied between 3-6 hours. 13.3 per cent studied from 7 hours or more. These were significant results as they pointed to conflicting issues concerning the extent of student responsibility and genuine difficulties in comprehension of courses resulting in students 'giving up' trying to understand them through personal study.

It is suggested therefore, that the results of the above sets of questions raise a number of important issues. Firstly, at Shiga University, the curriculum entailed that the first two years of education centred on compulsory courses with some optional courses. Compulsory courses were intended to give a basic understanding of the general principles behind a particular subject area. However, many student participants complained that there were too many compulsory courses and that their content was too specific and not general enough for them to understand. The results indicated that when students' reasons for choosing courses were crossed against their levels of understanding, 52.5 per cent stated that they understood less than 50 per cent to nothing of all compulsory courses. A further 37.4 per cent stated that they understood about 50 per cent of compulsory courses. Therefore, the result was consistent with what students had stated.

It should be noted that students had come from a high school environment which was full of rote-learning and memorisation of numerous facts. Many students stated that they wanted more

general courses which would frame all of these facts that they had memorised. They specifically asked for more general knowledge courses and basic foundation classes in all of the majors offered by the faculty, seeming to be quite aware of their own lack of academic ability. Some students held the professors personally responsible for the lack of courses that failed to consider the students' previous educational background. I have been doing my best to listen to the lecturer seriously and also to read the textbook but it does not make sense to make such an effort in his class. I want the lecturer not only to talk but also to consider how to teach, keeping in his mind what the students can understand." (Student 34#)

It is suggested that a lack of understanding of courses is more likely to lead to students becoming disinterested and unenthusiastic about their academic studies. To check the extent of this point, hours of study were crossed against comprehension of courses level. It was noted that out of the students who studied 2-3 hours a week, 49.0 per cent understood about 50 per cent of their courses. However, out of the students who studied 5-6 hours, a greater 51.7 per cent understood about 50 per cent of their courses and even more, students who studied more than 8 hours a week, 59.3 per cent of them understood about 50 per cent of their courses.

For the lower study times, it was expected that students would have less comprehension of classes. Student responsibility was an important factor to consider when addressing students' perceptions of their academic experience as it could transform the dynamics of some of the issues that students raised in other areas. Students had complained that they could not understand their courses but they also indicated that they studied very little. Therefore, it must be considered that there are some students who complain about their academic experience but who have already prioritised their non-academic lives over their academic ones such as being absent from classes due to club activities and/or working in one or more part-time jobs. The poor study skills of these students would certainly evidence why much of the higher education literature considered that the students' perception of university was a leisure land.

The results from crossing students study hours with their reasons for choosing courses showed that for compulsory courses and courses that were considered easy to pass, the majority of students (33.1 per cent of students and 34.0 per cent of students respectively), spent less than 1 hour a week in study outside of the classroom. These figures were therefore, fairly consistent with the idea that students did not feel they needed to study for courses with a structure that they considered easy to pass. Similarly, they did not study for long hours for compulsory courses of which many had been considered by the students to be too difficult to understand.

For students who studied for reasonable lengths of time, the return in comprehension levels did not seem to necessarily improve. This would again point to issues or problems arising within course structures rather than issues of student negligence regarding their studies. If a student is studying for a fairly reasonable amount of time outside of class but still has difficulties in understanding the courses, it is likely for one to assume that the student may become frustrated and may eventually reduce his/her study time.

Further, students noted that they chose their option courses based on the information written in the syllabus by the professor. However, when they attended the class, the material was often different from what had been described and/or the course structure had been dramatically changed. "There are also some teachers who are lecturing on their own research area which is completely different from what they wrote in the syllabus." (Student 133#) This could lead to frustration among students as well as comprehension difficulties for students who were not prepared for the unexpected shift in content.

With respect to course assessment, students also stated that many courses were both examination and attendance-based ones. In practise, this meant that despite the regular examinations at the end of each semester, students were more likely to pass the entire course if s/he had attended the class on a regular basis. In fact, some students noted that even when they

believed that they had failed the examination, they still ended up passing the course due to their attendance record. 'Come to the class and pass the course, the examination doesn't matter too much.' (Student 116)

Course assessment issues could also be related to the large number of students who stated that they chose courses because they were easy to pass. Students obviously wanted to pass their courses and many students would prefer an easy course to one which they deemed as difficult. Although why a course was deemed difficult needed to be explored as it might also raise issues of poor course structure or a lack of general foundation classes rather than being a case of Students not wanting to pursue particularly challenging studies because they entailed extra study.

Further, the issues of choosing easy to pass courses and courses that were attendance-based could also be related to the few hours that students spent studying outside of the class. If students believed that they could pass a course simply on attendance and/or because the class is easy to pass, they might see little need to spend extra time studying for it. It should be noted that in 1998, the *Monbusho* urged professors to place less emphasis on final examinations and more on written assignments. (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 1998) However, that advice was not yet in general practise at Shiga University.

'I don't think it's good to take a course only to obtain the credit and also I think that the attitude of the teacher who gives easy credits is not good.' (Student 119#)

5. The faculty-student relationship could enhance or devalue the students' perceptions of their academic experience

Contact and communication between students and faculty members is an important factor and at times, is often pivotal as to whether students enjoy their academic experience. Students were

asked specific questions about how much contact they had with faculty members outside of the classroom setting. These questions had a 100 per cent response rate, which was perhaps indicative of the importance of the topic to the students.

The results indicated that overall, there was little contact between faculty members and students. Under half of the students (44 per cent) stated that they occasionally to very often, talked with faculty members outside of the classroom. Although subsequent interviews with students indicated that they usually tended to have conversations with a particular minority of faculty members rather than the majority of faculty. A further 62.9 per cent of students had asked a faculty member for information related to a course. Finally, more than 82 per cent of students stated that they had never made an appointment to see a faculty member in his/her office.

The fairly large number of students who asked a faculty member for course information could be explained by the fact that students tended to become very communicative with staff a) prior to the examination period b) when important assignments were due, or c) final grades/exam results were the focus of whether they moved to a higher year. First-year students tended to show more concern for getting information about courses from professors as they were new to the university system.

The majority of students who stated that they had never visited a faculty member in his/her office could suggest that the students' main queries may have been sorted out in the class itself or queries may have been dealt with after class. Therefore, students may have had less reason to make an appointment with a professor. However, it should be considered that some students might have felt uncomfortable making appointments to see staff out of some kind of trepidation or anxiety about talking to a staff member on a one-to-one basis. Coming from a high school setting, they may have preconceived ideas about university professors given their

high social status and may be uncomfortable about communicating with them. "I haven't had so many opportunities to talk to teachers but honestly I don't know how to talk to them. (Student 130#)

Students were aware that they had entered a new environment and seemed to be looking for a closer relationship with professors where the shared discussion of ideas could take place. However, it seemed that they were waiting for the professor to initiate such a relationship. The *zemi* classes did create such relationships and discussions and notably, these were the classes of which students stated they enjoyed most and wished to have more.

However, overall the present relationship that seemed to exist between faculty members and students at Shiga University could be aptly described as one of a "you leave me alone and I'll leave you alone" situation as suggested by Kuh commenting on the American faculty-undergraduate student relationship. (Kuh, 1998, p.7) Kuh further suggested that faculty had disengaged themselves from an intense commitment to students which resulted in less teaching, less emphasis on keeping office hours and more attention paid towards publications. (Kuh, 1998, pg.7) "There is no atmosphere at university for students and lecturers can talk to each other in a friendly way." (Student 79#)

Students also pointed out in the interviews that peer group conversations greatly influenced them in terms of the faculty-student relationship. When one student had a negative experience with a professor, word would spread quickly across the student community, and the professor, his/her course and subject were all held in the same poor light. However, a few students noted that when good experiences occurred with professors, they tended to have a positive effect in building good relationships between themselves and faculty members in general. They also stated that positive experiences with a faculty member encouraged them to take more of an interest in that course(s) and other courses taught by that particular professor.

The above point was checked by crossing the results of students choosing a course because they liked the teacher against how often they talked with faculty, 29.2 per cent of students stated that they very often talked with teacher and 50.0 per cent stated that they occasionally talked with him/her. These figures were therefore, consistent with the idea that faculty-student relationships were significant in influencing students' perceptions of their academic studies.

6. Conclusion

Students' perceptions of their academic experience at Shiga University were significantly influenced by the following factors a) students' choice of university and specifically whether they could enter their first choice of university, b) students' choice of their faculty and specifically whether they could enter the faculty of their choice c) students' choice of their major and specifically whether they could study the major of their choice, d) the nature of courses and specifically how students chose their courses, how they were assessed in courses, how much time they studied for courses, and whether they understood their courses, and e) the student relationship with the faculty.

Further, it was noted that from the outset the majority of students had begun their lives at Shiga University as reluctant students as Shiga was not their first choice of university. The results also showed that although students appeared to have more positive attitudes towards studying at a faculty of Economics, the combined factors of the process of major allocation, the lack of systematic course structure and assessment, and the poor communication that existed between faculty and staff had resulted in a significant number of students experiencing a disappointing academic experience, notwithstanding the factor of individual student responsibility towards their academic studies.

The process by which students chose their courses, how they were assessed and their level of

comprehension of the courses taken, were areas which seemed to highlight the main institutional failings with respect to students, for example, Shiga University had yet to adopt a cohesive system of course assessment. Therefore, students seemed to negotiate the education process by choosing courses that they considered easy to pass while at the same time they also admitted that the majority of them understood less than half of the information in every course they took. Further, the impact that such institutional issues had on the "student perception of the academic experience was contributing to the perception of the stereotype of university being a leisure land.

It is hoped that the results presented herein could further assist with the overall process of understanding students' perspectives of their academic experience in Japan. Further, that the general issues raised by the results contribute to university policy regarding the improvement of the student experience at Shiga University.

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