

A huge world with countless possibilities: Overseas study tours for students in an allied health field

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Abstract

Since 2004, the Niigata Physical Therapy Department has organized several overseas study tours for its students. More than 100 students have participated in these tours to date. In this report, we describe the achievements of these study tours and of the recently developed exchange programs with our partner universities in the Philippines. For students in an allied health field, traveling abroad to observe and interact with international systems related to their studies and discussing this experience with a group that includes international students can be a worthwhile opportunity.

Introduction

Choosing to study abroad can be an exciting “parting of the ways” in university students’ lives. Travel abroad related to one’s studies can vary in important ways: in particular, the purpose of travel may differ from student to student, and the duration of a trip may be short or long depending on the student’s objective. In general, active participation in experiences and activities while on the trip will help students gain more from their travel experiences. What is it exactly that they gain? This report attempts to answer this question by describing the achievements of overseas study

tours and international exchange programs organized or initiated by the faculty of the Department of Physical Therapy, Niigata University of Health and Welfare (NUHW).

Achievements of overseas study tours

In March 2004, the first group of Physical Therapy students went on an overseas study tour to California. Thirteen students participated in this eight-day study tour. Since then, more than 100 of our students have participated in such tours to the United States (10 times), Australia (1 time), and the Philippines (5 times; Table 1). We believe that the large majority of these students have had worthwhile travel experiences.

Partnerships with universities overseas

Recently, newly developed exchange programs with our partner universities in the Philippines have begun to offer those students the opportunity to fulfill their hope of interacting with international students at our campus. For the past three years, university students and faculty from the Angeles University Foundation (AUF) in the Philippines have participated in inter-professional education (IPE) seminars at NUHW’s Niigata campus. The AUF and NUHW have had friendly relations since the late 2000s. The signing of a

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Table 1. Achievements of overseas study tours organized by the Physical Therapy Department

Country	Month/Year	Period (days)	No. of participants					Faculty	Total
			Undergraduate students						
			Freshmen	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Sub-total		
United States									
	Mar. 2004	8	0	3	8	0	11	3	14
	Feb. 2006	8	0	5	0	1	6	3	9
	Feb. 2007	9	0	11	1	0	12	2	14
	Feb. 2008	10	0	0	7	0	7	2	9
	Feb.-Mar. 2009	10	0	0	9	0	9	2	11
	Feb. 2010	11	0	4	0	0	4	2	6
	Mar. 2011	14	0	5	3	0	8	2	10
	Mar. 2012	13	0	3	0	0	3	2	5
	Mar. 2013	14	11	0	0	0	11	2	13
	Mar. 2014	14	2	3	3	3	11	2	13
	Sub-total of participants:		13	34	31	4	82	22	104
	Places visited:								
	California State University, Fresno; Keisar Permanent; University of Southern California; etc.								
Australia									
	Aug. 2008	10	0	0	4	0	4	2	6
	Places visited:								
	Curtin University (Curtin University of Technology), University of South Australia, etc.								
Republic of the Philippines									
	Feb. 2009	9	0	1	5	0	6	3	9
	Mar. 2010	11	0	0	6	0	6	2	8
	Mar. 2011	11	0	3	2	0	5	1	6
	Sep.-Oct. 2012	11	0	0	0	2	2	1	3
	Mar. 2013	11	0	2	0	0	2	1	3
	Sub-total of participants:		0	6	13	2	21	8	29
	Places visited:								
	Angeles University Foundation, University of Santo Tomas, Tahanang Walang Hagdanan, Inc., etc.								
Grand total of participants:			13	40	48	6	107	32	139

As of the end of March 2014.

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in August 2010 to foster cooperation in education and research between the AUF and NUHW committed both parties to working more closely towards their common goal: the pursuit of the internationalization of education and research.

In this context, in cooperation with IPE

seminar organizers and the NUHW International Exchange Committee, we invited AUF faculty to act as mentors to one of the groups at the 2011 IPE seminar. In subsequent years, we have invited AUF students to participate in IPE seminars as student members of the seminar groups. The IPE seminar is held for five days every September and



Figure 1. Discussion among Filipino and Japanese participants at the IPE seminar

The participants discussed a client case in a local community in the Philippines. They conducted the discussion in English.

has around 100 student participants from a variety of professional fields, such as health, welfare, and sports. The participants are divided into small groups for discussion of simulated patient cases.

With the advent of both Filipino and Japanese participation, our groups have become international groups. The patients' stories we have discussed originated from actual client cases in a local community in the suburbs of Angeles City. Group discussions are conducted in English, which people in the Philippines generally speak fluently (Figure 1). While students may still find such cross-cultural discussions difficult to understand and sometimes incomplete, the outcomes of students' discussions and presentations on their cases during the last days of the seminar are always praised by audiences.

"Everyone was willing to contribute their time and effort to arrive at the best outcome," one of the AUF Filipino students in our group wrote while discussing her fellow group members in her report. She also said that she was touched by their diligence, remarking, "It made me realize that there is a huge world out there with countless possibilities."

One of the Japanese students in the international group stated, "We did our best by combining our strengths and overcoming language barriers for a mutual purpose." She also mentioned that the experience of expressing their ideas to each other within the context of an international group was precious.

Conclusion

The overseas study tours may have been worthwhile experiences for the majority of Niigata's physical therapy students. For Japanese students in an allied health field, the group discussions of the patients' stories with international partners could be a challenging program that advances the internationalization of education.