

## "Sources of competitiveness in US universities: Lessons from University of Wisconsin-Stout's major reform in the last ten years"

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I had an opportunity to visit eight United States (US) universities as a member of a study trip for about ten days in August, 2007. The study trip was planned and formed by the Kansai Productivity Center (KPC) in order to conduct a extensive research on sources of competitiveness in US universities. One of the purposes of the study trip was to conduct a research on how US universities manage these universities efficiently. In addition, we would like to learn how universities in the US attract students from all over the world and how to improve the quality of their education.

Due to decreasing in population because of low birth rate and increase in numbers of universities in Japan because of deregulation, now Japanese universities are facing keen competitions not only among their domestic colleagues but also international ones. The Japanese government announced that they try to increase the number of international students; however it is not an easy task to accomplish while universities in other countries are also trying very hard to accomplish the same goal to attract students from overseas. Especially, US universities attract about 40 percents of international students and are dominant players in the field.

The delegates had several meetings before the visit and specify several problems of Japanese universities. We focus on the two important problems. First is that compare to the US universities, the management skills seemed much lower in Japanese universities. The market for top-management almost does not exist in Japan and it is very rare to hire top-management from other institutions. In the US, the market for top-managements exists and it is common to hire them from other institutions. Second is that Japanese universities seemed to focus less in education but research. It is often pointed out that many of Japanese professors are reluctant to teach while they focus on their own research. In addition, there are less rewards for faculty members to do so because course evaluation by students or peer faculty members are still not widespread among Japanese universities. We decided to focus on these two issues that we believe to be able to learn from US universities.

We visited Stanford University, University of California Berkeley, University of Wisconsin Stout (UWS), University of Minnesota, Carleton College, George Washington University, and American University. I would like to focus on UWS and its unique way of tackling its problems because there are many things we can learn from their experiences.

UWS is established in 1891 as a manual training school in Menomonie, Wisconsin. Currently, UWS hosts about 8,400 students in undergraduate and graduate programs in the College of Human Development: the College of Technology, Engineering and Management: the College of Arts and Sciences: and the School of Education. UWS places emphasis on "distinctive array of programs leading to professional careers focused on the needs of society," and "its programs are presented through and approach to learning which involves combining

theory, practice and experimentation." <sup>1</sup>

In 1996, UWS was facing serious problems due to series of budget reductions. The Chancellor decided to rebuild the campus through various changes in leadership, strategic planning, internal and external communication with its stakeholders, and information technology. With regards to leadership, the campus implemented so-called "shared-governance" or "shared-leadership" system in which faculty, staff members and students and administrators became members of senior leadership team. With regards to strategic planning, integration of the campus planning and budget processes are implemented. In addition, the campus began to collect data directly from students, faculty, staff, alumni and employers about their needs, expectation, and satisfaction levels. UWS now conducts series of surveys to understand and reflect stakeholders' needs. Almost all the data that they gather are available on their web-site, providing transparency in decision makings in many levels.

One of the stakeholders suggested to introduce "Malcom Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence in Education" to UWS and the senior leadership team adopted the idea. UWS Applied for the Baldrige Criteria and became the first recipient of the award in 2002, made UWS one of the leading universities in providing high-quality education and achieving higher satisfaction levels among its stakeholders.

UWS achieved this because it posses role model characteristics in six major areas such as leadership, strategic planning, student and stakeholder focus, faculty and staff focus, measurement, analysis and knowledge management, and educational and support process management system.

UWS keep its focus on providing high quality education by participating the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) in 2002. The AQIP enables the participated educational institutions to identify universities strategic plans and priorities. In the UWS case, first stage after the adoption was spent to improve in the area of graduate education, leadership development and assessment of student learning and the e-Scholar Program. In addition, students' first year experience and expansion and updates of its academic programs became the issue. UWS continues to search for its growth opportunity and now move toward to becoming a Polytechnic university such as MIT, as well as help students to become global workforce.

By focusing on its origin and its strength and weakness, and by adopting the Baldrige Criteria, the UWS was able to become one of the leading educational institutions. I believe that there are many lessons that Japanese educational institutions can learn from the UWS experiences in the last ten years.

References:

Kansai Productivity Center 2007, *Search for improving management to enhance education quality in Japanese universities (in Japanese)*, October.

UW-Stout's Quality Program Summary, May 2007. (Avalable at <http://www.uwstout.edu/aqip>)

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<sup>1</sup> UW-Stout's Quality Program Summary, May 2007, p. 2.