

# Life. Be in it! Comparative visions of student life today.

積極的な人生に！海外・日本の学生生活の比較的ビジョン。

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人生の形成期の1年間を過ごし、海外の大学で留学することは、最大に大切な機会である。しかし、あらゆる潜在的メリットがあろうとも、この機会の際にも乗り越えにくいような挑戦も表れる。

準備をする学生たちに様々な効果的対策はできる。以前に同じ経験をした先輩に聞き、海外文化や言語を先生に相談することもその例になるだろう。しかし、日本にいる限り、海外生活を話し合うために、外国人の学生に会えるチャンスはまれである。この困難に対処するため、著者は、ブレンディッド・ラーニングを使用して体験的アプローチを採用することにした。

140人以上の学生が出席している共同授業中に、海外・日本の学生のライフスタイルを比較するオンライン調査やビデオプレゼンテーションを使用した。“A Vision of Students Today”（「今日の学生のビジョン」）と題したビデオは、カンザス州立大学で200人の学生の調査を特集した。講義に参加した学生は、スマートフォンを使用して同じ調査を完了した。

目的は、1年間留学に関する学生の懸念を和らげる事と、来年体験しようとしているライフスタイルの変化の準備を支援することである。調査の結果は、それぞれの学生のライフスタイルの類似点と相違点の多くを強調した。

## INTRODUCTION

A series of joint lectures are held each year as an integral part of the courses entitled “English Communication for Study Abroad” and “Critical Literacy for Study Abroad” at Kansai University. This is a report based on a comparative survey carried out during one of those lectures. All of the students in attendance were language majors and all of them were preparing for their second year which was to be spent studying abroad as exchange students.

## BACKGROUND

As part of their preparations, students study intensively to improve their language skills and cultural awareness. They spend time meeting with senior students who have already been

through the experience of studying abroad. Furthermore, they attend lectures focused on cultural differences, language differences, and the practical and everyday considerations that they will encounter in the following year.

One problem is that opportunities to engage with foreign students who hail from the Japanese students' intended overseas study destinations are limited. To address this issue, the students in attendance at the joint lecture were shown a short video based on a survey of 200 students at Kansas State University based on the topic of "*A Vision of Students Today*." Before they watched the video, they were afforded the opportunity to collaborate or work individually and complete the same survey using their smartphones. The use of smartphones was adopted as part of an approach based on blended learning which facilitates independence and collaboration in learning and allows for data collection and customization of instruction (Harel, 2012) and their on-going ubiquity and popularity. (Barrs, 2011)

## **LECTURE**

The lecture was held on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014. A total of 141 students were registered in attendance. The title of the joint lecture was "*Life. Be in it! Language skills and integration.*" The title refers to the necessity of being an active participant in order to achieve success in improving language skills and social integration while living in a foreign country.

The latter part of the lecture was presented by David Murray for a duration of approximately one hour and the format was based on the following parts:

1. Online survey
2. A short video
3. Discussion
4. Report on the results of the survey

### **Online Survey**

The survey was prepared using Google Forms and Google Spreadsheets. It was reconstructed by the author based on the video (discussed below) and it broadly addressed student life with focus on the specifics of classes, daily routines, life, technology and problems.

Three groups were surveyed in total. They were 200 Kansas State University students from 2007 (2007 KSU); twenty Kansai University students who had studied overseas for one year from 2013 (2013 KU overseas) and finally students from Kansai University from 2014 (2014 KU).

Life. Be in it! Comparative visions of student life today. (Murray)

The students in attendance at the joint lecture were invited to complete the survey using their smartphones and 139 responses out of 141 students present were recorded. The online location of the survey was presented on the screen as QR code and as a Web link. The contents of the survey are listed in Appendix 1. This survey is hosted on Google sites. (Murray, 2014a)

## **Video**

In 2007, Prof. Michael Wesch asked 200 students at Kansas State University a question. "What's it like being a student today?" The 200 students compiled a survey using Google docs. The results of the survey were compiled as a short video (4 minutes 44 seconds). The video is described in the following terms:

*a [sic] short video summarizing some of the most important characteristics of students today - how they learn, what they need to learn, their goals, hopes, dreams, what their lives will be like, and what kinds of changes they will experience in their lifetime. Created by Michael Wesch in collaboration with 200 students at Kansas State University.* (Wesch, 2007)

At the time of writing, this video was available on YouTube (Wesch, 2007). The transcript of the video is included in Appendix 2. On the day of the joint lecture, some browser issues were encountered, but were remedied quickly.

## **Discussion (during the joint lecture)**

Five questions were presented to the students for their consideration and discussion. Subsequently, individual students were called on by name and asked to share their answers with the group.

The questions were:

1. Does this video make you feel confident or worried? Why?
2. What's it like being a student at KSU?
3. Are their lives different from your life today?  
What's the biggest difference?
4. What's a good place to study overseas? Why?
5. So, tell me something about Japanese culture...  
What's famous in your hometown or country?

The discussion questions were made available online (Murray, 2014b).

Report on the results of the survey

A summary of the results of the survey were presented in graphic format and the differences and similarities between the lifestyles of the selected three groups of students both abroad and in Japan were discussed.

## **Results**

The responses of 200 students from Kansas State University, 20 senior students from Kansai University (who had completed one year studying abroad) and 139 responses from 141 students in attendance at the joint lecture were collated and presented in graphic format. They are shown in Appendix 3 below.

## **DISCUSSION**

After the student discussion during the lecture, individual students were called on to share their thoughts with the group. There was some variation in their subjective impressions and insights. However, while reactions may have been mixed in terms of inspiring confidence and allaying concerns, it was evident that there were many similarities but also some apparently significant differences between their lives and the lives of the students portrayed in the video.

An interesting observation by one student was that students abroad seemed to be both busier and lazier. When asked to explain, the student said that she thought they had more work to do, but that they seemed to spend a lot more time emailing, social networking and doing other stuff even during class.

A brief rundown through the graphs (see Appendix 3 below) revealed some of the following interesting information:

Class size: KSU students seemed to have much larger classes in comparison with language majors at Kansai University. However, the senior students' data indicated that class sizes while studying overseas were somewhere in the mid range between the two. This was due to the fact that they had attended both regular classes and (smaller sized) language classes while abroad. The percentage of teachers that know your name (each student's name) also showed a similar trend but with the 2013 KU overseas students showing the most favourable results.

Academically, both 2013 KU overseas students and 2014 KU students seemed to outperform their counterparts in KSU particularly in terms of completed and relevant reading assignments. 2014 KU students also had double the class time of their counterparts at KSU and the least

amount of sleep as part of their daily routines.

All groups of students reported student debt as a problem. However the estimated amounts of debt reported proved unreliable and unrealistic. Two of the 2014 KU students estimated their debt figures to be as high as 300 million and 10 million yen.

The KSU group of students also seemed more acutely aware of social and global problems listing war, disasters, ethnic conflict, hunger and poverty among their concerns. Surprisingly, 2014 KU students listed money, jobs, marriage and global warming as their top four social concerns.

One week subsequent to the joint lecture, a further discussion was held with a smaller group of 21 students. They generally indicated a positive response to the content and proceedings and the reported finding it engaging, enjoyable and thought-provoking.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The stated objectives were to inform; to heighten awareness and understanding of what kind of life 2014 KU students when studying abroad; to encourage confidence and to allay some of the students' concerns by incorporating an experiential approach using blended learning. Particularly in the absence of access to live communication with foreign students, this seemed appropriate, engaging and ultimately successful in its intended aims.

While the original video appears to be informative, thought-provoking and certainly entertaining, the initial characterization of classes in particular seems bleak and inspires a sense of pessimism. Classes at KSU are described in terms of big class sizes, teachers who don't know students' names, incomplete readings, assignments that are perceived as being not very meaningful, unread textbooks, absenteeism, and much more time spent on social media than on study.

Before becoming overly critical, it should be noted that many of these characteristics are a common feature in tertiary education worldwide. Also the 2013 KU student group reported their experience in a much more positive light as they enjoyed both smaller language classes and regular classes overseas and found them to be very meaningful.

The differences reported in student life, technology and personal and social problems seemed minor in comparison. The extent of these differences can probably easily be explained when differences in time (2007, 2013 and 2014) and the differences in the apparent maturity of the various groups of students are taken into account.

It should be noted that this report represents a hermeneutic comparison in anecdotal case-

studies. Any attempt to infer positivist conclusions or comparisons with longitudinal studies would be inappropriate.

Ultimately, this undertaking represents an attempt to engage, to encourage, to heighten awareness and to deepen understanding of some of the issues related to student life overseas as the students prepare to spend year studying abroad. The extent of its success lies within the degree of readiness of each individual student for their sojourn abroad next year. The author wishes them well with their endeavours.

#### REFERENCES

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The online survey.

Survey Updated Jun 30, 2014, 5:52 AM

*What's it like being a student overseas? Is student life overseas very different from your life today? To answer these questions, let's compare your life with 200 students in Kansas State University. The first step is to do this survey:*

*Think about your life as a student...*

\* Required

Class

What is the name of your university? \*

What is your average class size? \*

(average number of students in ALL your classes)

How many of your teachers know your name? \*

(from 0 to 100%)

How many of your reading assignments do you complete? \*

(from 0 to 100%)

How many of your reading assignments are relevant to your life? \*

(from 0 to 100%)

Do you buy textbooks that you never read? \*

yes

no

Do you know any students who never attend class? \*

yes

no

How many books will you read this year? \*

How many Web pages will you read this year? \*

How many Facebook profiles will you read this year? \*

How many pages for class will you write this year? \*

(about how many...)

How many emails will you write this year? \*

(about how many...)

DAILY ROUTINE

How many hours a day will you spend on \_\_\_\_\_?

sleep \*

TV \*

online \*

music \*

cellphone \*

class \*

eating \*

work \*

study \*

Are you a multi-tasker? \*

yes

no

LIFE

Will you be in debt after you graduate? \*

yes

no

If yes, how much debt will you have?

(Answer in Japanese Yen . . .)

What problem in life concerns you most?

What is the biggest social problem you will face in life?

TECHNOLOGY

Do you access social networking sites during class? \*

never

always

1

2

3

4

5

Do you work on other stuff during class? \*

never

always

1

2

3

4

5

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**Appendix 2: The video transcript.**

Quotation:

<i>"Today's child is bewildered when he enters the 19th century environment that still characterizes the educational establishment where information is scarce but ordered and structured by fragmented, classified patterns, subjects and schedules."</i>	- Marshall McLuhan 1967
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- If these walls could talk . . .
- What would they say?
- If students learn what they do . . .
- What are they learning sitting here?
- The information is up here. (on the chalkboard)
- Follow
- Of course, walls and desks cannot talk
- But students can.

The page at <https://docs.google.com> says  
Enter a new document name

**A Vision of Students Today**

TYPING . . .

What is it like being a student today?  
Add collaborators (200 collaborators are added.)

TEXT

200 students made 367 edits to this document  
and surveyed themselves  
to bring you the following message

- My average class size is 115
- 18% of my teachers know my name
- I complete 49% of the readings assigned to me --- Only 26% is relevant to my life
- I buy hundred dollar textbooks that I never open
- My neighbor paid for class but never comes
- I will read 8 books this year --- 2300 Web pages & 1281 Facebook profiles
- I will write 42 pages for class this semester and over 500 pages of email
  
- I get 7 hours of sleep each night
- I spend 1½ hours watching TV each night
- I spend 3½ hours a day online
- I listen to music 2.5 hours a day
- I spend 2 hours on my cellphone
- spend 3 hours in class

- 2 hours eating
- I work 2 hours every day
- 3 hours studying
- That's a total of 26.5 hours per day
- I am a multi-tasker (I have to be)
  
- I will be \*\$20,000\* in DEBT after graduation! --- I'm one of the Lucky ones
  
- I did not create the problems but they are MY problems
- Over 1 billion people make less than \$1 a day
- This laptop costs more than some people in the world make in a year
- When I graduate, I will probably have a job that doesn't exist today
- Filling this (a test answer sheet) out won't help me get there or deal with (these problems...)

war      disasters                  ethnic conflict      hunger      poverty . . .

- I did not create the problems but they are MY problems

Some have suggested that technology can save us

Some have suggested that technology alone can save us

- I Facebook through most of my classes
- I bring my laptop to class, but I'm not working on class stuff

Quotation:

<i>"The inventor of the system deserves to be ranked among the best contributors to learning and science, if not the greatest benefactors of mankind."</i>	~ Josiah F. Bumstead 1841
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. . . on the benefits of the chalkboard.

Writing on a chalkboard . . .

What's missing? Photos Videos Animations Network

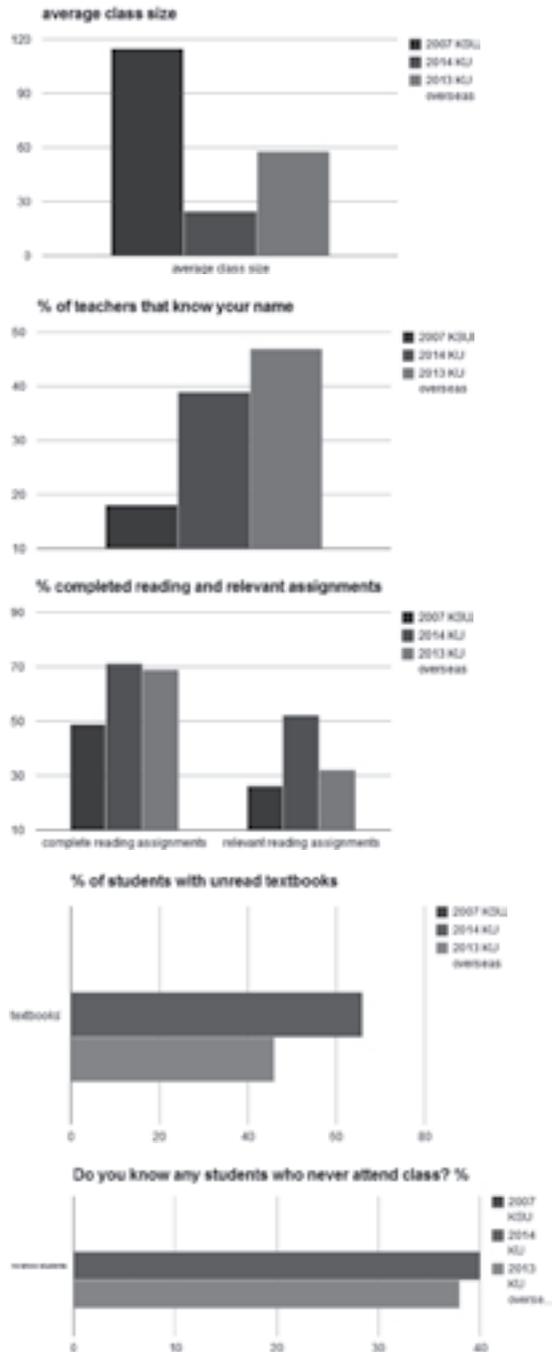
\* Forces / Encourages the teacher to move

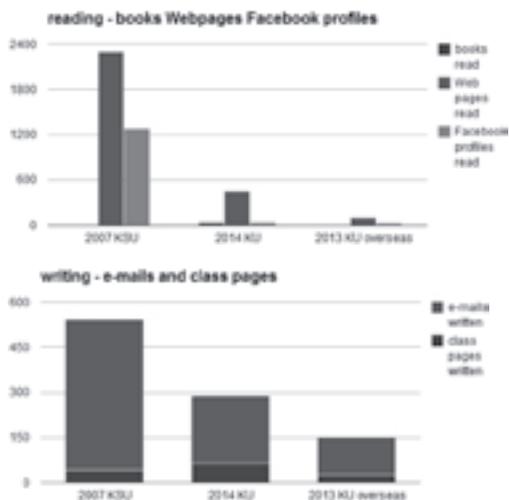
**Appendix 3:**

Report

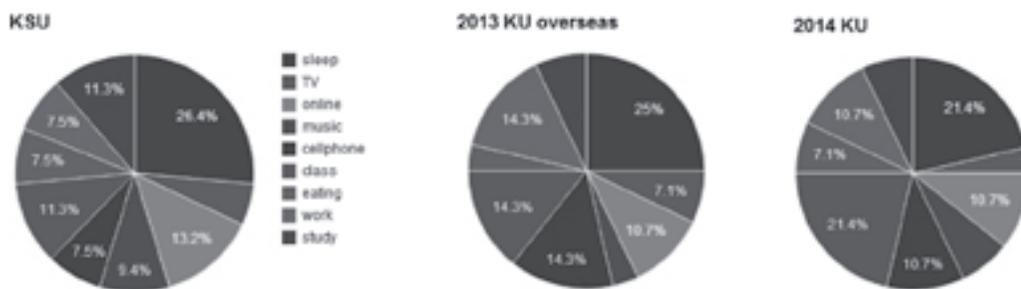
139 responses

Class

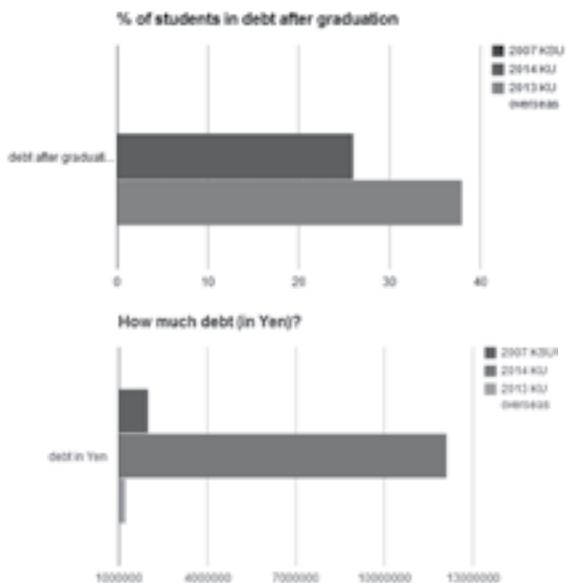




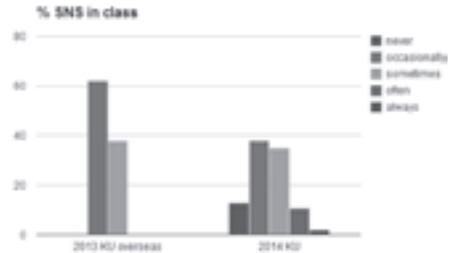
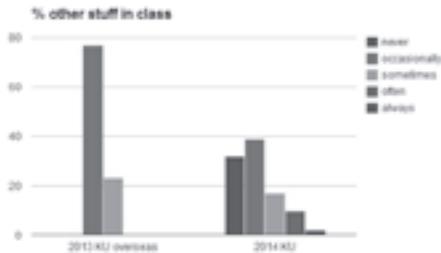
Daily routines



Life



Technology



Problems (with rankings where applicable)

KSU		2013 KU overseas		2014 KU	
life problems	social problems	life problems	social problems	life problems	social problems
debt	war	1 job hunting	1 Money	1 money	1 money
technology	disasters	2 money	1 job hunting	2 study	2 job
	ethnic conflict	3 marriage	1 Job	3 health	3 marriage
	hunger	3 relationships	4 Human relationships	4 English	4 global warming
	poverty	3 after graduation	4 Marriage	4 work	4 work
			4 aging society	4 job hunting	6 language
			4 Taxes	7 family	6 relationship
				7 homework	6 Communication
				7 job	6 global warming
				7 marriage	6 Violence
				7 study abroad	6 communication
				12 multi tasks	6 violence
				12 I'm lonely.	6 tax
				12 living by myself	14 bullying
				12 marriage	14 Friend
				12 communication	14 congestion and bad smell in trains
				12 too much home	14 I'm poor at English.
				12 unit	14 study
				12 assignments	14 understanding people
				12 I want some girlfriends	14 war
				12 homework & test	14 money

